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Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy: Practical Perspective **By**

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Abstract

The paper will discuss the nature of Pre-colonial African diplomacy. It will attempt to determine the peculiarity of pre-colonial African diplomacy as distinct and at the same time comparable to diplomacy elsewhere during the same pre-colonial period.

The paper will see how politics, economics and customary law characterized Pre-colonial African diplomacy. The pre-colonial market and how it contributed to the emergence and management of pre-colonial African diplomacy will be discussed.

Also examines the means and methods employed for the smooth running and actual practices of pre-colonial African diplomacy.

Keywords: *Pre-colonial, African, Diplomacy, Management, Methods and Practice.*

Introduction

The distinctiveness of pre-colonial African diplomacy are explicit and at the same time comparable to diplomacy elsewhere during the same pre-colonial period. In this paper, we will see how politics, economics and customary law characterized pre-colonial African diplomacy. The pre-colonial market and how it contributed to the emergence and management of pre-colonial African diplomacy will also be discussed.

The paper will discuss the management of pre-colonial African diplomacy. And how pre-colonial Africa managed its diplomacy through political, economic, military and legal means. How did pre-colonial Africa succeed in managing diplomacy despite the tense rivalry existing among the various pre-colonial African states? In spite of mistrust and competing trade interest, how was there peace and stability enough for diplomacy to thrive?

The means and methods employed for the smooth running of pre-colonial African diplomacy will be discuss. What really made pre-colonial African diplomacy comparable to diplomacy elsewhere during the pre-colonial period? Are the peculiarities of these methods universal enough for it to compare favourably with the conduct of diplomacy elsewhere? Of course, diplomacy all over employed negotiation, tact, bargaining, dialogue, compromise and threat. The use of courier services, establishment of embassies abroad, aids and exchange system to curry favour are all methods of diplomacy. The paper will examine how all these methods described the operation of pre-colonial African diplomacy. Hence, the actual practice of pre-colonial African diplomacy will be touch and how the practitioners were qualified to make use of the means and methods for easy facilitation of diplomatic relations. Subsequently, the functions of emissaries, their qualities and immunities surrounding their personalities will be listed, and how they assisted their states as agents and representatives to perform their diplomatic duties. Trading merchants and, Islamic scholars and christian missionaries and their agents will also be examined as practitioners of pre-colonial African diplomacy.

The General Nature Of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy

When referring to the general nature of a thing, in variably it is making reference to the main characteristics of a thing. In essence, the qualities possessed makes that thing unique. Pre-colonial African diplomacy is a result to pre-colonial African politics, trade, customary law and other social contact among African indigenous settings.

Robert Smith (1973: 609) agrees that what happened between pre-colonial African states could be depicted as diplomacy. As quoted in his word,

“Inter African embassies enjoyed a degree of prestige and immunity comparable to that which protected European diplomacy, and a widely accepted protocol regulated negotiations. Treaties were concluded solemnly and sanctions were provided for their observance.”

Robert Smith in his word summarizes the nature of pre-colonial African diplomacy as an ad-hoc diplomatic system as compared to European countries. Diplomatic practices had been in existence as early as the existence of man’s relation with man in response to political and economic circumstances. The means and methods employed in the practice of pre-colonial African diplomacy also enhance its uniqueness

The Political Nature Of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy

Pre-colonial African diplomacy had a political undertone. The existence of stable centrally organised and militarily powerful pre-colonial African states surely called for diplomatic relations. The centrally organised state maintained diplomatic relations with others in pre-colonial African. Historically, the administrative structure of these Empires seemed to have similar characteristics. For instance, Ghana, Mali and Shongai Empires had political structures that were sustained by the wealth realized by trade with North Africa and the outside world. Most of pre-colonial Islamic states were also influenced by the same source and so also most pre-colonial coastal states were influenced by contact with Europe. Therefore, it is

certain that almost all the pre-colonial states exhibit the same political traits which made diplomatic relations with one another easy (Smith, 1973: 617). Graham W. Irwin (1975: 81-96), stated in his book that, in Africa, during the pre-colonial period, several groups of states maintained peaceful relationships with one another at an official level and on a more or less regular basis. The member states of these groups sometime, had once belonged to the same Empire, as was the case in parts of the Upper Niger, in Senegambia and in the inter-lacustrine region of East Africa. Their relationship was based on rivalry at a distance, with Dahomey and Asante, at times on conquest, as with Dahomey and Oyo, and sometimes on common ancestry and traditions, as with the Yoruba and Mossi-Dagomba complex or the Lube-Lube states. But, their mutual relationship originated official contact between these states seems to have been maintained by methods and procedures which historians of the non-African world described as diplomatic.

Irwin strongly supports the view point of the "historians of non-African world" by asserting that the practices of these pre-colonial African states were main features of diplomacy anywhere in the world. He stressing that, if truly according to one well known definition, diplomacy is the conduct of business between states by peaceful means, and then pre-colonial Africa was no stranger to diplomacy.

Igbo land, for example, which had no centralized political system, was also an excellent model of practical pre-colonial African diplomacy. The use of dialogue to settle disputes and their friendly communal gatherings were established to negotiate in inter-group affairs and mutual understanding. As such, the political nature of pre-colonial African diplomacy was only peculiar to the political terrain it found itself and influence from the outside world.

The Economic Nature Of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy

The major determinant in a relationship between organised states is the interest each state wants to protect. Hence, in contemporary international

relations, it is called "National Interest" (Burchill, 2005: 156). As such, each state in an international setting has an interest it is pursuing. This eventually brings about competing interests and this may lead to conflict or war unless it is managed diplomatically. More so, trade contact contributed to the emergence, strength and viability of pre-colonial African states. The great Empires of Ghana, Mali, Shongai, Kanem-Bornu and the coastal states of Benin, Dahomey, Asante, Igbo, Efik, Ibibio and the East African states of Angola, Tanzania, Buganda, among many other pre-colonial African states were all sustained by wealth realized from trade contact within and without pre-colonial Africa.

Trade in slave, gold, ivory, pepper, salt, diamond and other precious commodities found in abundance in pre-colonial Africa attracted internal and external trade and this contributed to the emergence of political structures which contributed to rivalry and tension. This helped to shape the nature of pre-colonial African diplomacy, for instance, the rivalry between Omani Arabs and Portugal in a bid to control the trade in East Africa brought about intense rivalry among East African states (Sunday, 2010: 103-110). The Niger Delta states each wanted to control the palm oil trade with the British. Earlier on before this, the bid to control the slave trade brought intense rivalry between hitherto Empires of the same ancestry. According to Sunday (2010) in his lecture note, all these attendant tensions had to be resolved the pre-colonial African way, if war was to be avoided, then diplomacy remained the only option to reconcile the various competing interests and hence the emergence of pre-colonial African diplomacy.

An important feature of the pre-colonial African market shaped the nature of the pre-colonial Africa diplomacy. The markets of centrally organised pre-colonial African states are prototypes of practical pre-colonial African diplomacy. The markets were often situated near the king's/rulers or the emperor's palace, apart from buying and selling, market places were a place of contact both for domestic and foreign relations. On market days, chiefs received envoys and settled both domestic and international disputes.

Potential domestic negotiated for goods and commodities, so also they did for land and boundary disputes on market days in market places. The market was an ample opportunity for gathering of foreign envoys and diplomats, scholars and travellers and it was in the market that foreign news was easily gathered (Sunday, 2010: 109). The pre-colonial African market places really portrayed pre-colonial African diplomacy in practice.

The Legal Nature Of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy

One distinct feature of pre-colonial African diplomacy is the nature of its law. Before the influence of Islamic law, customary law guarded pre-colonial African diplomacy. This customary law though unwritten, exhibited broadly similar characteristics over a wide area. Most of the pre-colonial African states belonged to the same ancestry and Empires and almost the same customs guided and regulated their domestic affairs. These customs transcended politics over a very wide area and they were even transmitted to other politics that were not originally of the same ancestry. Customary law is accepted by the community and domestic conduct is regulated by the law. In the case of tension and negotiation between communities on states outside the purview of a particular community, the application of the customary law becomes international law. Despite the unwritten nature of African customary law, the existing evidence of interstate relations during the pre-colonial period, gives credence to the existence of the application of international law (Yakubu, p. 208). Guarding peace on one hand, and mitigating war on the other, stands of law, the body of rules, whether enacted or customary, which is accepted by a community. No community of man ever exists without a regulation and it is the nature of this regulation that shaped the relationship of pre-colonial African states and their diplomacy. Treaties were solemnly concluded and there were sanctions against its non-observance, in the absence of enacted written laws and yet to come Islamic laws then, African customary law was widespread enough to be termed so as to guide conduct of diplomatic affairs between the peoples of the same African region. The lapses of the customary law

enabled the overthrow of the law by Islamic law later on during the pre-colonial African period.

Management Of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy

One thing to be certain of is that, for any success to be achieved in any human endeavour, there should be good management. This assertion applied to diplomacy. It is quite certain that diplomacy thrives in an atmosphere of peace and stability, and surely, war or crisis is a failure of diplomacy has to be adhered to. War is the likely end result of a broken down diplomatic relation. If diplomacy fails between two politically viable states, tension would surely follow and if care is not taken, there is the likelihood of an outbreak of hostility (Sunday, 2010: 139). Management of diplomacy on one hand largely informs the management of war on the other. Therefore, diplomacy can be managed, by trying as much as possible to dissuade and prevent wars, and propagate peace, understanding and stability among states.

War was a common phenomenon during the pre-colonial African period. The outcome of war was unpredictable. It disrupted peace and brought destruction and woes. Structures were brought down and prosperous states became ruins. Arthur Marwick (1968: 51-63) in his work, "the impact of the First World War" stressed that, war is a destructive force interrupting the normal course of human progress and civilization.

The Political And Economic Management Aspect Of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy

The great Empires of Ghana, Mali and Shongai, the states of Ashante, Dahomey, Borno and the Delta states, the East and South African states and the major states in North Africa, all had political structures that made provision for the practice of international relations. Structures were put in place to facilitate the sound management of diplomacy among the pre-colonial African states even in the non-centralized states of Igbo land and such others. Ghana Empire for instance had a separate quarter for

foreigners in its administration of state affairs. Special officials were put in charge of foreign affairs and these officials had attributes and qualities that made them suitable for international affairs (Sunday, 2010: 187).

Mali and Shongai Empires ensured that the officials in charge of foreign affairs were well learned, widely travelled and greatly experienced. With the introduction of Islam, these Empires made use of Islamic scholars as envoys, ambassadors and representatives of states in other foreign states. Mali and Shongai rulers and eminent people maintained sound diplomatic relations with the outside world by going on pilgrimages and attracting foreigners into their Empires. Embassies were built abroad for their citizens. A notable ruler, Mai Idiris Aloma built inns in foreign lands like Cairo, procured firearms from North Africa, encouraged Arabic language to foster oneness and unity, and introduced learning, arts and culture which embraced peoples from diverse background and merged them together (Sunday, 2010: 113).

The East African states of Namibia, Angola, Buganda, Tanzania and the rest maintained diplomatic relations with one another and the outside world. The Portuguese and Arabic Omani influence in this region enabled a unification of the states with the use of English or Arabic language as unifying lingua franca for easy communication, dialogue and negotiation. Learned scholars acted as mediators in trade and boundary disputes. This enabled the arguing away of potential crisis. Igbo land which had a non-centralized political structure made use of eminent people in the egalitarian society to manage diplomatic relations. These men were title-holders who aspired to their eminent positions by merit. Therefore, the pre-colonial African states, kingdoms and Empires made political provision for international affairs among themselves and with the outside world. This moves forestalled wars and allowed for peace, stability and progress. This was a proof of sound diplomatic management.

The emergence of prosperous and stable pre-colonial African states was anchored on commercial relations and trade contact more than any other factor. Internal and external trade brought immense wealth to pre-colonial

African states and, inevitably, diplomacy developed. The exchange system first brought about idea of comparative advantage in international and diplomatic relations. That is to say, the idea of comparative advantage suggested that a particular state which had an edge over others in the possession and production of particular goods should concentrate on this and exchange these goods with others. Hence, some Empires exchanged their gold, ivory, diamonds and other mineral resources with salt, food crops, palm oil and other edible goods which they lacked. By this system, no state, no matter how prosperous could act in isolation of others. They all depended on one another to thrive. This by extension led to international interdependence between pre-colonial African states and the outside world of the Europeans, the Asians and the Arabs. Slaves, gold-dust, palm oil, salt, mineral resources, ivory and other food items from pre-colonial Africa exchanged for firearms, glass, perfume, wine, lanterns, lamps and other fancy commodities from the outside world (Sunday, 2010: 113-114).

With the exchange system came the system of bargaining. The volume, quantity and quality of what exchanged for what, had to be determined, devoid of crisis. It is argued by scholars that Africa, especially pre-colonial Africa, had always been at the loser's end in bargaining. This was even so during the colonial period and now during the post-colonial period, Africa had always been a pawn in the hands of outsiders when it comes to bilateral or multi-literal decisions. However, Africa had a surplus of the commodity they were exchanging. Therefore, they were only using what they had in abundance to get what they did not have. If outsiders needed gold dust, ivory and diamond, nothing stops them from giving it out, when the pre-colonial Africans never knew what to do with them. They got the frivolous things, which they cherished, in return never minding the value once they were happy with them (Sunday, 2010: 114).

The pre-colonial African states were good at bargaining both among one another and with the outside world. They knew how to get enough firearms for their military campaigns and how to get horses to reinforce their cavalries. No amount of gold, ivory, or even slave could be too much in

exchange for such ventures. Such was the idea of bargaining and negotiation during the pre-colonial era. The agreement or refusal of a particular state to trade with another also shaped the management of pre-colonial African diplomacy. For instance, the trade rivalry between Dahomey and Oyo, the Niger Delta states, the Ashante and the Fante states, the East and South African states all served to regulate the management of diplomacy during the pre-colonial period (Argyle, 1966: 57). On the other hand, the ready and stable trade pact between Kanem-Bornu of Mai Idris Aloma and the Hausa states facilitated a steady economic management of diplomatic relations between them.

The Military Management Of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy

Military might, even though may be destructive, is also a guarantee for peace. In international relations, there is what is called the “balance of power” or recently “the balance of terror”. The medieval European states used to use this system to dissuade wars and foster peace (Aron, 1967: 111). It guaranteed that no state was too powerful as to cause havoc to others. In pre-colonial Africa, military power kept ambitious predators and trouble-shooters at bay. It is foolishness in international politics for a prosperous, viable state to be militarily powerless. Of course, it would be inviting invasion from rivals. For diplomacy to be managed, pre-colonial African states never ruled out the potentiality of military power. Ghana, Mali, Shongai, Kanem-Bornu, Zululand, Dahomey, Oyo, Ashante and other notable African states all had disciplined standing armies. This helped a lot in managing diplomacy during the pre-colonial period. Once, power was balanced between these states, there was less fear of attack and instability. It should be noted that, in contemporary international politics, as long as the cold war lasted, there was no major war between U.S.S.R. and U.S.A. Both were militarily strong and though they were bitter rivals, no armed confrontation occurred between them (Aron, 1967: 111). Therefore, they fought wars by proxy, which is they gave military support to their cronies against one another.

Mai Idris Aloma of Kanem-Bornu always used this system of war by proxy. He would give tacit military support to a state that was fighting his rival but he himself or his state would not be involved in the war. Arguably, it is sure that state would easily identify with militarily powerful and economic viable states. Prosperous, might kingdoms would attract others and such states often dictate the management of diplomacy (Cohen, 1967: 43). Pre-colonial African states often used military threat to manage diplomatic ties while other, used trade sanctions or embargoes for diplomatic management.

Legal Management of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy

In pre-colonial Africa, there were existence of rules and regulations guiding diplomatic relations. These rules and regulations were widely accepted over a wide area in the sub-regions of pre-colonial Africa. It should be recall that most pre-colonial African states all had some kind of relationship one way or the other. They might belong to the same genealogical background or they might have belonged to the same Empire one time or the other. The customary laws, though unwritten, had similar codes of conduct, which were familiar to most African peoples. These customary laws were used to manage pre-colonial African diplomacy.

There were laws guiding negotiations and bargaining. Envoys were to be respected representatives of their emperors, kings or rulers as the case might be. Message carriers and negotiators had to be respected and honoured. Various items were used as messages and these messages were clearly understood by the recipients. In some certain extremes, messengers were reported to be maltreated or even killed but this was always a gross violation of diplomatic management and more often than not, the erring extremist ruler was punished by others ganging up against him (Irwin, 1957: 213).

Sanctions were provided for the observance of international laws. The introduction of Islamic laws however made international laws more uniform and less complex. Most of these laws were adopted by Islamised

pre-colonial African states and their written form made the legal management of pre-colonial African diplomacy easier and less cumbersome.

Means and Methods of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy

It is a known well fact that, for every conceived idea, there should be a means and method to carry it out practically. So also, there is a means and method employed to carry out an effective and successful diplomatic relations during the pre-colonial period. If, according to Sir Ernest Sallow (1973), "diplomacy is the idea of the conduct of business between states by peaceful means' then this idea can be achieved practically by putting sound methods, procedures and means into use. Pre-colonial Africa is no stranger to diplomacy. Sallow reinforces this fact when he agrees that "official contact (between pre-colonial African states) was maintained by methods and procedures which historians of the non-African world describe as diplomatic". What then are the methods, procedures and means by which pre-colonial African diplomacy was carried out?

One of the most handy method and means of pre-colonial African diplomacy was **Negotiation**. Going by Hornby (2007) dictionary meaning, negotiation is a formal discussion between people who are trying to reach an agreement. A more scholarly definition relevant to diplomacy asserts that negotiation can be defined "as a process in which explicit proposals are made ostensibly for the purpose of arriving at an agreement or an exchange or to harmonize interests that are conflicting". Therefore, negotiation is a method used to avoid war or crises in settling disputes. It harmonizes conflicting interests and it is used to reach an agreement or for the purpose of exchange among states.

In pre-colonial Africa, politics and trade necessitated conflicting interests among states. The Ashante and the Fante states longed to control the trade with the Europeans. Dahomey and Oyo each wished to outdo the other in controlling the trans-Sahara slave trade. The East African states of Swahili, Angola, Buganda (Uganda), Tanzania each sought to have commercial and

political advantage over one another in their contact with Portuguese and Omani merchants. The coastal states of the Niger Delta competed vigorously for trade relevance with the Europeans in the legitimate trade in palm oil. The competition was so tense and the rivalry very bitter. Unavoidably, the interests were conflicting and in most cases, to avoid outright confrontation, the states had to negotiate trade frontiers, sign pacts and treaties and delimit boundaries. This was what happened among and between pre-colonial African states (Argyle, 1966: 314; Apter, 1961: 117).

There was bilateral and multilateral agreement between the coastal states of the Niger Delta to avoid conflict. It even came to a time when there was an agreement as to the number of the quantity of palm oil to be produced and sold to the Europeans by the members of the palm oil cartel in the Niger Delta. During the trade in slaves, gold dust, ivory, diamond, salt and other commodities, agreement had to be reached among pre-colonial African states on the quantity to be supplied to the buyers by each bloc. If this were not so, there would be constant wars. The wars recorded during the pre-colonial era were mainly instigated by the proliferation of firearms acquired from outsiders and which were used to raid neighbours in search of slaves for commercial purposes. Wars were fought to control the salt mines of Taghaza and to control the trade in pre-colonial Africa but at the end of these expansionist and commercially induced wars, negotiation was always resorted to at the end (Sunday, 2010: 119-121).

Though, before anyone are involved in negotiation, there should be a common interest or else there would be nothing to negotiate for and there should be areas of conflict or else, there would be nothing to negotiate about. Negotiation involves complexities and the proposal may not sail through in time. In pre-colonial Africa however, because of the nature of unwritten customary laws that served as international laws, negotiation was comparatively simple. The regulations were widely accepted and the laws were common to most if not all of the pre-colonial African states and the agreement reached was always binding on each participant in the round table talks. Therefore, negotiation in pre-colonial African states, involved

bargaining, dialogue, compromise and even threat to arrive at an agreement (Sunday, 2010: 120)

Bargaining

It is defined as a discussion of prices, conditions etc with the aim of reaching an agreement that is acceptable to all concerned. Pre-colonial African states bargain for prices of commodities, boundary concession, land delimitation, trade frontiers, political jurisdiction and other issues in order to reach collective acceptable agreement among all parties concerned. The bargaining power depended on the amount of control one state had when trying to reach an agreement in a business or political situation. Some states had what was referred to as the “bargaining chip” which means a fact or a thing that a person or a group can use to get an advantage for them when they are trying to reach an agreement with other groups (Sunday, 2010: 121). This advantage was widely used to get concession from other groups by one group.

The militarily strong states of Mali, Shonhai, Kanem-Bornu and Ghana for instance could use their military strength to their advantage when bargaining. The economically viable states of the Niger Delta states, the East African states and other prosperous states could use their buoyant economies to their advantage. In pre-colonial Africa, there were things which a particular state had but which were lacking in another and if these things were to go round in the inevitable situation of interdependence, each state would have to use its bargaining chip. Even some Hausa states like Katsina and Daura were centres of learning and culture and this they also used to their advantage in bargaining (Olatunbosun, 1976: 98).

Dialogue

This is a formal discussion among groups of people or countries when they are trying to reach an agreement over problematic issues. It is also used in bargaining. This was effectively used during the pre-colonial African era to facilitate diplomacy and enhance negotiation. The choice of words and

language used were formal, clear and understandable. It was through dialogue that pacts were reached, agreements formalized and treaties ratified. Sanctions were provided for the observance of the mutual agreement reached and each pre-colonial African state concerned took the mutual agreement as binding.

Compromise

Compromise is an agreement made between two people or groups in which each side gives up some of the things they want so that both sides are happy at the end. In compromise, there is a connotation that two things cannot exist together as they are until they are changed slightly or reduced so they can exist together.

Compromise is an age long system in diplomacy. Even the biblical Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had to compromise before they could dwell peacefully and happily in the land of Canaan. In pre-colonial Africa, it was not always that agreement could be reached in situations as they originally were. There was always the need to let go of some privileges to modify a state's interest to the advantage of the other. For instance, the Niger Delta states had to cut down their production and sales of palm oil to the British to allow for other competing states among their cartel to sell. Mai Idris Aloma of Kanem-Borno had to concede some territories to his vassal states in order for hitch-free diplomacy to thrive (Sallow, 1973: 215). The East African states had to delimit their trade with Portugal and Oman among one another and this enabled diplomacy to flourish. The unalloyed spirit of interdependence among pre-colonial African states made compromise inevitable for a state to have some of the things of the other, the state should be willing to let go of some things of its own too. There should be a compromise for barter to be achieved. This informed the principle of trade by barter (Smith, 1973: 612).

Threat

Threat is a situation whereby a message of punishment or unpleasant circumstance is portrayed to another if one's wish is not carried out. Therefore, military or economic threat is used in international politics to get things done one's way. Threat can only be credible and effective however, when the state issuing out the threat has the military or economic capacity to carry out the threat. In this regard, pre-colonial Africa was no exception. The strong military make-up of well organized, centrally-based pre-colonial African states was used to threaten weaker states into submission during negotiation (Sallow, 1973: 135).

These weaker states found themselves helpless in such situations and since most of them wanted protection from such strong states, they had to dance to their tune. Also, economic power which is the mainstay of any political make-up became a handy tool in threatening poorer states into agreement over boundary and trade issues.

Sending of Embassies

Another important method that sustained pre-colonial African diplomacy was the establishment of embassies in other states. Robert Smith is of the view that "Inter-African Embassies enjoyed a degree of prestige and immunity comparable to that which protected European diplomacy". He further stresses that embassies were also sent to Europe and adjacent European possessions and settlements, North Africa and the Near East and they were received on a proper footing.

Although, it was later on in the nineteenth century that the development of the resident embassy came to Africa, there were in existence the sending of ad hoc and semi-permanent embassies abroad. Notable rulers like Idris Aloma of Bornu built residences in Cairo to cater for pilgrims from Kanem-Bornu and this later served as an embassy. The pilgrimages of Mansa Musa of Mali, Askia the Great of Shongai and other eminent African rulers served as an attraction to other states, which maintained trade and diplomatic contact with these Empires. Embassies were thus sent to the Empires to

cater for the foreigners attracted to Mali and Shongai respectively. This in no small measure enhanced pre-colonial African diplomacy (Irwin, 1957: 135).

Exchange of Presents and Gifts

Another is that of exchange of gifts and present among pre-colonial African states, and between them and outsiders. This gesture was peculiar to pre-colonial African people and this enhanced pre-colonial African diplomacy. This was used to seek favour and recognition. This can be likened to giving of aids, grants and financial assistance to win favour to one's side in a matter of international policy. Pre-colonial African states and their rulers exchanged gifts on regular basis to seek political relevance and sustained growth and development without fear of attack or invasion.

It was a method used to solicit for continuous peace and friendship and to make treaties of peace and amity. Allies were made and, the quality and largeness of the gifts and presents willingly given dissuaded armed conflict. After all, most wars were fought for spoil and booties but once these were willingly parted with, there might be no need to risk a war (Aron, 1967: 115). This method was also extended to the Europeans and the Muslim Arabs who were attracted to Africa to trade. They exchanged gifts and presents with one another and this bought profound alliance among them.

Using of Regular Courier Services

A very effective method in pre-colonial African diplomacy was the sending of messages between and among African states. Goodwill messages were sent from one ruler to the other and this facilitated peace for the smooth conduct of pre-colonial African diplomacy. Regular courier services were used for this purpose. Clear messages were sent and sometimes symbolic ones. Special items were used as messages between Dahomey and Oyo, among the Yoruba and Fante states, among the non-centralized peoples of Igboland, among the Niger Delta states, between groups of states in East

and South Africa, among the Hausa states and between Asante and other states related to it (Sunday, 2010: p. 123). These respective states had common ancestry and had once belonged to the same Empire and thus they understood the symbolic messages sent. They knew what the items meant and represented and they responded appropriately to the messages.

The messengers in such situations had certain attributes that made them suitable for the regular courier services and most of them were members of the ad hoc or semi-permanent Embassies sent to other states. These messengers were accorded respect, privileges and immunities as the case might be in the state where they delivered messages. They were the representatives of their rulers and there were accepted procedures for receiving them. Therefore, the use of regular courier services kept mutual agreement intact and dissemination of information easy (Sunday, 2010: p. 124-125). It enabled pre-colonial African states enjoy unity, oneness and deep alliances. It kept them abreast of local and international news and potential crisis which might have been caused by lack of information or contact was forestalled.

The Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy Practice

In pre-colonial Africa, there were practitioners, officials and special people responsible for the management and conduct of diplomacy. These people had special attributes that made them suitable for this responsibility. They had functions they performed. There were rules, regulations and protocol guiding the practice of pre-colonial diplomacy. There were laid down protocol, largely unwritten, but flexible and effectively used in pre-colonial African diplomacy.

In most pre-colonial African states since the medieval period, organized states were the main actors in the practice of diplomacy. The states' administration made provision for foreign relations and affairs. Most commercial activities had the direct involvement of the state concerned and since trade contact induced the evolvment of prosperous and organised states in pre-colonial Africa, it led to the inevitable evolvment of

interdependence and later, diplomatic relations. Centrally organised states controlled trade and the market system. The trade contact within and without pre-colonial African states was exclusively guarded by the participating states.

The government of Ghana, Mali, Shongai and Kanem-Bornu had a control over the trade in gold, ivory, salt and other products and minerals. They were able to collect import and export duties on communities. They all had a well-organized system of trade tax which they effectively used and harmonised for the development of their respective states and their expansionist purposes.

It was on historical record that Mali Empire, "trade was well organized. Taxes were regularly collected. There was a good system of taxation and royal monopoly on gold mines." Ibn Battuta, an Arab historian commending the good foreign relations and attitude of the Malian government wrote that, the Negroes are of all peoples those who hate injustice. The blacks do not confiscate the goods of the white men (meaning North Africans) who die in their country, not even when these consist of great treasures. They deposit them, on the contrary, with a man of confidence among the whites until those who have a right to the goods present themselves and take possession (Sunday, 2010: p. 124). Just like the case of Ghana and Mali, Shongai and Kanem-Bornu had a well-organized trade system. There was a good tariff system and royal monopoly of gold mines in order to regulate the supply of gold so that it might not be too abundant as to lose its value. There were two types of taxes which were taxes on import and export, and production tax.

What all this connote is that the governments of these Empires were the direct actors in inter-state relations. There were provision of quarters for foreigners and the appointment of learned scholars and experienced people as advisers was to enhance the quality of diplomacy. The ruling council in the respective states was the overseers of foreign affairs. They appointed officials responsible for this. Even in the diplomatic relations between African states and Europeans or Arabs as the case might be, representatives

of both governments were the major actors in the practice of diplomacy. The government of Portugal for instance had direct control on the trade of Portugal with pre-colonial African states of East Africa and West Africa. The contact between the Niger Delta states and the British was overseen by both governments. All over pre-colonial Africa, the states (Empires) of Dahomey, Oyo, Asante, Fante, Benin, Tanzania, Angola, Buganda, Swahili, and many others, trade was well organized around their central governments and the governmental control on trade extended to governmental management of pre-colonial African diplomacy.

The Merchants

Apart from the states, trade merchants also acted as propagators of pre-colonial African diplomacy. Notable and rich traders established personal trade ties with African rulers and governments and this informed their diplomatic relations. Apart from the Portuguese government, many rich Portuguese navigators embarked on voyages sponsored personally to discover new lands which they later traded with. These merchants also indulged in the method of exchange of gifts and presents between them and pre-colonial African rulers. They were given personal recognition and immunity and they were treated in dignified ways. They pledged support to their hosts and signed personal treaties of amity. There were agents responsible for maintaining friendly relations between Berbers and West African rulers. So also, many rich Arab and Indian traders sought diplomatic relations with rich African states where they traded.

Muslim Scholars and Christian Missionaries

Other actors in the practice of pre-colonial African diplomacy were the Islamic scholars and Christian missionaries. These people had a profound impact on pre-colonial African diplomacy. The introduction of Islam into pre-colonial Africa was not state-sponsored at first. It spread peacefully through the Berber traders and North African merchants. Later on Islamic clerics and scholars began to have relations with pre-colonial African rulers

and their states. with the entrenchment of Islam, most pre-colonial African states became Islamised and made use of Islamic laws which also affected pre-colonial African diplomacy. Scholars became advisers to pre-colonial African ruler in areas of international and inter-state affairs.

Christian missionary activities came with the Europeans especially into the coastal areas affecting commercial activities and politics. Missionaries and pre-colonial African rulers had good relations and many rulers were converted to Christianity. Gifts and messages of goodwill were also exchanged between the missionaries and pre-colonial states' rulers. Communication was made easier in diplomatic relations between Africans and non-Africans, and among African peoples themselves. This was possible because of the oneness of the lingua franca used all over. Therefore, the actors that made pre-colonial African diplomacy practicable were not only state governments but also there were the involvement of others.

Emissaries and Their Functions

An emissary is a person who delivers an official message from his state to another. He is what can be called a messenger of the state. They are envoys or ambassadors of their countries. They have certain functions, which include;

Courier Services

They were used for regular courier services during the pre-colonial African period to sustain diplomatic relations. They were messengers of state. They made communication and information flow between states that had diplomatic relations with one another. They filled the vacuum and uncertainty that would have occurred because of lack of proper information. The messages they carried were very official and classified. It might be written or unwritten or even symbolic. Before the advent of Islam and Christianity in pre-colonial Africa, the messages were unwritten or symbolic but they were understandable by all parties concerned.

Representation and Communication Agents

Emissaries were representatives of their countries or states in other states. During the pre-colonial period, they were the mouth, ears and eyes of their states. They had been vested with authority by their home states to represent them in all or some areas of inter-state affairs. More so, during the pre-colonial period, emissaries had no permanent representation. The representation might be ad hoc, semi-permanent as the situation might call for, just as inter-state embassies were ad hoc, or semi-permanent.

They were the communication and information agents of their states during the pre-colonial African era. They delivered information and brought feedback.

Negotiation

They were the officials invested with the authority to negotiate or bargain for their states in other states. They bargained with tact knowing the situation that called for compromise or the one that called for threat. The issuance of threat either economic or military was self-evident. The emissary only needed to remind the uncompromising rival state of the fact on ground. For instance, an emissary of Mai Idris Aloma of Bornu would only remind an economically and militarily weaker state that his boss would not like to use force in getting a disputed land because of his magnanimity and hence he was resorting to negotiation. Of course, the weaker state would get the message. It has helped to maintain its dignity as a stronger state. The weaker state will “peacefully” hand over the disputed land.

In negotiating, emissaries should mind their choice of words. In all situations, the issuance of compromise or threat should be for the mutual interest of the home state of the emissary. Emissaries always tried to win advantage to their sides through official dialogue during the pre-colonial African period. They also argued away potential crisis.

Courier of Gifts, Presents, Signing of Treaties and Pacts

Emissaries always led the team or delegation that carried gifts and presents to other states from their home states. This was an expression of love and goodwill, and the desire for continued peaceful alliance between pre-colonial African states, a gesture for the undesirability of crisis.

After due consultation with the home state, emissaries might be mandated to sign treaties of amity and pacts of alliance with other states. They might also be instructed to rectify agreement.

Qualities Of Emissaries

The appointment of emissaries during the pre-colonial era was by the ruler of a state in consultation with council of the state. In performing their assigned duties, emissaries should possess and exhibit certain qualities needed for the smooth operation of pre-colonial African diplomacy. These qualities include;

Education, Training and Experience

Before the evolvement of Islamized states, emissaries might not be scholarly but in place of education, they must be vast in wisdom and intelligence. They must virtually know the customs, cultures and behavioural patterns of other people they were dealing with. They must be well experienced and widely travelled. Most of these emissaries were once itinerant traders and this experience in their travels they applied to their tasks as emissaries.

With the evolvement of Islamized states and impact of Christianity however, educated elites became envoys and representatives of their states in other states. Education became necessary to make envoys more knowledgeable, more experienced and more relevant to written form of treaties and pacts. Most Islamic states like Shongai, Mali, Kanem-Bornu and the Hausa states used Islamic scholars as their advisers and mediators in inter-state crisis. They also served as negotiators in time of peace.

Tact

Another important quality that an emissary should possess is tact. Tact is defined as the ability to deal with difficult or embarrassing situations carefully and without doing or saying anything that will annoy or upset other people. Emissaries are representatives and messengers of states during the pre-colonial African era and in delivering their messages to other states, they should do so carefully without provoking others through inflammatory statements. Diplomacy entailed peaceful co-existence and these emissaries should always seek to maintain.

Eloquence

Emissaries should be fluent and be able to carry along their audiences. One who stammers is not fit to be an emissary. An emissary weighed his choice of words (diction) to be suitable for any circumstance of discussion. He should speak with clarity and use signs that would be understood by the receiving state. He should not be ambiguous. That was the situation during the pre-colonial African period.

Multilingual Quality

A good emissary understands and speaks many languages fluently. The advent of English and Arabic languages into Africa helped a lot in this regard. People with the knowledge of those two international languages were commonly used as emissaries during the pre-colonial Africa period. This made communication easy and the gathering of information handy. There were official interpreters between rulers and visitors to the states during the pre-colonial era but it is very common knowledge that an emissary who does not need an interpreter would be more efficient than the one who needs one.

Sociability and Decency

An emissary during the pre-colonial African era was sociable and decent. He attracted people through his character and bearing. He dressed and

spoke decently. He composed himself in a dignified manner. This ought to be so because he is a representative of his king in another state and all glamour of his state had to be portrayed through him. African rulers like Mansa Musa, Askia the Great and Idris Aloma exhibited great pomp and pageantry in their pilgrimage to Mecca. Such was the attitude of African rulers to portray great opulence to the outside world and their representatives had to portray same. This attracted investors, traders and great wealth and respect for pre-colonial African states.

Furthermore, emissaries made decent friends in the state they were sent to. This will enable them gather information for their home states and they would be able to get support for their negotiation bids. In all things, they did what would be beneficial to their home states and put them in a comparative advantage over others. There are many other qualities possessed by emissaries during this era. Among them are soberness, humility but not timidity, respect for others' views but not dogmatism, apt intelligence, deep understanding of others' cultures, customs and laws, and being a good listener.

Pre-colonial African diplomacy had deep respect and immunity surrounding the emissaries. Just like diplomats in modern day have diplomatic immunities, so also respect and honour were accorded to emissaries during the time of peace in pre-colonial Africa. Even emissaries carrying messages of wars were not harmed except in a few extreme cases like that of Kurunmi of Ijaye killing the emissaries of Alaafin of Oyo. And Kurunmi was severely punished for this because he had violated a very solemn custom of the peoples. Forces teamed up against him until he was destroyed.

Such was the sacrosanct opinion which pre-colonial African culture held about diplomacy. Emissaries could not be hurt or harmed. They should not be treated with contempt or in an undignified manner. Any treatment meted out to an emissary was indirectly meted out to his state. A disdain on an emissary was a disdain on his boss and state. Emissaries were accorded profound respect and they were always received officially with

much pomp and grandeur by the ruler of the receiving state himself, with his sub chiefs and full court in attendance.

Conclusion

What transpired in Africa during the pre-colonial African period qualified for diplomatic relations judging by the conduct of relations between various pre-colonial African states. The trade contact and the law of pre-colonial African states contributed immensely to the type of diplomacy that evolved during that period. So the existence of centrally-organized and non-centralized Empires and states inevitably called for diplomatic ties. They equally seemed to have similar administrative structures which enable easy diplomatic contact. The control for trade and the yearning for fabulous economic gains engendered great rivalry and competing interests which necessitated diplomacy for tension to be avoided. While, the market place served as a prototype of diplomatic conduct and it greatly influenced the practice and sustenance of pre-colonial African diplomacy. The customary nature of pre-colonial African law distinguished pre-colonial African diplomacy.

In a bid to prevent crisis the pre-colonial African states harmonized political, economic, legal and military means to manage diplomacy among one another. War even though a common phenomenon was not desirable for diplomacy to thrive. Customary laws were widely accepted and binding on pre-colonial actors and they could be termed international laws among one another in as much as they were binding on the actors.

Moreover, negotiation, sending of Embassies, using of regular courier services, and present contributed to the enhancement of diplomacy during the pre-colonial era. Hence, the method of negotiation and tact, with its attendant use of bargaining dialogue, compromise and threat were essential for maintaining effective pre-colonial African diplomacy.

Lastly, the actual practice of pre-colonial African diplomacy involved actors who were the states themselves, the trading merchants and their agents responsible for making friendly relations with African rulers, and the

Islamic scholars and Christian missionaries. These made pre-colonial African diplomacy practicable and flourish. The emissaries equally played a fundamental role in this regard. Being the representatives of their states or agents of their bosses in other states, their functions, qualities and immunities, helped tremendously in charting an easy way for the conduct of pre-colonial African diplomacy.

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