A dominant theme in early nineteenth-century economic history for the West African coast has been the transition from slaving to legitimate commerce, and the persistence of the former after the trade became illegal. The ability of trading centres to withstand changes in commercial patterns depended largely upon the character of slaving which had preceded its legal termination. Some areas of the coast, as Simon Rottenberg reports, had no recognized entrepôts of the trade; instead, shippers anchored offshore and signalled local merchants of their desire to buy slaves. In most cases, such practices waned after 1808, because of the increased risk of seizure which extended waits for cargoes invited. Walter Rodney describes other circumstances in which Europeans, from the sixteenth century on, established factories onshore where slaving and commerce in African produce occurred simultaneously, in a symbiotic relationship.

Colin Newbury, in a recently published paper read at the 1969 Free-town conference on African trade, links the location of the latter type, which he calls ‘bulking centres’, to indigenous trading systems stretching into the interior, which predated the more profitable years of slaving on the coast. One such centre mentioned by Newbury was located in the Rio Nunez, where the Baga of the coast processed salt, which they sold to Fula from the Futa Jalon in exchange for beef, cloth, and other manufactures of the interior. Europeans settled on the upper Nunez, became middlemen in the existing trade, and provided new markets for additional produce, including hides, ivory, wax, and slaves.

Another, but less studied entrepôt of Fula trade on the coast, was in the Rio Pongo, located some 40 miles south of the Nunez area. This river was home to one of the Windward Coast’s largest bulking and slaving centres at the turn of the nineteenth century. The Pongo community of European and Euro-African traders was also the first to be challenged by a threat from a monopolistic company which eschewed slaving even before the trade became illegal in 1808. This article describes the Pongo trading community, its

life style and relationships to the indigenous economic and political systems, and the cohesiveness which enabled it to withstand a major challenge for control of commerce by the Sierra Leone Company between 1795 and 1802. It demonstrates the symbiotic relationship of slaving to legitimate commerce and the forces which drew slavers and chiefs together to guarantee continued slaving and economic prosperity after 1808.

The principal lure of the Pongo to European traders during the latter half of the eighteenth century was the bountiful supply of slaves available for export. These slaves resulted largely from Fula wars of conquest in the interior, but slave uprisings and wars between the Susu of Sulima and the Fula of Timbo after 1762/3 resulted in Fula tribesmen as well as Susu and others being sold on the coast.4

Generous hospitality offered by the river's chiefs, and an absence of firmly established trading families who might oppose their entry, also attracted new traders to the river. Following the patterns previously established between local chiefs and Portuguese traders, called lançados, each trader sought the permission of a chief to build or purchase a factory. The chief to whom he made the request called a conference of the chiefs who might be most affected, as well as his own paramount chief. Together, the chiefs determined a specific annual rent or custom and granted the stranger permission to move freely among a number of villages. The host chief (landlord) promised to protect the life and property of his guest (stranger) and to guarantee his debts. In return, the trader agreed to pay a head tax on slaves shipped from his factory and to provide his landlord with guns and other supplies in time of war.5 Established practice required the trader to entertain his hosts at his own expense at a dantica or 'exposition of purposes'.6 These festivities formalized the landlord-stranger contract, generally lasted several days, and included gifts of rum, tobacco, and gunpowder to the chiefs and paramount-chief of the district.7

Once a European trader began to accumulate wealth, his landlord, more often than not, attempted to marry a daughter or a slave to his guest and thereby tie his own commercial prosperity to that of the trader.8 Although initially advantageous to both parties, this practice often generated conflict. The resulting Eurafrican generation, which sought to become chiefs or, at


5 W. Rodney, Upper Guinea, 83. This relationship remained consistent throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.

6 Brantz Mayer, Captain Canot or Twenty Years of an African Slaver (New York, 1854), 130. Dantica is the Susu word for this ceremony.

7 Leopold Butscher, 'Extracts from the Journal of the Missionary Butscher', Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society, II, 491–2; Wenzel to Secretary, 14 Nov. 1811, C.A.L./Ex2/107, C.M.S.

8 Mayer, Canot, 110–17.
the very least, to reduce the obligations of earlier contracts, complicated
the traditional landlord-stranger relationship. In some instances, Euro­
peans married chiefs’ daughters, sired a few children, and left the operation
of factories to their wives and children, while they transported slaves and
other goods to markets in the New World. A few traders and their progeny
intervened freely in local chieftaincy disputes, enhancing their own power
by success, but also sharing the defeats of their candidates. Most traders,
however, attempted to remain neutral, if only to protect their property.9

Europeans and Eurafricans made up the bulk of traders in the Rio
Pongo, for there were few African traders who had financial resources
adequate for stocking a factory with manufactures, or who could acquire
credit from European ship captains for the purchase of slaves. Until the
early nineteenth century most African traders associated themselves
instead with the commerce of European or Eurafrican traders, and collected
local products, particularly rice, needed by slaver captains preparing to
return to the Americas. Still others served as hawkers on interior paths, and
advertised varieties and prices of trade goods which particular traders had
available on the coast.

European traders built or purchased ‘factories’ or trading posts, where
they conducted the river’s commerce. Factories took many forms, but
usually consisted of living quarters above or adjoining the store, a ware­
house, a barracoou to contain marketable slaves, a courtyard large enough
to protect visiting caravans and their merchandise, and usually a wharf
where visitors anchored their ships. Only the most wealthy could afford
to fortify their factories with cannon purchased from visitors’ ships.
Others salvaged cannon from shipwrecks, which occurred frequently along
the coast. One turn-of-the-century factory in the Rio Pongo consisted of a
two-storied brick structure with a large courtyard and adjoining storage
areas;10 most were not so well constructed.

Traders at factories carried out their transactions according to a system
known along the Upper Guinea coast as the ‘bar trade’. This system
stemmed from an earlier era when mariners exchanged bars of iron or
copper for African produce or slaves. European and African goods, as a
result, acquired value according to the ‘bar’. Over the years the bar came
to include manufactured goods, tobacco, rum, firearms, and other goods of
European or American origin. The bar was little more than an accounting
tool, for the bar value of both African and European goods fluctuated
according to supply and demand.11 Should the coast become flooded with
tobacco, the value of hides or slaves vis-a-vis tobacco increased, and tobacco
became a ‘cheap bar’. To avoid these fluctuations in prices, ship captains

9 See Mouser, ‘Trade and Politics’, chapters III and IV.
10 Eugene Stock, History of the Church Missionary Society (London, 1899), 1, 134. This
factory formerly belonged to John Ormond, Sr.
11 Rodney, Upper Guinea, 196, calls the bar simply an ‘accounting unit’. Lars Sundstrom,
The Trade of Guinea (Uppsala, 1963), 70, 74–75.
increasingly carried specie, which maintained its value and permitted rapid transactions at coastal factories.\textsuperscript{13}

Resident traders also sent hawkers into the interior to advertise their wares as well as their special bar prices. Once a caravan had arrived and settled down to bargain, the trader attempted to balance his more expensive bars with ones which he acquired at a lesser cost.\textsuperscript{15} It seems likely that the caravan leader, who represented the entire caravan at the bargaining table, was attempting to secure a similar advantage.

The system of trade established in the rivers benefited all parties: resident traders (the middlemen), caravans (the suppliers of slaves and African legitimate trade goods such as cattle, hides, gold, rice, and ivory), European ship captains and supercargos (the purchasers of African products), and chiefs (the landlords). Caravans were formed between October and May at the capitals of Fula provinces, called \textit{diwāl} (s), in the Futa Jalon. All traders wishing to sell goods on the coast placed themselves under the protection of a guide who was generally a relative of the local chief. The caravan leader guaranteed safe passage to the coast, conducted the bargaining session at the coastal factories, and received, in compensation, a percentage of the caravan's value.\textsuperscript{14} The composition of the caravan often determined its destination. The Gambia and Nunez factories became best known for hides and ivory, while the Pongo became a good market for slaves and live cattle, especially after the founding of the Sierra Leone settlement in 1787. Most caravan leaders, however, established commercial ties and friendships with particular traders on the coast and tended to frequent specific factories.\textsuperscript{15}

Few caravans arrived on the coast with only slaves to sell. Slaves destined to be sold at coastal factories generally carried rice, hides, and ivory, which had low bar values in relation to the trade goods received in exchange. In consequence, excess porters who were not needed to carry merchandise on the return to the interior were included in the sale.\textsuperscript{16}

Bargaining sessions between the caravans and the resident traders generally lasted several days, and custom required the trader to provide hospitality in the form of food, lodging, and entertainment for the duration of the session. Any violation of established trading practices was immediately reported by the caravan leader to the trader's landlord.\textsuperscript{17} Finally, having struck a bargain, the resident trader and the caravan leader exchanged gifts and the transaction was completed.

\textsuperscript{14} Mayer, \textit{Canot}, 179–80.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. 86–9, 93.
\textsuperscript{16} James Watt, 'Journal of Mr. James Watt, in his expedition to and from Teembo in the year 1794' (Rhodes House Library, Oxford, MSS. Africa S. 22), 74.
\textsuperscript{17} Adam Aftelius, \textit{Sierra Leone Journal: 1795–1796}, ed. by Alexander P. Kup (Uppsala, 1967), 113.
The willingness of a resident trader to learn an African language and carry on lengthy bargaining sessions assured his success on the coast. Most European ship captains, in contrast, sought only to enter and leave the rivers as quickly as possible, having exchanged their goods for slaves or African products in the process. Ship captains, therefore, sought those rivers known for particular African exports, and established friendships with resident traders, informing them of the types of goods they might require on their next voyage. A consideration of equal importance to commercial success was the quantity of traders resident in any given river. Large numbers of traders could collectively gather a cargo of slaves or other products in a short time.

The bane of supercargos, those charged with disposing of the ships’ trade goods, was the practice of giving a trader merchandise on credit. The supercargo negotiated his order for a specific number of tusks of ivory, hides, or slaves, leaving the resident trader to reach a bargain with a Fula caravan. Meanwhile, the supercargo waited. The chances of contracting malaria and dysentery for both captain and crew, and the possibility of losing a cargo of trade goods increased daily. Consequently, most captains and supercargos sought only those rivers where known traders were established and where traders warehoused those goods in demand. This latter consideration increasingly attracted ship captains to the Rio Pongo.

A large number of European and Eurafrican traders had established factories in the Rio Pongo by the early 1790s. Among those operating factories on the right bank within the jurisdiction of Chief Cumba Bali, the Susu chief of Dominguia and recognized King of the Rio Pongo, was Benjamin Curtis (1774–c.1820), an Afro-American born near Boston, Massachusetts. He established residence near Kissing before 1795, and called his factory ‘Boston’. Curtis dealt both in slaves and legitimate goods, and, although he occasionally co-operated with other traders in the river, he was considered a loner and one not to be entirely trusted. Curtis was in partnership with an American trader called Gaffery, who had killed someone in the Pongo a few years earlier and had fled to the former North American colonies to escape punishment. While in exile he may have sent Curtis to the Rio Pongo to look after his property. By late 1796 Gaffery had returned to the river.

Two other Europeans were located at Kissing. John Irving (1780s–c.1807), an Englishman, married a Baga woman and had a son, George. The second, William Skelton (1780s–c.1804), was an American and had a

18 ‘Enoch Richmond Ware’s Voyage to West Africa’, 283–98. Ware’s account dramatizes the problems of fever upon a crew and the uncertainty of markets.
20 Afzelius, Journal, 114; Buckle to Governor, n.d., enclosed in Council, 29 May 1795, C.O. 270/3, P.R.O.
DUBUKUNSI

RIO PONGO
CHIEFS AND TRADERS, 1790-1808

LIMIT OF MANGROVE

MILES
son, also named William, whom he sent to England for an education. Both Irving and Skelton were slave traders but they also purchased legitimate goods from caravans.\textsuperscript{21}

Only two traders were established in the Bangalan basin, a second centre of trade in the river. Mr Ferrie (c.1750–c.1804), a European, was a prominent and successful slave trader and held the respect of other traders because of his close ties with important Fula caravan leaders.\textsuperscript{22} The second factory was operated by the widow of John Ormond, Sr. and was located at Bangalan town. Born in Liverpool, England, Ormond (c.1750–91), the most notorious slave trader of the late eighteenth century, had sailed to West Africa in mid-century as a cabin-boy aboard a British slave ship. He jumped ship in the Rio Nunez, where he ran a factory, in association with Mr Fortune of Boké, for many years.\textsuperscript{23} Ormond also owned a factory in the Rio Grande, where a Mr Bootte served as sub-factor until 1791. When warfare broke out between the Fula and the Susu of Sulima in 1763 and new slaves became available outside the Labé-controlled path to the Nunez, he moved his headquarters to the Rio Pongo, where he established a factory at Bashia, under the protection of the paramount-chief of Lisso. Known as Mungé or Chief John, he married the daughters of several Susu and Baga chiefs from the Bangalan and Fatala rivers, among them the daughter of the Susu paramount-chief of Bangalan, and sent a son, John Ormond, Jr., to England for an education. Early in 1791 Ormond went to the Iles de Los because of failing health. In his absence, his slaves rebelled and, joined by Chief Baké of Lisso, sacked his stores, destroyed £30,000 worth of property, and killed a son whom he had left in charge. Ormond died soon after. After the Baga attack, one of Ormond’s wives moved to Bangalan to her father’s protection.\textsuperscript{24}

Sam Perry and a Mr Wilkinson, both Englishmen, and Louis Gomez, a Portuguese, operated factories between Bashia and Karara on the Fatala River after Ormond’s death. There was, however, little trade above Bashia after 1791.\textsuperscript{25} Instead of risking probable plunder from the rebellious Baga of Lisso, Fula caravans left the Fatala River near Binda and headed directly for factories in the Bangalan basin or, if the exchange were to their advantage, further downstream to the factories at Kissing and Boston.

Also resident in the Fatala River was Samuel Holeman, the Eurafican son of John Holeman (c.1750–c.1790), who had married a female of the Baga Tanu clan of the left bank and had traded in the Dembia River before

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{a} Afzelius, \textit{Journal}, 109.
\bibitem{b} Ibid.; Corry, \textit{Observations}, 92; Cooper to Council, 24 Aug. 1795, enclosed in Council, 1 Sept. 1795, C.O. 270/3, P.R.O.
\bibitem{c} Afzelius, \textit{Journal}, 76; \textit{Royal Gazette & Sierra Leone Advertiser} 17 July 1819. Mayer, \textit{Canot}, 76, states that Ormond was a Liverpool captain. J. P. L. Durand, \textit{A Voyage to Senegal} (London, 1789), 8x, says that Ormond was an English cabin boy.
\bibitem{d} Mayer, \textit{Canot}, 76–7; Renner to Secretary, 29 July 1812, C.A.I./E3/13, C.M.S.
\bibitem{e} Afzelius, \textit{Journal}, 102, 105–6. Afzelius termed Gomez ‘a white Portuguese a villain’
\end{thebibliography}
his death. John Holeman sent his son to England for an education. Upon his return to the Guinea Coast, Samuel married ‘a Malatter, a fine woman’ from Sierra Leone, who claimed to have returned to Africa from the United States. 26 Holeman took possession of Ormond’s factory at Bashia following the Baga rebellion and engaged in slaving. He owned a schooner which he sent to the Iles de Los and to Sierra Leone for supplies. 27

The last trading centre was located in the Bakia River, and was under the jurisdiction of Emmanuel Gomez, Jr., the paramount-chief of Bakia. Gomez (c.1769-c.1816) was the Eurafrican son of a Portuguese trader from Bissau. The elder Gomez entered the river in mid-century, married a female of the Tanu clan, and acquired, as a result of a coup which brought William Fernandez to power at Bramaya, the paramount-chieftainty of Bakia. As was customary on the left bank, Gomez, Jr. studied in England before becoming chief of Bakia, where he operated the largest factory in that branch. 28 Two European traders also had factories in the vicinity of Bakia: Gospar, a Portuguese, and Tool, an Englishman. Tool studied at Christ’s Hospital in London in his youth and had been an associate of Ormond, Sr. at Bashia before moving to Bakia following Ormond’s death. 29

The only trader having a factory in the river but residing elsewhere was David J. Lawrence, the Eurafrican son of an English trader identified only as Lawrence of Deal, whose centre of activity was at Kissassi in the Rio Nunez. Like Ormond, he also operated a factory in the Rio Grande. His Pongo factory was at Dominguia, the capital of Cumba Bali Damba. Anthony, a Portuguese, and Cooper Cummings, a Eurafrican, supervised his holdings in the river. 30 Cummings later established his own factory at Ventura. 31

Despite the profits which derived to ship captains, resident traders, and chiefs alike, trade in the Rio Pongo was fraught with dangers. All Europeans underwent a period of ‘seasoning’ upon their first contact with West Africa: this included contracting malaria and encountering parasites present in the food and water. The rainy season, from April to October, was the most unhealthy time of the year. Europeans blamed malaria, yellow fever, and other fevers on ‘bad air’ and, in consequence, established

26 Ibid. 105–6 or 108.
29 Ibid. 115, 161.
30 Ibid. 109.
31 Corry, Observations, 92. Ventura’s location is uncertain in the early sources. Joseph Hawkins, A History of a Voyage to the Coast of Africa (Troy, New York, 1797). 154, mentions a John Stone trading in the river in 1795. Wadstrom, An Essay on Colonization, 557, also mentions a Johnstone on the coast, but claims that he was a Black trader from Bissau.
their factories outside the mangrove limits, 'the paradise of mosquitoes and crabs'.

Once a trader had lived through his first encounter with African fevers and parasites, his chances for survival during the next rainy season improved materially. The ship captain and his crew, however, were often without this protection and many remained in Africa, buried near those factories which had promised them fortune.

Despite these disadvantages, the resident traders made life as pleasant as possible for themselves and for maritime visitors. Joseph Hawkins, a clerk on board a slaver which visited the area in 1795, described a remarkable banquet given by the local traders to celebrate a large sale of slaves to his captain. The festivities began in the morning with each trader vying to surpass the others in his selection of Madeira, Lisbon, and French wines:

They [the traders] come to the table nearly intoxicated, and before dinner is completed, they become downright drunk. . . . The coarse jocularity of destroying their apparel or wasting the food, is their amusement; while the most exquisite viands are wasted without utility, and the appetite being palled by superabundance, loses all its value but that which gratifies the vanity of the provider, by indulging the waste and absurdity of his guests. After the wine has circulated freely, the meats are even occasionally dashed about at the heads of the best humored, or most patient of the company, and the empty dishes, plates, and tables are demolished to shew the spirit of the party, and the lengths to which they could carry a joke.

Allowing for exaggerations on his part, Hawkins’s description does indicate that traders provided their visitors with ample hospitality and enjoyed each others’ company in a manner to be expected of former sailors who found themselves in Africa with a common language and with common experiences.

The traders surrounded themselves with the daughters of chiefs, their landlords. Others married into the established trading families, who generally were descendants of Portuguese lançados. Prosperous traders, moreover, sent at least one of their sons abroad for an education. Most went to England, for the English language had gained in importance on the West African Coast following the Seven Years’ War when the British expelled the French from Senegal. Among those educated in England were William Fernandez of Bramaya, John Ormond, Jr. and Samuel Holeman of Bashia, William Skelton, Jr. of Kissing, and Emmanuel Gomez, Jr. of Bakia, all Eurafricans. Upon their return to the rivers, most became apprentices to successful traders and later inherited their fathers’ trading operations. After the founding of the Sierra Leone settlement in 1787, traders and

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33 ‘Ware’s Voyage to West Africa’, 314–17.
34 Hawkins, *Voyage*, 155.
chiefs alike sent children to Sierra Leone for the traditional education abroad.

Despite the educational opportunities made possible by the Sierra Leone settlement, the presence of a British chartered company within 150 miles of the river was not without its disadvantages to commercial stability in the Rio Pongo. Failing to establish overland contact with the lucrative trade of the Futa Jalon, in 1793 company officials met to evaluate the trading systems then in operation in the vicinity of the colony and to formulate a strategy for the company's commercial penetration of the interior. Counselor Zachary Macaulay, a member of the Clapham Sect and evangelical opponent of the slave trade, proposed that a company factory be established in the Rio Pongo, where paths were already operating and where he obviously believed the company would strike a forceful blow against slaving on the Windward Coast.

Not until early in 1795, however, was Macaulay able to realize his goal. Late in April, the company dispatched Captain Richard Buckle to the Pongo, where he met with Cumba Bali Damba at Dominguia and negotiated for a land-based factory within his jurisdiction. Cumba Bali agreed to provide a factory site at Freeport (called Toké Heren before 1796), to clear the land, and to provide the company with a guide to Timbo. In exchange the company agreed to pay him an annual custom of 100 bars, equal to about thirteen pounds sterling.

Within a few days, the most important slave traders, including John Irving, Benjamin Curtis, and William Skelton, Sr. of Kissing, and Mr. Ferrie of Bangalan, learned of the Dominguia palaver or talks, and immediately took action to reverse Cumba Bali's decision. They warned their landlords, who quickly met with Cumba Bali, that a company factory would 'ruin the river'. The slave traders opposed the company for two reasons. However small the company factory, it represented a threat of company monopoly and expansion into the river. Moreover, the company by its charter was restricted from engaging in the slave trade. Anti-slavery proponents were not welcome additions to the river's commerce.

Concerned by the anxiety which this threat to the established slave traders created among his headmen, Cumba Bali informed Buckle of the complaint early in May 1795 and, at Buckle's insistence, called a palaver of chiefs and traders to resolve the dispute before actual construction of the factory could begin. Cumba Bali defended his earlier decision, and, despite the traders' objections, the headmen approved the factory. The chiefs thereby demonstrated their economic motivations as landlords, for another

36 Council, 29 Oct. 1793, and 1 Jan. 1794, C.O. 267/2, P.R.O.
37 Knutsford, Zachary Macaulay, 49.
38 Afzelius, Journal, 12–13, 17; Buckle to Cooper, 25 May 1795, C.O. 270/3, P.R.O.; Buckle to Governor, 29 May 1795, C.O. 270/3, P.R.O.
40 Buckle to Governor, 29 May 1795, C.O. 270/3, P.R.O.
factory in the river simply meant additional income through customs and a new market for local produce. Having obtained for the company its first victory in the Pongo, Buckle advised the slave traders that, should they harass the company, the company would destroy them by raising the price for ivory beyond their ability to pay.\(^{41}\)

Disturbed by the company's determined entry into the river's commerce and resentful of Cumba Bali's refusal to heed their wishes, Curtis, Skelton, and Irving met at Ferrie's factory at Bangalan at the beginning of the 1795-6 trading season to formulate a plan of action. They recognized that the Freeport factory was an experiment, and that if their vigorous opposition contributed to an unsuccessful trading season the company might abandon the river. In any case, they determined collectively to withstand the price war which Buckle had promised earlier.\(^{42}\) They were secretly supported by John Tilley, chief factor for John and Alexander Anderson of London on Bunce Island in the Sierra Leone River, and whose sub-factor, Samuel Holeman, operated a factory at Bashia. Tilley offered to share equally in the costs necessary to undermine the company's enterprise in the Rio Pongo. The company's success in operating factories at either Port Loko or Freeport could seriously endanger his own commercial prosperity. For several years, Tilley had supplied traders in the Rio Pongo with trade goods and had sold cattle and rice to the settlers at Freetown.\(^{43}\)

The slave traders demonstrated their control over commerce in November 1795, when they collectively lowered the prices paid for slaves at their factories. The chief of Timbi Tunni, the immediate Fula overlord of the Rio Pongo, reacted as they expected by closing the path to the river.\(^{44}\) The slave traders thereby brought all trade to a halt and provided the first significant test of the company's determination to establish a foothold in the river.

David Lawrence, meanwhile, had moved his headquarters from the Nunez to Dominguia, but too late in the year to be invited to the Bangalan meeting. When John Irving afterwards invited him to join the slave trader alliance, Lawrence declared himself unwilling to become involved in their contest with the company.\(^{45}\) Lawrence's unco-operativeness earned him

\(^{41}\) Ibid.

\(^{42}\) Cooper to Council, 24 Aug. 1795, enclosed in Council, 1 Sept. 1795, C.O. 270/3, P.R.O.

\(^{43}\) For Tilley, see Knutsford, Zachary Macaulay, 49, 151; Afzelius, Journal, 62, 109; Sierra Leone Company, Substance of the Report of ... 1796 (London, 1796), 8; Council, 30 Sept. 1795, C.O. 270/3, P.R.O.

\(^{44}\) Cooper to Gray, 12 Nov. 1795, enclosed in Council, 19 Nov. 1795, C.O. 270/3, P.R.O.; Afzelius, Journal, 62. George E. Brooks, Jr., Yankee Traders, Old Coasters and African Middlemen (Boston, 1970), 55-6, notes that during the period 1794-9, trade goods of American origin were extremely scarce on the Windward Coast due to the fear of French privateers and to high interest rates stemming from the Anglo-French war. In consequence, it is doubtful that Pongo traders had large quantities of goods to exchange for slaves, excepting salt, or that the halting of trade in late 1795 caused them great financial losses.

\(^{45}\) Council, 1 Sept. 1795, C.O. 270/3, P.R.O.
the enmity of the other traders and, according to Thomas Cooper, who was the company's agent at Freeport, Irving had him beaten. Lawrence retaliated by allying himself with the company. In January 1796 he accepted the company's commission to proceed to the Fula capital at Timbo with gifts for Alimamy Sadu and to negotiate the reopening of the Pongo-Timbo path, which had been closed since the previous November. Sadu accepted the gifts, ordered the Fula chief of Timbi Tuni to reopen the path, and promised to use his influence to ensure continuous communications between Timbo and the company's entrepot in the river. Lawrence's role in this affair cemented his tie with both Timbo and the Sierra Leone Company, but it enraged his fellow slave traders. Lawrence gambled that an alliance with the company would prove to his own advantage. Moreover, with factories in both the Rio Grande and the Rio Nunez, his commercial prosperity was not dependent upon his activities in Rio Pongo.

The reopening of the path in late February 1796 profited the slave traders more than the company, for the Timbo-Fula had successfully invaded the Sulima homeland at the beginning of the dry season and subsequently flooded the coast with captives. Cooper complained increasingly to Governor Macaulay of the small quantities of ivory, rice, and gum reaching Freeport factory, and of the continuing opposition of slave traders to the company. At Macaulay's suggestion, Cooper sent hawkers upcountry to intercept approaching caravans and to advertise the factory's wares. Although trade at Freeport did increase in March and April, when several caravans from Segu on the Niger River reached the coast, Cooper complained that the only trade goods reaching the company's factory were commodities refused by resident slave traders, who purchased all the slaves as well as the quality merchandise which caravans wished to sell. Cooper also accused Lawrence, who was recognized by Freetown as a friend of the company, of enticing from Freeport those caravans having a few slaves to sell. Cooper's difficulties were partly of his own making. Caravan leaders from either Segu or the Futa had travelled hundreds of miles before reaching the coast. Most wanted a leisurely rest before returning to the interior, and used this time in bargaining sessions with resident traders. Cooper refused to provide the customary hospitality or to engage in bargaining beyond the limits allowed by the company. Experienced

46 Cooper to Gray, 12 Nov. 1795, enclosed in Council, 19 Nov. 1795, C.O. 270/3, P.R.O.
47 Cooper to Council, 21 Jan. 1796, enclosed in Council, 3 Feb. 1796, C.O. 270/3, P.R.O.
50 Macaulay to Cooper, n.d., enclosed in Council, 26 Apr. 1796, C.O. 270/4, P.R.O.
51 Afzelius, Journal, 103, 109. Macaulay sent Adam Afzelius, botanist for the company, and Dr Thomas Winterbottom to the river in March 1796 to investigate Cooper's complaints. Afzelius's journal is an important source for this period.
caravan leaders, therefore, traded with only those residents who offered shelter and hospitality, and Cooper was left either with novice leaders or with caravans from afar.

Encouraged by the lack of trade at Freeport and the growing dispute between Lawrence and Cooper, the resident traders found support emerging from an unexpected quarter. The chiefs, particularly Cumba Bali, had defended the company since the May 1795 palaver, if only perhaps to demonstrate to other traders their continuing prerogatives under the landlord-stranger relationship. With the beginning of the 1795-6 trading season, however, Cumba Bali had reason to reconsider his continuing support of the company factory. While impressed by the company’s influence at Timbo, Cumba Bali received frequent Fula complaints of irregularities at Freeport, which generally translated into Cooper’s refusal to bargain and to provide required hospitality. Disappointed, the Fula ordered Cumba Bali to chastise his stranger, and forced him to visit Freeport on several occasions to remind Cooper of the traditional trading practices.52 The company’s policies forced Cumba Bali to support the company not only against the slave traders but also against the Fula, a position which he did not relish.

Moreover, Freeport did not bring to Cumba Bali revenues comparable to those from slave traders within his domain. All resident traders paid the regular annual custom, but Cumba Bali received an additional income from a head tax of one bar charged on each slave exported from the river. The sale of locally collected rice, fruits, and other goods, which were necessary in the provisioning of slavers for the trans-Atlantic voyage, was another source of income which accrued to all residents of the river. The company factory, in contrast, profited the chiefs solely by the traditional annual custom.

In April 1796 Governor Macaulay visited the Pongo to resolve those disputes which were developing between the company and the landlords and to investigate Cooper’s repeated criticisms of Lawrence. Macaulay refused to change the company’s policy of fixing prices or of refusing hospitality, but did agree to pay Cumba Bali an additional sum of fifty bars in compensation for the traditional head tax on slaves exported from the river.53 Macaulay dismissed out of hand Cooper’s complaints against Lawrence, describing him as ‘one of the most respectable Slave traders on the coast’.54 Governor Macaulay’s visit to the river marked an important change from a policy of competition to one of cooperation with several of the resident traders. Even though Cooper remained as principal factor at Freeport, Macaulay began direct negotiations with David Lawrence for rice and
ivory, obtainable at either his Pongo or Nunez factories, in exchange for salt and kola nuts. Lawrence’s new stature in trade stemmed in part from his association with the company, but perhaps of greater importance was the death of his major trading competitor in the Nunez, Doctor Walker of Kacundy, in January 1796. John Pearce, an Eurafrican of American descent, continued the operation of Walker’s factories following his death and was assisted by the Nalu trader Towl at Kissassi. Meanwhile, Lawrence improved his own position in the river.

With the dispute in the Pongo between the company and Cumba Bali temporarily resolved in April 1796, Benjamin Curtis, William Skelton, John Irving, and Mr Ferrie increased their opposition to the company, especially following its latest manoeuvres, by implementing a new policy of refusing to purchase slaves from caravans which had sold legitimate products at Freeport. This technique proved extremely effective for, while all caravans transported legitimate goods coastward, as has been said, most were also prepared to sell those bearers not required to carry the exchanged merchandise on the return journey into the interior.

The effectiveness of this new policy was enhanced by events occurring outside the rivers. In April 1796 the leader of a Fula caravan was mysteriously killed along the Pongo path, and commerce was subsequently halted for the duration of the trading season, which was already drawing to a close. In June 1796, moreover, Alimamy Sadu of Timbo was assassinated, as was his immediate successor, and Alfa Salifu (Alfaya, 1796 to 1802) was not elected as the new Alimamy until October 1796. The agreements between Sadu and the company were thereby void.

Of perhaps greater importance to the company was the effect of the Anglo-French war upon American and English trade with Africa. French privateers captured a company vessel laden with trade goods from England in 1796, and John Gray, the company’s accountant, informed Cooper that no trade goods were forthcoming from Freetown because of the French danger. High insurance rates and the possibility of seizure also kept American vessels from West Africa during the early years of the war.

In October 1796, Cooper revived the company’s dispute with Cumba Bali and significantly diminished the company’s new-found respect among

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65 Macaulay to Lawrence, 2 June 1796, C.O. 268/5, P.R.O.; Macaulay to Cooper, 3 June 1796, C.O. 268/5, P.R.O.
66 Afzelius, Journal, 47.
67 Cooper to Council, enclosed in Council, 3 Feb. 1796, C.O. 270/3, P.R.O.
68 Council, 26 Apr. 1796, C.O. 270/4, P.R.O.
69 Cooper to Council, 8 July 1796, enclosed in Council, 18 Nov. 1796, C.O. 270/4, P.R.O.
70 Sierra Leone Company, Substance of the Report of ... 1798, 6; Council, 26 Apr. 1796, C.O. 270/4, P.R.O.
72 Brooks, Yankee Traders, 56; Gray to Cooper, 7 Oct. 1796, C.O. 268/5, P.R.O.
73 Brooks, Yankee Traders, 56.
the Pongo landlords. Two large Fula caravans and a smaller one from Segu on the Niger River had recently arrived at Freeport, and Cooper refused either to bargain or to provide hospitality. The Fula sought redress from Cumba Bali who, once again, was forced to go to Freeport to remonstrate with this stranger. Cooper bluntly informed Cumba Bali of the company practice and forbade any further interference in company affairs. Later Cooper reported that Cumba Bali had summoned a palaver of headmen to consider his actions. While the resolutions of the above-mentioned conference are unrecorded, Cumba Bali moved his capital to Thia soon thereafter. Perhaps he was dissatisfied with his ineffectiveness at Freeport, but more probably he sought additional distance from the company’s factory and from the Fula caravans who increasingly sought his intervention with Cooper. Perhaps of equal importance was the improved position of Lawrence in the river’s trade. Adam Afzelius, who visited Dominguia in March 1796, reported that between 1500 and 2000 Fulas were then at Lawrence’s factory. Certainly such large numbers of Fula in his capital diminished Cumba Bali’s independence of action, and increased the possibility of an imposition of new Fula regulations regarding trade on the coast.

Cumba Bali’s removal to Thia after 1797 aided the company little, for, although Cooper thereafter bought and sold goods unmolested, the company as well as the slave traders were entering a period of economic depression. Few trade goods of American or European origin were available on the Windward Coast between 1797 and 1800, and all traders increasingly resorted to the basic commodities of salt and kola in their exchange. The company, moreover, lost five cargoes out of six of trade goods sent from England in 1798 and 1799, and few American vessels visited the coast. Late in 1797, with its stores empty at Freetown, the company sold two of its vessels, the Dawes and the Providence, to John Pearce of Kacundy for a sum of 11,554 pounds of ivory.

This sale reflected the company’s frustration with its factory in the Pongo, the effectiveness of the Pongo resident traders’ boycott of Freeport, and the company’s determination to expand into the Nunez, where John Pearce had offered to build a ‘salt house’ for the company. The company sent its agents to Freeport, where they collected salt which Cooper had purchased from Baga traders and exchanged this salt for ivory in the Nunez. Nathaniel Snowball, a Nova Scotian settler at Freetown, was appointed company agent in the Nunez.

The boycott of Freeport factory brought the resident traders their first

64 Cooper to Council, 11 Nov. 1796, enclosed in Council, 18 Nov. 1796, C.O. 270/4, P.R.O. The results of this palaver are uncertain in the sources.
65 Afzelius, Journal, 103.
66 Brooks, Yankee Traders, 56.
67 Macaulay to Cooper, 18 July 1797, C.O. 268/5, P.R.O.; Council, 13 Sept. 1797, C.O. 270/4, P.R.O.
68 Sierra Leone Company, Substance of the Report of . . . 1798, 7.
69 Council, 5 Mar. 1798, C.O. 270/4, P.R.O.
success, and an injudicious action by Governor Macaulay in 1798 further damaged the company’s commercial potential in the river. During Cooper’s tenure at Freeport (1795–1800), two missionaries of the Edinburgh Missionary Society, Reverends Henry Brunton and Peter Greig, arrived at Freetown with the intention of proceeding with the earliest caravan to Timbo.\textsuperscript{70} Alimamy Sadu had promised James Watt to provide any European who chose to settle at Timbo with ‘land, cattle, and men’.\textsuperscript{71} When Sadu died in 1796, and with no path yet established between Freetown and Timbo, Macaulay sent both missionaries to Freeport, where they arrived early in January 1798.\textsuperscript{72}

While Macaulay’s intent was honourable, his timing was unwise, for the slave traders immediately took advantage of the missionaries’ presence at Freeport to circulate rumours among the landlords, as well as among Fula visitors, that the company had deliberately imported anti-slave-trade advocates into the river. The traders implied that the company had adopted a more aggressive policy in its attempt to overturn the slave trade. Both Brunton and Greig were thereby frustrated in their attempt to reach Timbo, and withdrew to Freetown during the 1798 wet season amid a flurry of anti-company propaganda.\textsuperscript{73} Brunton remained at Freetown as chaplain, and when Greig returned to the Pongo in late 1798, he found that opposition to missionaries in the river had increased.\textsuperscript{74}

In January 1799 Greig, who had established residence at Karara under the protection of the Baga chief Fantimani, made his first attempt to convert several Fula to Christianity. He offered seven Fula traders the hospitality of his house and during the day showed them many objects which he had brought from England. During the night the Fula killed him, but not without a struggle. According to a later account, Greig’s assailants struck him with an axe, stabbed him, and ‘cut his throat from ear to ear’.\textsuperscript{75} Together, the chiefs and traders sought out Greig’s murderers, seized them, and put them in irons at Freeport. Perhaps in response to the brutal circumstances of Greig’s death, the slave traders slackened their opposition toward the company factory in early 1800, especially when a number of English and American vessels arrived and satiated the markets with American trade goods.\textsuperscript{76}

Despite this turn of events in the Pongo, the fortunes of the company failed to improve. The cost of maintaining the colony during a period of renewed war with France had exhausted the company’s resources by 1800,

\textsuperscript{70} Knutsford, Zachary Macaulay, 183; Council, 8 Dec. 1797, C.O. 270/4, P.R.O.

\textsuperscript{71} Sierra Leone Company, Substance of the Report of ... 1794, (Philadelphia, 1795).

\textsuperscript{72} Knutsford, Zachary Macaulay, 183; Council, 8 Dec. 1797, C.O. 270/4, P.R.O.

\textsuperscript{73} Missionary Records: West Africa (London, 1836), 68–71.

\textsuperscript{74} Sierra Leone Company, Substance of the Report of ... 1801 (London, 1801), 22; Knutsford, Zachary Macaulay, 211.

\textsuperscript{75} Missionary Records, 71–2. Most sources erroneously cite January 1800 as the date of Greig’s death. If Greig spent only one rainy season at Freetown, it must have been in 1799.

\textsuperscript{76} See Brooks, Yankee Traders, 56–7, for a revival of American trade.
with little chance of recouping its losses except by a direct grant from Parliament. The plight of the company was worsened in 1800 when a group of settlers who had arrived from Nova Scotia in 1792 rebelled, claiming that the company had failed to keep certain promises made before they left the New World. While many Nova Scotians were seized and several were put to death, others escaped and incited King Tom, a Temne and the immediate landlord of the vicinity, to launch several attacks upon the company's settlement in November 1801. These difficulties at Freetown postponed indefinitely any possibility of further company activity in the river's commerce and, with the Sierra Leone settlers afraid to venture into their fields, the settlement floundered as after the French attack of 1794. In consequence, the importance of trade in food staples from Pongo traders increased despite their earlier opposition to the company. The company, confronted by rebellion at Freetown and by difficulties in resupplying its own stores, no longer presented a challenge to the existing commercial system in the river.

The slave traders were further relieved when Thomas Cooper was appointed alderman of Freetown in November 1800, and was replaced by Duncan Campbell, a former missionary of the London Missionary Society, who lasted only four months as company agent at Freeport. John Lowes (February 1801-August 1801), a surgeon for the company, proved his lack of commercial ability within a few months, and John Gray (August 1801-2), a former Acting-Governor of Sierra Leone, guided the company's fortunes in the river until mid-1802. Misled by the surplus of trade items during the 1799-1800 trading season, Gray negotiated the purchase of John Fraser's factory at Bangalan town and rebuilt Freeport factory at a cost of £250. The King Tom war of November 1801, however, ended the company's experiment in the river. Gray, as had his predecessors, wrote to Governor William Dawes that a company factory could not compete with slave traders who purchased legitimate goods. Gray's forthright appraisal earned him an early dismissal in 1802, and Thomas Carew was made Freeport's last factor.

By July 1802 Carew had reached conclusions similar to those of Gray and, in a letter to Dawes, suggested that Freeport be abandoned. He

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79 Council, 8 Nov. 1800, C.O. 270/5, P.R.O.; Council, 20 Feb. 1801, C.O. 270/5, P.R.O.
81 Gray to Council, 10 Dec. 1801, enclosed in Council, 11 Dec. 1801, C.O. 270/7, P.R.O.
82 Carew to Council, 20 July 1802, enclosed in Council, 29 July 1802, C.O. 270/8, P.R.O.
was reacting to rumours circulating in the river that a Fula army was descending on the settlements to 'lay them [the lower river chiefs] under contribution'. None of the slave traders, however, was willing to help the company out of its financial difficulties. Adding insult to injury, the traders refused to purchase either the company’s stores or property, and the company loaded its goods and abandoned Freeport as quickly as had it entered the river seven years earlier.

The company’s presence at Freeport had brought few significant modifications to the Pongo trading community. George Irving, William Skelton, Benjamin Curtis and John Ferrie had successfully challenged the company and remained undisputed leaders of the river’s commerce. After 1802, however, the composition of the trading community began to change. Joseph Corry, who visited the river in 1806, mentions Curtis and Irving as active at Kissing, but failed to name either Ferrie or Skelton, who apparently had departed or died in the intervening years. Skelton had sent his son William, Jr. to Liverpool to be educated, and the latter did not return to the river until 1811. No slave trader profited as much from the company’s presence as had David Lawrence who, with factories in the Rio Grande, the Rio Nunez, and the Rio Pongo, improved his position in the river. In 1799 Lawrence sought to extend his commercial operations to Freetown, where he bought a town lot and six acres. The governor and council of Sierra Leone responded to this unanticipated competition by ruling that only company personnel or settlers could own property in Freetown.

A significant addition to the river’s trading community was John Ormond, Jr., who returned to the river in c.1805 after an absence of over a decade. The offspring of John Ormond, Sr. and a daughter of the Susu chief of Bangalan, the younger Ormond had been sent by his father to England for an education. When John Sr. died in 1791, his agent in England refused to extend additional credit, and after drifting about for a while, John Jr. shipped aboard a merchantman and was afterwards pressed into the Royal Navy for five years, where he served as a cabin boy. Ormond then returned to the Pongo and was recognized by his mother, who turned over all his father’s property. Soon thereafter, the Susu chief of Bangalan died. With the support of his mother, Ormond bribed his opponent and was elected chief of Bangalan.

Continued warfare between the Fula and Susu in the upper Scarcies...
River from 1793 to 1805 as well as political instability in the Futa Jalon meant continued prosperity to slave traders in the Rio Pongo and brought several new traders to the river. Daniel Botifeur, a former surgeon at Bunce Island under John Tilley, established a slave trading factory at Mary Hill in the Bangalan branch, and shipped cattle to Freetown after the Freeport factory failed.\textsuperscript{90} Bangalan town rapidly became a major centre of commercial activity, with four traders established there by late 1802. These were Lancaster, Trion, Varing and John Fraser.\textsuperscript{91} John Gray, Sierra Leone Company factor at Freeport from 1801 to 1802, operated a factory at Bashia on the Fatala River between 1802 and 1807, where Samuel Holeman and a Mr Tillinghurst, both English subjects, also had factories.\textsuperscript{92} Another newcomer was Samuel Samo, who had a slaving factory on the Charleston River. Born in Amsterdam in 1770, Samo had shipped around the East Indies from 1788 to 1795, and in 1797 settled at Charleston in the Rio Pongo.\textsuperscript{93}

Until 1808 the landlord-stranger relationship divided the chiefs and traders into two groups. The interests of each, however, were complementary, for prosperity depended upon a continuation of trade and an absence of warfare in the Rio Pongo. In 1795 the Pongo chiefs demonstrated their prerogatives as landlords by permitting the Sierra Leone Company’s entry into the river’s commerce, against the wishes of the trading community. The resident traders, on their part, abided by the chiefs’ decisions, but adopted commercial tactics against the company which relegated Freeport factory to an insignificant position in the river’s trade. The absence of major wars in the Rio Pongo, not only between traders but also between local tribal groups, brought new traders to the river and prosperity to chiefs and established slavers alike.

**SUMMARY**

The movement from ship to shore and to merchant stores occurred prior to 1790 in the Rio Pongo, where an indigenous trading system between the coastal Baga and the Fula of the interior had long existed. Between 1790 and 1808 contact with the interior improved. A vibrant European and Eurafrican trading community developed at the mouth of the river and coalesced to oppose an attempt by the Sierra Leone Company to capture control of the river’s commerce. More significant than the threat of monopolistic control was the company’s opposition to slave trading. This study of trade, coasters, and conflict in the Rio Pongo outlines the importance of the landlord-stranger relationship, the interaction of slaving and legitimate commerce, the influence of long-distance African traders upon littoral trade and politics, and the manner in which traders and chiefs cooperated to forestall company success.

\textsuperscript{91} Smith, ‘Journal’, 13, C.O. 270/8, P.R.O. The first names of Lancaster, Trion, and Varing are not mentioned.
\textsuperscript{92} Corry, *Observations*, 92.
\textsuperscript{93} *Trials*, 21–2, 29–30.