

Nigeria-Sierra Leone Relations in the Nineteenth and Twentieth

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Abstract: *In the waning years of the nineteenth century and dawn of the twentieth century, there developed the phenomenally congenial relations between Nigeria and Sierra Leone. The 'recaptives' or liberated Africans, who were settled in Sierra Leone, eventually developed with exceptional and rapid growth in wealth, education and influence, resulting in the evolution of the creole civilization or culture remarkably noted for its curious and perfect blend of Afro-European culture. Armed with this together with their adventurous and exploring spirit, the British colonial authorities depended upon the Creoles for clerical, administrative, missionary, commercial, and educational enterprises throughout the British West Africa, making them pioneers and transformative agents in almost all facets of human endeavours in Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia and Sierra Leone. In Nigeria, the Creoles migrated to cities like Lagos, Abeokuta, Port Harcourt and Calabar to mention but a few. Using the descriptive and analytical historical method based largely on secondary sources, this research reveals that the hall mark of the creoles immigrants in the new commercial City of Port Harcourt established in 1913 ab initio was a high degree of mutual co-existence and peace, resulting in profound and remarkable cultural ties and inter-ethnic borrowing. The work discusses that the Saro which can be appropriately described as the "light of the new age" were actually the far-sighted pioneers of practical Christianity, imperishable icons of evangelism, tireless spiritual giants, strong educational pillars, astute diplomats and great socio-political mobilizers of not only the indigenous elements of the municipal port Harcourt Township but also the diverse settler elements with whom they co-habited and interacted at different levels. The research posits that the diversionary British policies of "divide and rule" coupled with their demise of the iconic leader, Rev. R.L. Potts. Johnson in 1949 gave a final blow to the Saro's political leadership, influence and contributions to the overall development of Port Harcourt, the widely known "Garden City" east of the Niger.*

Keywords: *Nigeria, Sierra Leone, relations, pioneer, development.*

Introduction

The phenomenally congenial relations between Nigeria and Sierra Leone dates back to the nineteenth century, precisely during the periods of the Anti-slave trade patrol of the West African coast by the British Navy to stop slave trade from the main roots (Webster & Boahen, 1971; Burus 1972; Crowder, 1973). The harvests of the British Naval Squadron, like the captured slaves and liberated Africans or “recaptives” as they were often addressed, were settled in the newly established colony of Freetown, the headquarters of the British Navy.

It is not without significance that the ‘Recaptives’ or liberated Africans were of multi-ethnic backgrounds and different cultures. By the 1850s, about 40,000 recaptives were settled in Sierra Leone with exceptional and rapid growth in wealth, education and influence. The result was the eventual broke down of cultural distinction between the settlers and liberated Africans. Clearly, the Creole civilization had emerged with a perfect blend of their Afro-European culture, making Sierra Leone a foremost cultural “melting pots” of the West African Sub region of the sub-Saharan Africa in the nineteenth century. Webster and Boahen (1971, p.142) brilliantly discuss that “the recaptives were not assimilated by the settlers, rather Creoles, who emerged as a distinct group by 1850, were a blending of settlers and recaptives, the proud inheritors of the European, American and numerous African cultures”. It follows, therefore, that Crowder (1968, P.151) was absolutely correct to inform that “creoles” was “the term by which the descendants of the mixed community of settlers and recaptives became known”. Fascinatingly, they adopted the European culture as Christians, but they never went out of their ways as Africans. They retained African cultures like religion, extended family ties, African philosophy of communal living and above all the development of their special language known as *krio*, a sort of “the English language Africanized”.

The point to be made, however, is that the Creoles, as “an adventurous and exploring race” (Webster & Boahen, 1971, P.144) poured out into Nigeria like other West African sub-regional countries as pioneer traders, investors, clergymen, educationists, lawyers, doctors, proprietors of newspaper, to mention but a few. In Nigeria, the recaptives returned to Badagry, Abeokuta, Lagos, Calabar and Port Harcourt, among others to make their meaningful contributions to the development of these cities. They were in the vanguard of ecclesiastical activity, commercial enterprise, colonial civil service, journalism, education and other critical sectors of the Nigerian economy within the period under review. Webster and Boahen (1971, P.145) point out that “in Nigeria the registrar of the Supreme Court, Colonial Treasurer and Postmaster General were Creoles.... as late as 1925, forty-four of Nigeria’s fifty-six barristers were of Creole descent.” Mention must be made here of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther who pioneered the proselytization of Christian missionary endeavour in the Niger Delta. The Creoles were, indeed, revivalist and revolutionist elements in Nigeria due to their wealth, education and influence (Crowder, 1968; Crowder, 1973).

The Emergence of the Creoles in Port Harcourt

Records are replete with the fact that Port Harcourt City, which is older than Nigeria, was a British creation in furtherance of its interests in Nigeria. In order for the British to blatantly and ruthlessly exploit the Nigerian resources, there was the need to search for “a convenient and safe port, east of Lagos” (Tamuno, 2013, P. 21) that was to serve as a

railway terminus, and sea port. This decision, which eventually became Port Harcourt in 1913, was fuelled by the discovery of coal in commercial quantities in Udi (near Enugu) In 1909 which must be evacuated to the metropole through a wharf. The seaport was planned to export the palm produce and other resources of the colonised from the hinterland of Nigeria (Tamuno, 2013; Daminabo; 2013; Okowa, 2013; Briggs & Ndimele, 2013; Nduka, 2013).

Arising from the foregoing, there were frantic efforts to find a suitable location for a port in the eastern axis. Hydrographic survey parties were forced to embark on a tour of the coastal region of Nigeria. The search parties visited Opobo, Calabar, Itu, Oron, Warri, Sapele, Degema, Burutu, Onitsha, and Okrika. Okrika was provisionally chosen but the colonial administrators “serendipitously came across a piece of coastal territory which appeared to be a more suitable site than Okrika” (Nduka, 2013, P.5). Thus, Port Harcourt, which was named in honour of Lord Lewis V. Harcourt, who was the colonial Administrative Officer and the British Secretary of State for the Colonies from November, 7, 1910 to May, 26, 1915, was founded (Daminabo, 2013; Briggs & Ndimele, 2013). Apparently, “a largely uninhabited mangrove swamp rapidly turned in a complex seaport, a railway terminus, a provincial headquarters, a major hub of activity, and a ‘new frontier of opportunity for a varied range of economic, social and political interest’ (Briggs & Ndimele, 2013, P. 73).

Geographically, the City of Port Harcourt “is situated on the edge of the Eastern Niger Delta over 64 Kilometres from the Atlantic.... The peninsula is part of the older section of deltaic deposits otherwise known as the tertiary raised coastal plain. The underlying rocks are clays, sands and gravels comparatively deep and drained” (Nwanodi, 2013, pp. 48-49). The climate of the city is characterised by temperatures which range in the eighties while the relative humidity averages up to seventy percent. The distribution of rainfall appear to have changed much in recent times, the rainy seasons has departed from its traditional April-November to total rainfall throughout the year. The mean annual rainfall, according to Wolpe (1974, P.15) “exceeds ninety-eight inches, and in the apex of the rainy season, a figure as high as sixteen inches may be obtained in a single month”.

Soon after the formal establishment of Port Harcourt, the city progressively metamorphosed from the Township status in June 1949 into Municipal status with a Major and Deputy in December 1955 and became a world class metropolis so, it correspondingly attracted all manners of interests from medley of people from diverse ethnic groups and cultural backgrounds. Pointedly, Port Harcourt city was to be a metropolitan city with people of diverse ethnic nationalities as a result of labourers recruited from northern, middle belt, western and eastern parts of the country. Infact, Port Harcourt with its ever-increasing prosperity and other attractions led to the unprecedented influx of immigrants from other countries of West Africa like Gold Coast (later Ghana), Gambia, Liberia, Togo, Sierra Leone, and Non-Africans such as the Asians, particularly the Syrian, the Indian, the Lebanese and later the Chinese to the city were they met and intercourse at different levels and degrees. With the intention to exploit the available enormous employment and investment opportunities offered by the new City of Port Harcourt, they migrated from far and near into the City mostly as wage earners, traders, craftsmen, missionaries, civil servants, commercialists, industrialists, students and others. Laying credence to this claim, Briggs and Ndimele (2013, P.85) document:

The social significance of making Port Harcourt the new administrative headquarters of the old Owerri Province was the unprecedented influx of all manner of people, civil servants, traders, job seekers from far and near to swell the population of the new city. Apart from communities of the old Rivers and other parts of Eastern Nigeria, there was a significant population of people from other ethnic groups, such as a Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani and other ethnicities. There were also people from other West African countries, such as 'Gold Coast (which later became Ghana), Gambia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Togo and others as well as a significant presence of Asians, who had travelled there by sea.

Also, Alagoa (2013, P.138) energetically supports that:

In the course of the building of the new colonial metropolis, the Efik and Ibibio of the Cross River Valley as well as Yoruba of the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos and Western Nigeria, as well as Hausa and other people of Northern Nigeria came to seek employment or were deployed by the colonial authorities. Port Harcourt was a thus a multicultural neighbourhood to begin with, acquired an extended cultural mix with the recruitment of people from other British West Africa countries such as the Gold Coast (Ghana), Sierra Leone, and the Gambia. The international dimension was completed with business people from the Middle East (Syrian/Lebanese), and of course, the European rulers and merchant community.

It is worthy of note that the most notable contributors to the overall development of the "Garden city" of Port Harcourt or "Pitakwa" as the mega-city were variously called where the *creoles* or *Saro* from Sierra Leone. Anyanwu (1979) demonstrates that the *Saro* as popularly called in Port Harcourt City were part of the Non-Nigerians' population of 1,076, constituting about 2.2% of the percentage of Port Harcourt's population in 1953.

The Dimensions and manifestations of the Creoles Cross-cultural Relations in Port Harcourt

A critical analysis of the interactions of the Sierra Leoneans in the city of Port Harcourt will discredit the opinion of Sylvia Leith Ross who visited Port Harcourt in 1935 and Anyanwu (1971). Some of the most successful *Saro* residents of Port Harcourt like I.B. Johnson, PottJohnson and Bishop Johnson wholeheartedly considered the "Garden city" as their permanent home mainly for their working life and their retirement. And as such worked enormously for the development of Port Harcourt. Differently put, majority of the *Saro* population, who were not successful, retired back to Sierra Leone as papers. As Dixon-Fyle (1969, P.108) starkly put: "a larger group of *Saro*, who never knew much material security, toiled endlessly in the marches of the Niger, often retiring to Freetown. Much traumatized

by the memories of their Nigerian sojourn, to die among their bemused kin.”

It is, therefore, historically untrue to admit the position of a British Divisional Officer for Port Harcourt who, in his Annual Report for 1950-51, declares that the residents of Port Harcourt under its former Township status: “Too many people spend too much of their time and energy in the quest for money and little else, and too few of the citizens of this Township have the feeling there” (as quoted in Anyanwu, 1971 P.359). The above seem to agree with the position of a Sylvia Leith Ross who had visited Port Harcourt in 1935. According to Anyanwu (1971, pp. 358):

No one takes root in Port Harcourt; no one visualizes his future in Port Harcourt. No one hopes to die in Port Harcourt. Men come to make money and have no thought of something there for good. If they build houses it is only to save rent and to make more money by letting out rooms. The house of their ambition will be built in their own town.

Anyanwu (1971, P. 358) strengthens that;

The feeling of attachment to people’s rural homes was not confined only to the labourers of Port Harcourt. Other sections of the community shared this feeling. Thus, whether they were traders, civil servants or professionals, the general tendency among people was to regard Port Harcourt as a place where they had come to make profit in their trade or business before going back to their rural homes to spend their money.

To actually understand and appreciate the manifestations of the Creoles’ intermingling in Port Harcourt, their various efforts will be subjected to the crucibles of critical analysis under the following:

i. Educational Enterprise

Irrespective of the insignificant population of the Creoles (*Saro* as locally called) in Port Harcourt, the Sierra Leone migrants, who placed more premium on education, made considerable influence to spread and consolidate western-style education, in Port Harcourt. They left an indelible mark in the annals of history of Port Harcourt as the chief transmitter for the propagation of western ideas, values and culture in *Pitakwa*.

The evidence of the Creoles inter connectivity’s in Port Harcourt was surprising in the area of western education. This is premised on the fact that western-style education was regarded as an adjunct of Christian missionary endeavour. It was a fashionable combination for school and evangelization to go on hand in hand. It was a powerful strategy adopted by the pioneer evangelists to “catch” the children early into the missionary fold. Commenting on the water-tight synergy between the church and western education, Murray (1929) posits:

To all intents and purposes the school is like the church.
Right away in the bush or in the forest the two are one, the

village teacher is also the village evangelist. An appreciation of this fact is cardinal in all considerations of African education (as quoted in Coleman, 1986, P. 113).

In like manner, the Reverend Lionel Randall Potts-Johnson founded the first post-primary educational institution in the Garden City of Port Harcourt on 2nd May, 1932. He subsequently named the institution, which initially commenced as a co-educational and later became exclusive institution for boys, after his beloved wife, Mrs Eniton Potts-Johnson. The private school managed by the Iconic proprietor and principal had a handful of Sierra Leoneans, Gold Coasters, Yoruba and a few Igbo as members of academic staff. The Head of Administration went to the Mr Savage led Caretaker Committee when the school's most cherished principal and proprietor departed to the sweet bosom of our Lord in June 1947 to 1959.

Instructively, like other grammar school in the British West Africa, the Enitonna High school adequately prepared its students for the highly competitive Oxford and Cambridge Examinations, resulting in the teaching of subjects like Latin, Greek, English Language, Bible Knowledge, Algebra, Geometry and Trigonometry (Moses, 1983). Following the replacement of the Oxford and Cambridge curricula with those of the newly established West African Examinations Council (WAEC) in 1956, Moses (1983, P.29) correctly notes that "the school's duration of minimum years spent and classes a pupil must have passed through before being eligible to sit for these examinations were reduced from six to five"

On another note, Daminabo (2013, P.26) profusely argues that the establishment of the Enitonna High School, Port Harcourt was not the sole effort of the Rev. Potts-Johnson, a Creole migrant, but in collaboration with I. Warrior Osika from Okrika. In his words:

Enitonna High School, Port Harcourt, a private secondary school was jointly founded by a teacher, I.W. Osika (or I. Warrior Osika) and a proprietor, Rev. L.R. Potts Johnson, a Port Harcourt based Sierra Leonean priest.... It was warrior-Osika who suggested the idea of establishing a High School to Rev.-Potts-Johnson who eventually accepted to sponsor the school, on one condition: that it be named after this wife, Eitonna. Rev. Potts-Johnson's wife, at the time had just passed on. The school was established with about seven students and they performed wonders in the first (1936) School Certificate Examination they took, It also started in a room of a building situated at No 74/76 Bonny Street and now stands as a great monument in Borikiri, Port Harcourt where the late Warrior-Osika's name is non-existent.

Moreso, Nwanodi (2013, P.60) energetically supports that “the first Secondary School in Port Harcourt, Enitonna High School, opened in 1932 in rented accommodation. It was a co-education school started by the Sierra Leone Reverend L.R. Potts-Johnson in collaboration with I. Warrior Osika, of Okrika. In 1935, the school moved to a purpose-built building at the corner of Barracks Road and Bonny Street”.

In spite of the above, it is pertinent to observe that the pioneer secondary institution came into being when the Christian mission or government owned schools in the City of Port Harcourt. One is right to state that the Enitonna High School gave birth to the first Girls’ School, Archdeacon Crowther Memorial Girls’ School (ACMGS) in Elenwo, Port Harcourt in 1943 and two mission schools for boys only in 1948, namely, Baptist High School and Stella Maris. Away from that, the institution had produced many professionals and intellectuals like teachers, clergymen, doctors, Lawyers and several other callings that have created substantial in the transformation of Port Harcourt. A case in point is the late Honourable Justice Chief Opubo Ivan Inko-Tariah (1920-2010), a brilliant lawyer and seasoned judge who was one of the students of the second set of the institution (1933-1937). Daminabo (2013, Pp. 26-27) presents a vivid account of Inko-Tariah thus:

One of the pioneer students of this school, a member of the second set (1933-1937), the late Honourable Justice Chief Opubo Ivan Inko-Tariah, (1920-2010) later read law at the University of London, England and was called to the English Bar (Lincoln’s Inn) on 23 November, 1954. On his return to Nigeria, he enrolled at the Supreme Court as Barrister and Solicitor of the Supreme Court of Nigeria on 15 January 1955. In 1971, Justice Opubo Inko-Tariah was appointed judge of the Rivers State High Court by the Federal Government, thus, becoming the first judge from the Port Harcourt area to be so appointed. He remained a recurring decimal within the top echelon in legal circles in Port Harcourt for more than three decades beginning from the mid-1950s.

From the cultural perspective, it is worth noting that the site of the old buildings of the school at Bonny Street, Port Harcourt provided a temporary accommodation for the Rivers State Council for Arts and Culture when it was established in 1972 by the young Rivers State government. The Council, according to Alagoa (2013, P. 145) “became an almost immediate success, attracting visitors from other States, and winning many medals for Rivers State at many national festivals of the Arts.”

ii. **Journalism**

Closely related to education is the point that the Creoles migrants in Port Harcourt made gigantic impact in the pedestal of journalism like in education, the Rev. I. R. Potts-Johnson, a *Saro* established and edited the famous *Nigerian Observer*, a Port Harcourt based local tabloid. The maiden edition of the paper came to the news stance on the 4 January, 1930. Like other newspapers during the period under review, the *Nigerian Observer* greatly influenced and galvanized the political

consciousness of the African population in *Pitakwa*. It consciously rekindled the people cultural nationalism and racial consciousness. The paper's unwavering commitment and dedication to better the lot of the African community in Port Harcourt made the paper to be the most widely read in Port Harcourt. Moses (1983, P.13) discloses that *the Nigerian Observer* "functioned as a significant medium of both social and political articulation. Local affairs were debated and local grievances articulated. Citizens' complaints on welfare issues like the inadequacy of water supply in the "Native locations", the odour of the public latrines, the absence of street names and the too frequent positioning of Port Harcourt's station magistrates were among the issues raised in the paper".

Most of its lengthy thought-provoking editorials were dedicated to stimulate Africans' Self emancipation and to be enterprising. *The Nigerian Observer's* of January 25, 1930 seems to provide appropriate summary:

Now, what is the position of the African in the commercial activities in Nigeria? Without mincing matters we must say at once that it is that of newers of wood and drawers of waters. But who is to blame. The African of course.... If the African feels he is badly treated he should act in the way that will command the respect of the Whiteman, our Anglo-Saxon friends are always too ready to bow to merit whenever they can detect it. The fact that they have recently elected Mr. P.J.C. Thomas, the well-known Negro merchant of Lagos as president of Lagos Chamber of Commerce is evidence of this fact. The African is unwilling to cooperate with his country-men.... As a people the Africans are not individualistic but superficial contact with western ideas have produced a race of men different from the native African and certainly not in any way like the accomplished Europeans. Each westernized African prefers to distrust his neighbour and carries on trade single handed. As long as this continues the African must continue to suffer commercially (as quoted by Wolpe, 1974, P.87).

In yet another development, the late Rev. L.R. Potts-Johnson financed and edited *the Nigerian Observer* urged the African population in the Garden City to unite and take common stance against the colonial authorities' neglect and abandonment of what concerns the "Native locations". This was *tersely* captured in the 5th March, 1930 editorial of the paper with the caption: "the necessity of cooperation of Port Harcourt". It states inter alia:

There are those who hold the view that each tribe (sic) should form its own association and a central Committee set up to be composed of representatives appointed by the association of each tribe (sic).... The idea is that the Jekris (Itsekiri), Ibos (Ibo), Efiks (Efik), Yorubas (Yoruba) Fantees (Fantee) and

Sierra Leoneans, etc. should have separate associations of their own; and then there could be formed a Central Committee of the various tribes (sic). The members of the Jekri association will appoint their own representatives to represent them on the Central Committees. The Ibos (sic) and other tribes (sic) will do the same.... Will not the leaders of each tribe (sic) seriously take the matter to heart and summon a meeting of their people? The position of the Gold coast people of West Africa today affords an interesting and enviable example of what cooperation can achieve. Why should we not in our little world of Port Harcourt practice principles of cooperation and self-help? (As cited by Wolpe, 1974, P.91).

What must be stressed here is that the far-sighted nationalist, Rev. L.R. Potts-Johnson, who was ahead of his generation, canvassed for political unity among the settler elements living in Port Harcourt City even before the establishment of ethnic based associations like the Ibo Union established in 1933 and the Central Union called “the African Community League which came into existence in 1935. There is abundant truth in the statement that the *Nigerian observer* “took the first step towards uniting the African community in Port Harcourt politically” (Wolpe, 1974, P.91). The editor’s comments are reflected in his most celebrated editorial columns which dramatically announced and remarkably boosted the personality of Rev. L.R. Potts-Johnson among the Africans in Port Harcourt. Okoye article in the *Nigerian Eastern Mail* of January, 5, 1945 reveals:

The Rev. L.R. Potts-Johnson, if an election were to take place, would score the highest votes. He has always shown a keen interest in the affairs of Pot Harcourt. He is accessible and any poor man or woman can see him at anytime. He is always prepared to take up the people’s case.

iii. Civil Service and Commercial Sectors

As discussed above, the Creoles were recaptives who were rehabilitated in Sierra Leone by the British philanthropists. Thus, they accepted and absorbed a substantial amount of foreign European culture which they blended with the African culture. One of the western values imbibed was western style education. It was this crop of the Creoles who migrated to Port Harcourt to assume the pioneer duty of administrative and clerical services in the emerging new city of Port Harcourt. They were the first contractors, civil servants, staff of commercial firms, and so on. Okowa (2013, P.124) reveals that “the Sierra Leoneans locally referred to as *Saro*, provided much of the clerical and administrative support services to the colonial authorities”. We must understand that Mr. H. Reffel was the first Chief Clerk of the City in 1909. He was credited to have built the first storey building in 1919 in Port Harcourt (Moses, 1933).

The Creoles culture, more than any other cultures in the British West Africa, had the highest pedigree of European values and cultures. For these factors, the British colonizer at the beginning of their alien rule depended on them for smooth “pacification” and effective

administration throughout the sub-region. Webster and Boahen (1971, p.145) trenchantly document:

As the British expanded their empire in West Africa they were dependent upon the creoles to fill the junior and many of the senior civil service posts. Creoles sat in the executive and legislative councils of Ghana, Gambia and Nigeria. In Ghana creoles were judges of the Supreme Court, Colonial Treasurer, Solicitor-General, Postmaster General, Chief Medical Officer, District Officers and once-acting-governor; In Nigeria the registrar of the Supreme Court, Colonial Treasurer and Postmaster General were Creoles.... Under the Niger Company and in Lagos and Dakar they held responsible positions as marine engineer.... Everywhere along the coast they were the first or among the first clergymen, lawyers, doctors and newspaper owners. As early as 1925, forty-four of Nigeria's fifty-six barristers were of Creole descent.

The Creoles in Port Harcourt also repeated their long tradition of "first of firsts" in the commercial sector. Like their Kith and kins in other urban centres of the country, the *Saro* in Port Harcourt, as expected pioneered the commercial life of the residents of Port Harcourt. It is important to place on record that the first bakery to be established in the City was undertaken by Creoles immigrants namely Mrs A.K. Macaulay and Mr. I.B. Johnson in 1921. As I.B. Johnson was a very successful contractor some proportion of the daily output of about two hundred and fifty to three hundred loaves of bread were consumed by the prisoners (Moses, 1983). It will not be too much to add that the creoles in the person of Mr. I.C. Cummings pioneered the establishment of the first supermarket in the city in the early 1920s. Moses (1983, P.33) instructively notes that the entrepreneur "used part of his private residence along Club road for this purpose and by 1926, he had converted the whole of this building to his supermarket. In that year, his staff strength stood at fourteen". What an innovative and result-oriented entrepreneurship.

The Creoles' epoch-making pioneering efforts were also noticeable in the Transnational Companies and the banking sector. Records available showed that the services of Creoles immigrants in Port Harcourt were sought and received by most Port Harcourt based Multi-nationals like the United Africa Company (U.A.C), United Trading Company (U.T.C.), Unilever, among others. They were engaged by Multinationals Companies as company clerks, transporters/drivers, administrative staff, distributors, attachees, sales representatives, to mention but a few. Suffice to note that through their dexterity and training-on-the-job most Creoles rose through the rank to the top. Plainly, Mr. W. Bucknor, a Creole immigrant was appointed a sole distributor for United Africa company (U.A.C) in 1937. Their influence was also felt in the banking sector. The Creoles played a leading role in the first Bank that was established in Port Harcourt. As at 1937, the Sierra Leoneans who worked as foundation staff of the bank included but not limited to Mr. C.K. Garrick, Mr. G. Wilson, and Mr. Byron (Moses, 1983).

iv. Missionary Endeavour

The Creoles evangelists also contributed enormously to the Port Harcourt missionary history. Oral history of the people indicates that the *Saros* were the pioneers of the Wesley Methodist Church in Port Harcourt. It was in want of a worship centre that Pa Benjamin, a popular *Saro* living at No 36 Bonny street, immediately donated his residence for the purpose in 1915 (Moses, 1983). By 1918 the Bible class meetings had metamorphosed into a full scale Church service with sermons preached. Incidentally, Rev. L.R. Potts-Johnson visited Port Harcourt from the Opobo Circuit and administered the first Holy Communion. Records available indicate that following the tireless collective evangelical efforts of C.K. Garrick and Pa. Cole, the infant church tremendously increased in spiritual calibre and physical fibre, attracting the posting of a minister in 1920. Fortunatley, the Catechist sent was Gladstone Taylor, Creole of Sierra Leone extraction. By the Lord's leading, he administered the Church up to 1932. He was replaced by another *Saro* called E.K. Williams (1934-37), another creole, H.L. Ford (1937-43) and B.T. Showell, a Briton in 1943 (Moses, 1983).

The 1932 "Great Union" of the Wesleyan Methodists and the Primitive Methodists radically transformed the fortunes of the Church from a mushroom standard to a big church of numerous worshippers with the result that Pa. Benjamin's residence could no longer contain the members. The increase in membership threw up the challenge of inadequate worship space. To solve this, creole members of the Church like Pa. Benjamin, Olakogbin Johnson and Rev. Lionel R. Potts-Johnson thoughtout ways to acquire a parcel of land from the colonial authorities. Through negotiations, they secured the parcel of land where the Wesley Methodist Church Harbour Road now stands. They had a contractual agreement with Messes Fair Brothers Construction Company (A Syrian Owned firm) which commenced the construction of the church building following the Foundation Stone Ceremony laid in 1933.

Also, a crop of dedicated and spirited Sierra Leonean believers like I.B. Johnson, I.C. Cummings, and Effusion Johnson paid a huge sum of money to defray the debt incurred during the construction of the church building. Again, the role of the *Saro* in Christian mission education cannot be glossed over. The Wesley Methodist School established in 1936 was the brain child of Rev. E.K. Williams. As the Church and Mission School were fused into an organic unit, Rev. E.K. Williams functioned as the Church evangelist and the Headmaster of the School between 1936 and 1937 when he was succeeded by J. Cole, another Creole clergy. The *Saro* in Port Harcourt were not mere icons of evangelization. They were, indeed, spiritual giants, far sighted pioneers and epitome of practical Christianity.

v. Politics

The preponderant weight of evidence at our disposal point to the fact that the crucial activities of the Creoles were not restricted to the domains of education and journalism alone. The Creoles also made landmarks contributions to the political development of the African community as they were known in Port Harcourt then. Like the Rev. R.L. Potts-Johnson, the Rev. E.K. Williams, a Creole migrants in Port Harcourt formally convened the African Community league 1935 for the mutual benefit of the African community and political development across the barriers of ethnicity in Port Harcourt. The aim of the body,

which was a true reflection of the multi-cultural mix of Port Harcourt, was “to represent the whole Port Harcourt African community, and to stand as the only channel of communication between government authorities and the community, in all that affects municipal interests and the welfare of the people” (As cited in Daminabo, 2013, P.36).

The most outstanding pioneer unifying League’s Constitution of 1935 provided that the numerically strong cultural/linguistic groups like the Igbo, Delta (Ijaw), and Yoruba be accorded ten representatives each, while the numerically smaller ethnicities such as Benin, Calabar, Gold Coast (later Ghana), Togoland, Hausa, Sierra Leone/Gambia and Warri Areas were each accorded six members (Wolpe, 1974, Daminabo, 2013). In 1945, that is ten years after the formal inauguration of the league, a review to increase the member from nine was considered. The inclusion of the “ethically mixed plot-holders and market traders association” (Wolpe, 1974, P.91).

Adopting non-confrontational posture, the Creole Methodist pastors-inspired African Community League relentlessly agitated for improved economic opportunities during the years of economic down turn. To pressure the colonial government into lessening economic burden of local African traders in Port Harcourt, the organization despatched repeated representations to the British administrators. The grievances were based on the high cost of electric light bills, the exorbitant tariff for Crown Land allocations and unjust enforcement of local authority, among others. The climax of the League’s struggle for self-determination was what is recorded in the history of Port Harcourt as the “Palmer Affair of 1944”. The 1944 confrontation was the township’s first major political controversy in which the politically united African League under the auspices of the Creoles confronted the colonial government to restrain an over-zealous local authority. All in all, the league which was formed, motivated, and sustained by the enterprising Creoles-migrants in Port Harcourt, particularly the Rev. E.K. Williams and the Rev. L. R. Potts-Johnson, both Methodist clergymen, seriously aroused the much needed political unity and consciousness among the African population in Port Harcourt. The first political organization actually aggregated diverse interests and groups together under one united canopy, striving towards communal benefits that remarkably departed from individual and ethnic interests.

Additionally, the Creoles (*Saro*) took active part in the administration of Port Harcourt from the beginning. In order for the colonial authorities in Port Harcourt to effectively control the pattern of development in the new city and ensure that it was run properly as a model township, the township affairs was not only transferred from the Railway Department to the Administration and other Government Department but also the establishment of the Township Advisory Board (TAB) in 1918 (Nwanodi, 2013, Briggs & Ndimele, 2013). The Colonial Government clearly spelt out the powers of the Municipal Council to run the new first class township to include the establishment malt of cultural institutions and control of cultural practices:

- To establish social centres, libraries and shop, etc.
- To maintain tree nurseries and plantains;
- to protect African works of art;
- to establish parks:
- to licence playhouses;
- to prohibit nudity, to mention but a few.

The Municipal Council, according to Alagoa (2013, P.143) was “interested in curbing, eradicating or reforming practices they considered reprehensible, indecent, or inimical to public order. It is clear that the Garden City image of the City was deliberately created over time through a policy of managing tree nurseries and Parks. Port Harcourt did maintain a green culture in the open spaces and parks in the old City through the 1950s and into the 1970s”. It may be recorded that the township Advisory Board (TAB) heralded the Port Harcourt Planning Authority.

The Local authority was saddled with executive duties but was answerable to the Resident of Owerri Province. “Both the European companies and the African community wanted to participate in the running of the township. However, at first representation on the Board, was equally divided between representatives of the government and mercantile interest. There was no African representation until 1926” (Nwanodi, 2013, P.58). Interestingly, too, Mr. I.B. Johnson, a *Saro* in the Township “and Mr. S.I. Ikiroma-Owiye were appointed. It is important to point out that in October 1947, the Rev. Potts-Johnson tabled the formal motion on the municipality issue at a meeting of the Township Advisory Board (TAB) (Dixon-Fyle, 1999). He, indeed, merited the honorific title: The founder of Port Harcourt Municipality”. To further demonstrate the political significance and contribution of the Creoles immigrants in Port Harcourt, the late Rev. R.L. Potts-Johnson was the representative of the African population in Port Harcourt when the Eastern House of Assembly was created in 1947 (Crowder, 1973). He was only replaced and succeeded by G.C. Nonyelu in 1949 when the eternal life giver called him home (Dixon-Fyle, 1999).

The Decline of the *Saro* in the Politics and Development of Port Harcourt

By the dawn of the 20th century, Creoles’ dominance, influence and contribution in education, the civil service, commerce and the Missions in most British West African Colonies was declining. The exclusion and displacement of the Creoles by the British Government and the Missions were the leading factors that contributed to the systematic replacement and elimination of the *Saro*, from the top echelon in the public services, the Mission and the commerce. The anti-creole policy caused the replacement of the Creole clergymen, businessmen and/or outright dismissal from the civil service. In fact, most of their acquired lands and other property were confiscated from them (Webster & Boahen, 1971).

This was not the scenario in Port Harcourt. It was ethnic politics that completely ousted the *saro* from the political dynamics of Port Harcourt. Quoting Dixon-Fyle (1999), Okowa (2013, P.124) maintains “the indigene versus immigrant divide also increasingly became more pronounced. The Sierra Leoneans locally referred to as *Saro*, who had provided much of the clerical and administrative support services to the colonial authorities increasingly found themselves on the receiving end of the political conflict”.

The outcomes of the June 1949 General Elections into the Port Harcourt Municipal Council clearly revealed the subjugation of the Creoles political leadership in Port Harcourt by the numerically superior Igbo settler elements. The elections, which were conducted on the line of ethnic politics, produced seven seats for the Zikists, six seats for the Nigerian Republic Party and five seats for the Port Harcourt Secret Society. (Dixon-Fyle, 1999). None of the *Saro* were elected into the new council. By this time, ethnic unions had been hugely proliferated along ethnic lines, resulting in ethnicized political socialization and mobilization in Port Harcourt. The newly elected councillors according to Dixon-Fyle

(1999, P.149), were: V.K. Onyeri, M.D. Okechukwu, Chief M.I. Asinobi, A.O. Akuwike, C.U. Dibia, G.C. Nonyelu, B.O.N. Eluwah, S. Macebuh, Mrs E. Adeshigbin, P. Okirigwe and R. Madueme. This first elections into the Port Harcourt Municipal Council abruptly crippled the role of the immigrants in the politics of Port Harcourt. As Dixon-Fyle (1999, P.149) bluntly put: “the political rout of the immigrants was now complete at the level of popular representation”. Okowa (2013, P.125) confirms that the June 1949 elections “apparently brought the role of the immigrants (*saro*) in the politics of Port Harcourt to a close”.

A major event that stamped the decline and consequent collapse of the Saro’s influence in Port Harcourt was the demise of their iconic leader, the Reverend Lionel Randall Potts-Johnson in June 1949. Okowa (2013, P.126) concurs that “the death of Rev. Potts-Johnson in 1949... brought critical *Saro* political participation in the politics of the city to a final full stop”. Supporting this view, Dixon-Fyle (1969, P. 136) writes “never again was a Sierra Leonean to play a formidable and as decisive role in the political life of the city. By 1950, the indigenous (communities) had rallied to fill the vacuum created by Potts-Johnson’s demise, with the Ajibades (sic), Nzimiros (sic), Allagoa (sic) and others sin the vanguard”. By virtue of the death of Rev. Potts-Johnson in 1949, G.C. Nonyelu succeeded his position in the Eastern House of Assembly. Dixon-Fyle (1999, P.156) Stresses:

By December 1949, G.C. Nonyelu had succeeded to Potts-Johnson’s position in the Eastern House of Assembly, ushering in a new era of Igbo dominance in Port Harcourt politics that would largely feature Owerri and Onitsha factions in fierce competition for the spoils. Port Harcourt’s new Town Council was, before long, a matter a much official regret and profound disappointment.

The agitation for self-determination by the Port Harcourt indigenes to be the drivers of the politics of Port Harcourt kept the people on the path of constant struggle until 1967 when Rivers State was created alongside other eleven States in the federation. The creation of a Rivers Province in 1947 could not quench the Zeal of total political and economic emancipation as the Province and the people were still lumped together with Igbo dominated and controlled Eastern Region.

Evidence of the Saro inter-ethnic Relations in Port Harcourt

The phenomenon of ethnic politics which dangerously distorted the smooth interflow between the *Saro* and other elements in the city of Port Harcourt, notwithstanding, there are abundant cultural crosscurrent among them. Cultural values were borrowed by both parties, leading hugely to overlap of cultures. The trade relations which existed among the settler elements enabled the trading partners and associates to name their children and loved ones after themselves. Most importantly, the pattern in the naming of streets in the city of Port Harcourt, actually reflected some important personalities, both Africans and Europeans, as well as Towns/Cities. Accordingly, prominent Creoles migrants, who contributed enormously to the development of the city of Port Harcourt, were named after some major Streets in the African section of the Township. For example, Streets in the African section of the Township of Port Harcourt were named after distinguished creoles

settlers like I.B. Johnson, Rev. L.R. Potts-Johns and the Rt. Rev. Johnson. Daminabo (2013, Pp: 35-36) affirms:

To date, three Streets in the African section of the first segment of Port Harcourt bear names of Sierra Leoneans, who played important roles in the development of the City: I.B. Johnson, Potts-Johnson, and Bishop Johnson. (Also) in appreciation of the contributions of Ghanaians towards the development of the young City, one of the first three major roads in the African section of the first segment of Port Harcourt is named after a Ghanaian educationist and celebrated exponent of ("I am Black and Proud") inter-racial unity, Dr. James Emman Kwegyir Aggrey (1875-1927). The name Aggrey Road is still in use.

The legacy of linguistic interflow and borrowing also followed the interactions between the Creoles and other settlers as well as the indigenes in the commercial and administrative City of Port Harcourt. Due to their wealth, education and missionary absorptive influence, the *Krio* language became popular and widely used by the residents of *Pitakwa*. Webster and Boahen (197, P.142) declares that the *Krio* language "is particularly suited to describe African society and life and has a melodious liquid tongue which eliminates the harshness of English. The numerous cultural strands which make up the Creoles are best seen in *Krio*, which is English and Yoruba enriched by Portuguese, Spanish and French vocabulary and containing elements of Temne, Mandinka, Ibo, susu and Arabic". The language was a curious blend of the African – European and Arabic cultures.

The introduction of *Krio* language and its general acceptance, making it a sort of second language to all the settlers in Port Harcourt. The profound influence of this inter-linguistic assimilation and borrowing that criss-crossed among the people is still felt today. Alagoa (2013, P.142) throws a great deal of light on the *krio* language in this manner:

Eventually, the growing Port Harcourt population came to define its identity in its own form its identity in its own form of Pidgin English, incorporating contributions from the *krio* of the Sierra Leoneans, and all the languages of the other ethnic communities. It was a language understood and used by all residents in the market and on the streets in daily commerce and communication as the language of Port Harcourt. It was distinct from Pidgin English developed in the Western Niger Delta around Warri, and from Cameroon pidgin. Port Harcourt Pidgin became a badge of identity and a lingua franca: a lingua franca that is yet to achieve the status of a language of literature, and official recognition in the education curriculum.

Also, within the orbit of this cultural web the enduring features of cross-culture combine and inter-ethnic marriages took place between them. By the end of the *Saro* political leadership in the City of Port Harcourt, many settler elements could have married the Creoles who left their wives or lovers and migrated to Port Harcourt in search of

fortunes. In the process, offspring of cross-culturally-bred abound in Port Harcourt as in Lagos, Abeokuta and Calabar. Crowder (1968, P.341) strengthens the argument by declaring that “the City attracted the young, in particular, for without wives and children it was easier for them to leave home to seek their fortune in the Cities, where they could escape oppressive features of home life... they could earn the money to pay taxes their impoverished lands could not produce; or where they could gain cash to pay brideprice (bride-wealth), purchase a bicycle or even build a house at home, for wealth in the village was increasingly becoming a rival status to traditional position. Whatever the motive for coming to the town, the immigrant was much more liable than the migratory agricultural labourer to come against the forces of European modernisation.”

The Creoles in Port Harcourt actually made their mark in the history of relations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Their legacies of self-employment, specialized skills like carpentry, masonry and others were transmitted to other African residents and the indigenes. The Sierra Leoneans immigrants engraved their name in gold in the architectural development of the only Garden City, east of the Niger. Moses (1983, P.34) informs that the “the first concrete storey building in the city, built in 1919, is credited to a Creole by the name of H. Reffel, who was the first Chief Clerk of the city in 1909 and this house still stands on the present site of No 31 Aggrey Road.

In the social domain, there are intimidating records that the Creoles factors are indispensable. Moses (1983, P.34) records that in “elitist” social institutions like the lodge (freemason)...H. Reffel was in fact the first negro master of the lodge in Port Harcourt. After his tenure of office, this position passed on to another Sierra Leone Creole migrant by the name of I.C. Cummings who retained this post for a number of years. Initially, most lodge meetings took place in the private residence of H. Reffel at No. 31 Aggrey Road and he was even instrumental to the building of a permanent meeting place which come to be known as “Okrika Lodge”. These Creoles bequeathed worthwhile social legacies in Port Harcourt which formed the hall mark of most social activities in the city. Prominent among the culture of “clean up campaigns” initiated to instill the rudimentary hygienic behaviour in the people, “win the lavar fund”, an appeal fund during the outbreak of World War II envisaged to raise funds for the execution of the war, to subsidise the high prices of imported food items and to cushion the hardships faced by the “ex-service men” who were disengaged without appropriate benefit, and the “most fascinating Sierra Leonean Day” which was established by the famous Sierra Leone Friendly Society (S.L.F.S.) in Port Harcourt. Members used the occasion to throw their doors wide open to all residents and non-residents of Port Harcourt for a lavish entertainment spiced with plays and concerts, depicting the rich cultural heritage of the Sierra Leoneans. The annual Ibo Day, Hausa Day, Yoruba Day and so on that were celebrated then in the city must have diffused from the well-known Sierra Leonean Day”.

Colonialism phenomenally transformed the stratification of the class structure or classification of the newly created urban centre. It compelled the settlers to be increasingly dependent on salaried jobs or wage employment anchored on individual enterprise or achievement like education and wealth. In the new emergent class structure, the Creoles had the upper hand based on their western education and wealth. The Sierra Leonean immigrants occupied the top echelon of Port Harcourt City as contractors, preachers, civil servants and businessmen in a ‘a nascent petty bourgeoisie’; low level civil servants, small-scale artisans, workers in the employ of “commercial bourgeoisie”, forming “the fledgling

proletariat' (Alagoa, 2013, P.141). Moses (1983, P.34) was correct when he vividly states that the "Creoles that occupied the premier strata of the City's social class", constituting the cream of the society. These class formations that were originated by the *Saro* in Port Harcourt City formed the real basis of class differentiation among the multiplicity of communities in the City of Port Harcourt until political independence was attained.

Conclusion

The paper has attempted to discuss the Nigeria-Sierra Leone relations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with special reference to the *Saro's* inter-cultural interactions in Port Harcourt. The research noted that the hall mark of the creoles immigrants in the new commercial City of Port Harcourt *ab initio* was a high degree of mutual co-existence and peace, resulting in profound and remarkable cross-cultural ties as evident in inter-linguistic interflow, assimilation and borrowings, naming of Streets after these iconic Creoles leaders and personalities.

In the hey days of the Creoles' inter-ethnic interactions, which could be regarded as the golden years of the *Saro's* influence and contributions to the political, socio-religious, economic, and cultural development of the Garden City of Nigeria. The *Saro* as they were locally called were the pioneers of the educational enterprise, Journalism, ecclesiastical activities, and political consciousness of the diverse elements that cohabited at different levels in the municipal Township of Port Harcourt.

It was also discovered that the colonial policies of "divide and rule" and "ethnic politics" introduced by the British colonial administrators and supported by the Christian missions led to the decline of the most celebrated political leadership and participation in the politics of the city of Port Harcourt. In point of fact, the exit of the Rev. R.L. Potts-Johnson in June 1949, their leader *Par excellence*, gave a final full stop to the intermingling of cultures and pivotal contributions of the *Saro* to the political politics of *Pitakwa*. The Igbo, who replaced the Creoles political leadership in the administration of Port Harcourt were said to have planted ethnic politics, self-gratification, nepotism, corruption among others in the political chessboard of Port Harcourt, thereby forcing the indigenes to choose the path of agitation until 1967 when a new Rivers State was created.

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