

HARD AND SOFT POWER POLITICS: THE DYNAMICS OF OYO-DAHOMEY DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS 1708-1791

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ABSTRACT: *This paper, following the assumptions of the Realist School, takes a critical look at 'power' and the use of it, with relations to pre-colonial Oyo and her neighbor, Dahomey in the eighteenth century. The purpose being to examine the extent to which 'power' determined the foreign policies of the two Powers during this period. The paper observes that while 'soft power' (as postulated by its chief proponent, Joseph Nye) was sparingly deployed by Oyo to achieve her foreign policy objectives, she more often than not exhibited her 'hard power' potentials which involved coercion and the threat of it, to resolve some irreconcilable politico-economic issues. More importantly, and acutely germane to contemporary discourse on global relevance, the paper challenges notions in certain quarters that pre-colonial West Africans were insulated from systematic, elaborate and sophisticated art of diplomacy.*

KEY WORDS: Hard Power, Soft Power, Alaafin Ojigi, King Agaja, Tegbesu, Abiodun.

INTRODUCTION

This paper challenges the notion in certain quarters that pre-colonial West Africans were not capable of engaging in any systematic, elaborate and sophisticated art of diplomacy. Although the focus of the paper is to examine the extent to which 'hard power' determined the foreign policy behavior of two West African countries during the pre-colonial period, it also explores though tangentially, some of the aspects of interactions between Oyo and her neighbour, Dahomey during the period under review. The paper argues that the relations that existed between the Oyo and the Dahomey during this period were essentially diplomatic. This stemmed from the fact that actors from both states displayed their diplomatic astuteness at all levels of the relationships which included negotiations, wars, treaties, inter-marriage, exchange of gifts, the use of envoys, etc.

The paper also examines the extent to which the actions and inactions of these actors or the foreign policies of both countries affected their relations in the 18th century. It concludes by examining the factors that contributed to the inability of a once formidable Oyo to continue its hegemony over Dahomey. Some of these factors the paper observes, were not unconnected with some irreconcilable political issues within the vast Oyo Empire.

It is important to note that relations between the Yoruba and the Dahomeans predate the 18th century. For instance, political crisis in Aja country (in Dahomey) is said to have impelled Oyo to invade and burn Allada kingdom (also in Dahomey) twice. The first time was between 1680 and 1682, and the second time was in 1698, Akinjogbin (1967: 110). But official and noticeable relations between the two countries could be said to have begun with the ascension of Agaja in 1708. The year 1791 marked the period when Oyo's hegemony on Dahomey started to wane, hence, the choice of 1791 as terminal period of consideration.

What is referred to in this paper as Dahomey was known from the beginning as Aja. However, nationalism which sprang up from among the Aja people in the 18th century led to

the creation of a new, politically stable and economically viable state, called Dahomey. It is also referred to in certain quarters as the Yoruba-Aja country. Akinjogbin (1967:110). The area lying roughly between the mouth of the Niger and longitude 1⁰ east, and between the sea coast and latitude 1⁰ north, could be regarded as a country and perhaps might have been so delineated if a political map of West Africa had existed, say, at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Its coastline was later designated 'slave coast' by the Europeans from about the end of the seventeenth century onwards.

The Yoruba kingdoms, numbering about fourteen major and many minor ones at the beginning of the eighteenth century, occupied mainly the eastern portion of this area. The major kingdoms were: Benin (or Ibini), Ekiti (or Efon), Egba, Egbado (or Awori), Ife, Igbomina, Ijamo, Ijebu including Idoko, Ijesa, Ketu, Owu, Ondo, Oyo and Sabe.¹ The smaller ones were scattered all over modern Dahomey and Togo republics. The oral traditions regarding their origin have been extensively discussed elsewhere, (Adegbulu, 2004:52)

The Aja occupied the western portion of the country known as the Yoruba-Aja. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the most important of their kingdoms were: Allada, Whydah, Popo, Jakin and Dahomey. It has been suggested that before these kingdoms were founded, the Aja lived in autonomous villages. (Herskovits, 1938:3). However, oral traditions would suggest that from the time they came into contact with the Yoruba, probably before the 14th century, they started to adopt the Yoruba institutions and to live in kingdoms. King Agaja of Dahomey who ascended the throne around 1708 is said to have instituted a system of spies, the *Agbadjigbeto*, whom he sent to any town or village he might want to attack. This diplomatic method of espionage was extensively practised in Oyo, before or around the same period. Hence, it is not certain who learnt the idea from whom. However, what is of utmost importance to us here is the manner in which Oyo exhibited raw power in her dealings with Dahomey.

Power: A Conceptual Analysis

The concept of power in International Relations, is traditionally confined to the province of realism. Hans Morgenthau famously declared that anchored on the human desire to dominate and /or the need for self protection, 'statesmen think and act in terms of interests defined as power' (Morgenthau 1960:5) and that power is 'the immediate aim' of all states (1960:27). Ever since, realist scholars seem to have successfully monopolized 'power' as an analytical device to make sense of international politics. They have defined it primarily in terms of military capabilities and used it for classifying states and explaining their behavior (Berenskoetter 2007:1). However, evidence that the realists do not possess exclusive usage of the analysis of power is seen in the recent robust discussion of the concept of 'soft power'. Although it should be admitted that all of the various schools of international relations theory have something to say about the nature and role of power, it is the highly influential realist school that has been most closely identified with the study of power.

Realists throughout the ages have argued that power is the decisive determinant in the relations among separate political communities and of crucial importance to understanding the dynamics of war and peace. Indeed, as witnessed by the actions of the USA in Iraq, Thucydides' ancient dictum that the strong do what they want and the weak endure the consequences is as germane today as it was when he described Athens' behavior towards the tiny island of Melos in 400 BCE, (Schmidt 2008:43). For all realists, John Mearsheimer (2001:12) writes, 'calculations about power lie at the heart of how states think about the

world around them'. The temptation to specify 'power', always pitches International Relations scholars towards Robert Dahl's definition of "'A' getting 'B' to do something 'B' would otherwise not do", (Dahl 1961; 1968). (Berenskoetter 2008:5). Like Weber, Lasswell and Kaplan understand power as a phenomenon of international relations. They defined it as the production of intended effects on other persons, more precisely as 'A' affecting 'B' through the shaping and distribution of values within a shared 'value pattern'.

It is noteworthy that Lasswell and Kaplan further differentiate between 'power' and 'influence'. Whereas the former is understood as 'actual control' of shared value patterns under the threat of sanctions (1950:76), 'influence' is defined as a potential contained in a superior position and lacks the coercive character of 'power'(1950:58f). (Lasswell and Kaplan 1950:14).

Although realist theory remains indispensable to understanding the contemporary practice of international politics, critics continue to identify a variety of problems and inconsistencies in many of its central tenets. This is especially the case with respect to the manner in which realists define, measure and utilize the concept of power. From the birth of the modern realist school to the present, critics have commented on the ambiguity of the realists' conceptualization of power. In consonance with the other critics of the realist school, Schmidt (2007) concurred that there is a general lack of consensus on the most appropriate manner to conceptualize and measure power (Baldwin 2002; Barnett and Duvall 2005a). But since it is the realists who argue that power is the *sine-qua-non* of international politics, any wonder that critics have targeted much of their criticism of realism at what they consider to be its inadequate understanding of power? Most recently, liberals have accused realists of failing to consider the changing nature of power in a globalized world (Nye 2004b). While such criticism has some merit, it should be noted, that the fact that these critics often assume that all realists have the same understanding of power, does not do justice to the complexity of realist thought.

However, even 'soft power' which liberals like Nye advocate, is not devoid of its own complications. Understood as the ability to achieve desired outcomes through attraction rather than coercion, soft power can, advocates claim, make allies out of worst enemies (Nye and Owens 1996; Lennon 2003; Fukuyama 2004; Nye 2004a, 2004d). In this way, soft power promises to be a 'means to success in world politics' (Nye 2004b). Indeed, soft power is touted not just as a tool for the USA to use in its effort to right its relations but as a tool that can be used by any country or any actor in world politics to achieve a greater degree of influence over the dynamics of world politics (Maley 2003; Smyth 2001). At the same time, however, soft power according to Mattern, remains rather poorly understood (Mattern 2008:98). For instance, he posits, soft power works by attraction: by convincing others to follow based on the appeal of one's ideas. But what exactly is it that makes an idea attractive or appealing in the first place? For actors who aim to deploy soft power, success will ultimately depend on knowing how exactly to make not only their ideas but also themselves attractive to a target population. It is thus unfortunate for state and non-state strategists alike that international relations scholars have not engaged in explicit enquiries into attraction as it applies to world politics (Mattern 2008).

However, Nye himself seems to be acutely aware of how problematic his theory of 'soft power' is. Soft power, he said, is more difficult because many of its crucial resources are outside the control of governments, and their effects depend heavily on acceptance by the

receiving audiences. Although it can be argued that both ‘hard power’ and ‘soft power’ have their merits and demerits.

Nevertheless, our study of Oyo’s (a major sub-tribe among the Yoruba of the South western states, Nigeria) external relations and the views of most scholars of Yoruba history, show that realism (power politics), the use of “hard power”, seems justified in explaining her behavior during the period under review. For instance, when the Onikoyi, led others in expanding the Alaafin’s territory...and in pushing the Nupe forces across the Niger (Babayemi 1990:75) in the seventeenth century, it was to increase Oyo’s power in order to be able to pursue and protect her national interest. It should be noted that Oyo did not only reduce Dahomey to vassal status in the eighteenth century, but also planted ‘colonial’ agents (Ajele) there to look after Oyo’s interests. By so doing, Oyo was able to control virtually all the resources of Dahomey during the reigns of Alaafin Abiodun (king of Oyo) in the 1740s, and Tegbesu and Kpengla (both kings of Dahomey). This action of Oyo recalls Morgenthau’s description of how a state can pursue its foreign policy through the use of power which could be exerted “through orders, threats, the authority or charisma of a man or of an office, or a combination of any of these’.”(Morgenthau 1973: 2a). Besides, a study of most of the nineteenth century alliances in Yorubaland (of which Oyo was central) shows that these alliances were entered into either to advance their own power potentials or to check the imperialistic propensity of other actors.

This paper agrees in the main, with the realist school that nations are naturally aggressive and acquisitive, and that it is the reluctance of nations to come to terms with this reality that causes conflicts and wars. Against the backdrop of the above, this paper takes a critical look at pre-colonial Oyo’s ‘hard power’ potentials and the manner in which they were deployed to gratify Oyo’s foreign policy objectives vis-à-vis her neighbor, Dahomey, in the eighteenth century.

The Dispensations of Ojigi (Oyo) and Agaja (Dahomey)

As noted earlier, relations between the Yoruba and the Dahomeans predate the 18th century. For instance, political crisis in Aja country is said to have impelled the Oyo to invade and burn Allada kingdom twice. The first time was between 1680 and 1682, (Barbot, 1732:351-352), and the second time was in 1698, (Bosman, 1705:397). But official and noticeable relations between the two countries could be said to have begun with the ascension of Agaja in 1708, whose era had great consequences for Dahomey.

What seems to have established the first *casus belli* between Oyo and Dahomey started consequent upon Agaja of Dahomey’s government policies. Agaja had in his expansionist quest, conquered and subjected all the surrounding Aja territory under him. This successful conquest of the surrounding towns and the destruction of Allada in particular, had very serious political implications far beyond the confines of the Aja country. Before 1724, all the Aja states had been organized as if they were members of a family, (Akinjogbin, 1963:545). The ruler of Allada, (whose name was not certain) was regarded as the ‘father’ of all the other kings and his state took precedence over all the others. The ruler of Whydah (name not mentioned) was like the ‘elder’ brother and the ruler of Abomey whose name was not mentioned,(Akinjogbin, 1963: 546) and who was originally called the king of the Fon, was regarded as the youngest in his family. No constitutional step was valid until confirmed by the ruler of Allada. The kings of Whydah were crowned by the authority of the king of Allada and the ruler-designate of Dahomey went to Allada to have his title confirmed. The

arrangement was strikingly similar to what obtained in the Yoruba country about the same time, in which the Ooni was the 'father' and the ruler of Oyo was one of his most important sons.

When therefore Agaja successfully invaded Allada, he seemed to have "struck his father". This act was seen as not only unnatural and immorally repugnant but also sacrilegious. Politically, it meant that Agaja had defiled the traditional constitutional arrangement of the Aja as well as all the people surrounding the Aja country including the Accra who were at that time sojourning at little Popo, modern Anecho, and Yoruba. From this stand point, dealing with Agaja of Dahomey on 'soft power' basis lost its appeal as leaving him to get away with this reckless power show may set a bad precedence and spell doom for political stability in that jurisdiction. No one knew where he would stop in his lawlessness or how many people of his ilk would emulate him. Moreover, because Allada was a tributary state to Oyo, the latter's core national interest had been affected. For these reasons, Oyo felt bound to defend not only the vanquished but also its national interest which was already in jeopardy. The diplomatic discussions that went on between Oyo and Dahomey following the conquest of Allada are not known. However, if they were, they seem to have broken down. So on the 14th April 1726, the Oyo army invaded Dahomey, (Snelgrave, 1734:7). Agaja seemed to have been emboldened by his recent victory over Allada and the stock of firearms which he obtained from foreigners around the port. He withstood the Oyo cavalry. Events proved that he had underrated the fire power of Oyo, as the war which ensued was short and terrible, leaving a large number of casualties in the camp of Dahomey; while a larger number were enslaved. Within a few days the Oyo were on their way back home, having taught the upstarts a lesson of their lives. Thenceforth, the fear of Oyo became the beginning of wisdom, as the mere mention of Oyo after that bloody encounter, caused all Dahomeans to panic.²

With the humiliating defeat of Agaja, Alaafin Ojigi had thought that Agaja would humbly accept reasonable terms and desist from disturbing the status quo (the balance of power) in the region. But this turned out to be a wishful thinking as Agaja successfully invaded Whydah in February 1727, barely nine months after the Oyo army had withdrawn from Dahomey. This recalcitrant behavior demonstrated to the Oyo that Agaja was bent on destroying the ancient system. Oyo had to choose between two options; one, leaving Agaja alone and accepting his victories and two, defending the status quo respect for the traditional system to the end. Expectedly, Oyo chose the latter; since a continued respect for the traditional way of life was its own hope of enjoying tranquility. Moreover, all the princes of Allada, Weme, and Whydah, whose territories Agaja had appropriated, sent emissaries to the Alaafin imploring him for help to regain their patrimony from the illegal grasp of Agaja (Snelgrave, 1734:121-122). Besides, these towns were under the economic hegemony of Oyo.

It was not as if the ravage of Oyo invasion of Dahomey in 1726, did not teach Agaja a bitter enough lesson, he still however, hoped to bribe or outrightly outwit Ojigi. He had already planned a strategy of escape should the Oyo again invade Dahomey. He had two choices: one was to retreat to his 1726 hideout and the other was to advance to the European fort on the coast where he thought the Oyo would not come to because their national oracle forbade them to see the ocean. (Akinjogbin, 1963:553). Another probable option was to burn all the available provisions so that the Oyo invaders would find it impossible to stay long. Soon after the invasion of Whydah in 1727, he sent presents to the Alaafin Ojigi, whose messengers were in his camp at Allada in the following April. (Snelgrave, 1734: 59).

Again the course and the content of the diplomatic discourse between Agaja and the Alaafin's messengers are entirely obscure, but Agaja (in his usual diplomatic shrewdness) had to prolong it so as to ensure that the setting in of the rains would make it impracticable for the Oyo to invade Dahomey until 1728 dry season. This would give him plenty of time to prepare his flight well. Predictably therefore, the negotiation between Oyo and Dahomey after the invasion of Whydah broke down, mainly because the rulers of Oyo and Dahomey recognized that they were committed to two fundamentally different political systems.

The only diplomatic means of settling their differences was force, which arguably, was another form of diplomacy (Clausewitz 1942). So between 1728 and 1730, Oyo invaded the Dahomey three times; once annually in 1728, 1729, and 1730 (Snelgrave, 1734:122). It is not necessary to go into the details of the wars. It will be sufficient to note that the more Dahomey was defiant, the more determined Oyo became to show Dahomey how dangerous and costly defiance could be. It must be recalled that Oyo is said to be at its golden age at this time;³ contrary to the view in certain quarters that it had started to decline by 1700.

During the 1728 invasion, Agaja put into operation the plan which he had conceived soon after his invasion of Whydah. He buried his treasure, burned all the provisions and withdrew to his forest hideout. When on the 22nd March, 1728 the much dreaded Oyo army entered Dahomey, they found an empty kingdom. Deprived of sufficient victuals, they quickly withdrew and by the end of April, Agaja was back in his capital. Such a tactic made the Oyo to decide on the permanent occupation of Dahomey as their invasion of 1729 would tend to suggest. A large Oyo host set out for Dahomey from about the beginning of January 1729 and reached Dahomey about the following March. The length of time may have been partly due to the fact that there were several non-combatants accompanying the cavalry. At the sight of them, Agaja repeated his earlier tactics and fled, but he and his people were hotly chased. This time the Oyo army penetrated as far south as Gome, the northern province of the old Whydah kingdom, which lay much further south than Oyo army had ever reached. However instead of withdrawing as they were wont to do, and as the Dahomeans had expected, the Oyo started building a town somewhere near Abomey, and occasionally sallied forth to attack the Dahomeans in their forest hideouts (Akinjogbin, 1963:48). This went on until May, obviously longer than Agaja had planned for or expected. Consequently, the Dahomeans were greatly distressed. Not only were most of them killed in the Oyo sallies, a large number also died of hunger. However, the Oyo army did not find conditions easy, as they were forced to leave Dahomey probably because of the scarcity of provision in 1729.

A FAILED ALLIANCE WITH THE FRENCH

Before the next invasion of the Oyo in 1729, Agaja tried to win the French fort to his cause. He seemed to have been impressed by the fact that they, of all the Europeans, first championed the cause of the defeated Whydah. From that he seemed to have concluded that they must have been the bravest of the Europeans and very trust worthy friends. He, therefore, calculated that they would be reliable allies. In a skillful diplomatic way, he set about winning their friendship. By a mixture of threat, cajolery and lavish entertainment, Agaja secured from the French firm promises of French military and general assistance, if the Oyo should come to invade Dahomey again, (Akinjogbin, 1963:48). Unfortunately for Agaja, when the Oyo army came in 1729, the French did not fulfil any of the promises they had given to Agaja. Although Agaja was able both in 1728 and 1729 to extricate himself

from serious difficulties and re-occupy Whydah, he was nevertheless, becoming more persuaded that his programme would be impossible to carry through in the face of combined opposition from the Oyo and from the European traders. If he had any further doubts the Oyo invasion of Dahomey in 1730 fully persuaded him.

Oyo in 1730 ensured that all loose ends were tightened before embarking on their attack on Dahomey. They entered into an alliance with the Mahi republics, (Akinjogbin, 1963:48) situated north of Abomey. One of the advantages of this alliance to the Oyo was that it deprived the Dahomey of places of asylum towards the north of their territory. The Oyo set out very early in January 1730 or perhaps late in December 1729, and reached Dahomey about the end of February, (Snelgrave, 1734:122). As usual, Agaja had sent his population away and he himself had fled. His experience in the previous year had convinced him that both he and his subjects were no longer safe from Oyo ravages. The prospect for Agaja and his subjects was therefore bleak. Three consecutive years of hiding and privation; of voluntary burning by the Dahomeans of their own property, and of Oyo depredation, had rendered Dahomey very poor. The situation became so bad that Dahomeans were now building their houses in the rainy season only to set them on fire again during the following dry season (Akinjogbin, 1963:48). More frustrating to the Dahomeans was the fact that the Oyo were not showing any sign of relenting.

The Oyo perpetuated their siege until Agaja decided to submit to the Oyo. He offered large quantities of presents, rumored to be goods worth six hundred slaves to induce them to withdraw before the start of negotiations. Once beaten, twice shy, so goes the saying, the Oyo knew Agaja too well by then to allow him to buy time, but they accepted his presents and appeared to have withdrawn. Agaja then came out of hiding and sent for his scattered subjects to come out and start the work of rebuilding Abomey. The Dahomeans who had been taking refuge around the European forts at Igelefe set out for Abomey on 9th March, 1730. But on the 20th they ran southwards again in great panic. Reason for their quick and confused retreat was that the Oyo had not totally withdrawn as had been believed.

However, as Agaja and his subjects came out of their forest hideouts, skirmishes broke out between them and the Mahi, allies of the Oyo. It is not clear who first attacked who. But if the account given by the French fort director is anything to go by, the Mahi may have launched an unprovoked attack on the Dahomeans taking advantage of their distressed situation. On the other hand, it may also have been that the Dahomeans first attacked the Mahi for concluding an alliance with the former's enemies, Oyo. Whoever really provoked the other, the skirmishes brought the Oyo cavalry back in defense of their allies, the Mahi. The Oyo attacked the Dahomey in such an unexpected way that it was with great difficulty and with great luck that Agaja escaped (Akinjogbin, 1963:49).

Even though the Oyo agreed to withdraw, they did not abandon the town, which they had started to found in 1729. This probably made Agaja feel unsafe to continue to live in Abomey. He therefore relocated his capital to Allada. Agaja sent to inform the European directors of his intention and asked for their representatives to accompany him from Abomey as a sign that they would support him, (Akinjogbin, 1967:72). All the European directors excused themselves on one pretext or another, their reason being that none wanted to commit himself except to the winning side (Akinjogbin, 1967: 72).

The series of Oyo invasion in protest against the political methods of Agaja and the stubborn unwillingness of the Europeans to give up the slave trade thus rendered it completely

impossible for Agaja to carry through his programme of ending the slave trade in Aja country. His removal to Allada could be seen as an admission of his failure; as the question then was no longer whether the slave trade must stop in the Aja country, but whether Dahomey itself would survive and how. Agaja had no sooner settled in Allada than he asked Brazilio, the director of the Portuguese fort, to help him make a lasting peace with the Oyo. Brazilio agreed to his request and provided a large part of the preliminary presents, which were sent to Alaafin Ojigi and his chiefs, (Dalzel, 1793:59). Although the details of the treaty that followed are opaque, but the result were quite clear from the subsequent events.

One of the results of the 1730 treaty was that Oyo, who hitherto had been invading Dahomey on the solicitations of the defeated rulers of Allada and Whydah, could no longer do so on their behalf. After 1730, Oyo never again invaded Dahomey on their behalf, and Agaja was able to reduce the territory without any external intervention. The only time the Oyo had to renew their invasion of Dahomey, was in the year 1739, (Dalzeel, 1793:59) in defense of their territorial integrity. This was to checkmate Agaja's army which had hitherto in 1737 crossed Lake Nokowe and the Weme River to attack Epe and Badagry (Akinjogbin, 1963: 49).

THE 1730 TREATY

The highlights of the 1730 treaty were as follows : Agaja was allowed to keep the whole of the kingdom of Whydah and a substantial part of the Allada kingdom but was prevented from returning to Abomey, without any giving any reason. The Eastern boundary of the kingdom was marked by Lake Nokowe, the So and the Weme rivers and the whole of Dahomey became a tributary state of Oyo. The Weme dynasty was re-instated and the remnant of the Aja people were resettled in a new territory called Ajase, which became the kingdom of Porto-Novo in the 19th century. Places like Epe and Badagry, which lay outside the eastern boundary of Dahomey, became independent of it and enjoyed Oyo protection.

Weme and Ajase were left free to manage their internal administration and to borrow as much of Oyo's practices as they wished. As a guarantee that Agaja would adhere strictly to these agreements, one of his sons, who later succeeded as Tegbesu, was given as a hostage to the Oyo. The treaty itself was sealed by a diplomatic exchange of royal marriages, with Agaja sending his daughter to the Alaafin Ojigi for a wife and Ojigi returning the compliments, (Dalzel, 1793:59).

The reigns of Amuniwaye and Onisile of Oyo and Avissu (Tegbesu) of Dahomey. A mixed bag of pacifist and aggressive foreign policy

Agaja, unarguably one of the greatest kings of Dahomey died just as a new series of Oyo invasions was beginning notwithstanding, the 1730 treaty. Therefore, whoever was to rule Dahomey after him would have to be capable of making peace with Oyo without betraying Dahomeyan interests. Tegbesu seemed to be the man whom the cap fitted. He had served Dahomey by being a hostage at Oyo and through that stay, had become familiar with the Oyo nobles and their manners. It would be very much easier for him than for anyone else to deal with the Oyo authorities. His election might to some extent, satisfy the pride of the Oyo and incline them to offer lenient terms of submission. It is however, not certain whether Oyo actually supported his election.

That the desire to placate Oyo formed a large element in Tegbesu's administration is further strengthened by political developments in Dahomey from 1789 onwards. When antagonism to Oyo's influence grew, opposition to the Tegbesu line also developed. As will be seen, Kpengla, Tegbesu's son and successor, adopted a foreign policy which portrayed a complete independence from Oyo rule. From then on, Tegbesu's line was increasingly challenged. Kpengla's son and successor, Agonglo, was murdered in a palace revolt and Agonglo's son and successor, Adandozon, was deposed in 1818 when Gezo vigorously and aggressively carried out the anti-Oyo, independence policy of Dahomey.

At the ascension of Tegbesu, the greatest immediate danger that confronted him was the then renewed Oyo invasions which had started in 1739; barely nine years after the famous treaty, which was cemented by royal marriages. It is not certain how many times the Oyo came down between 1740 and 1748. This was because during this period, Dahomey tried to go back on the 1730 treaty. After Ojigi's death around 1735, it would appear that Agaja the king of Dahomey thought the most formidable man in Oyo had been removed. He would appear to have been slack in paying the annual tributes (partly no doubt, because he was very poor) He definitely attacked territories which were guaranteed by the 1730 treaty. But unfortunately for Dahomey, it seemed, the Alaafin that reigned after Ojigi were equally men of great valor.⁴

Amuniwaye and Onisile, the second and third Alaafin after Ojigi, had twice between 1739 and 1748 dispatched the Oyo army into Dahomey and were only prevented from sending the army twice more by Dahomey's presents.⁵ The causes of these invasions are obscure, but the 1748 threat most probably, followed immediately after Tegbesu's attack on Epe in 1747 and suggests that the over lordships of Epe and perhaps of some other small territories between Jakin and Badagry were still being disputed by Dahomey.

Whenever the Oyo army came down or threatened to come, the Dahomeans simply followed the tradition laid down by Agaja. The king and his court ran into some remote forest and the citizens were distributed in small parties of safe places. One director of the English fort, Isaac Gregory, who was at Allada during one of these invasions, was taken away to the king's secret hideout, (Dalzel, 1793:74). These invasions, apart from being great threats, were also the root cause of most of the other difficulties confronting Dahomey at Tegbesu's succession. They encouraged the little Popo and the old Whydah to resume their raids on Igelefe and the Whydah beach. Again, it is not certain how many times they came. But it seems probably that they came whenever the Oyo invaded Dahomey and sent Tegbesu into hiding. They certainly attacked the forts during the Oyo invasions of 1743 and in 1747. Not much is known about the Tegbesu's court at Abomey. But his stay in Oyo had certainly familiarized him with Oyo court institutions, some of which he introduced into his court. The most notable of these introductions was the *ilari* system. The *Ilari* were the people whom the Europeans called 'half heads' from the way their hair was cut. They were, throughout the Yoruba country, messengers-cum-civil servants used by certain classes of Oba (kings). The advantage of this class of people for Tegbesu was that they were mobile, could be sent to any part of the kingdom and thus used to check any remote officer or coordinate any national plans. In fact, their role was akin to modern day Intelligence Officers.

Tegbesu's foreign policy was essentially pacific. He realized that stability could not exist in Dahomey while the Oyo persisted in their invasions. The only way to get them to stop their sporadic attacks was to offer them (the Oyo) terms that they would be ready to accept, and to observe such conditions as they might impose. Tegbesu's long residence in Oyo must have

given him a fairly accurate idea of the power of Oyo and of the men who ran its affairs. It must also have made him wary of offending Oyo. Indeed, it seems that throughout his reign he studiously avoided any action that might cause an Oyo invasion of Dahomey. It must however, be stated that it was not until after a few Oyo invasions, and threats of invasion that he reached a definitive settlement with them.

As earlier noted, he gave the Oyo a very lavish present in 1743 after one of their invasions. In the middle of 1746, he also asked the forts to defray some of the customary presents demanded by Oyo. It was not however until 1748 that a settlement was reached. In March of that year, news reached the forts at Igelefe that the Oyo were up in arms against Dahomey, that Tegbesu had vacated his habitation and carried all his valuable movables into the bush, and that he was making large dashes to avoid impending blow'. In a hurry the nobles and the most important officers at Igelefe were summoned to the king's secret hideout for urgent advice and necessary contributions. The preliminary presents were very effective, as the Oyo did not invade Dahomey. The negotiations then followed on a definitive peace treaty, which was happily concluded, probably around April, definitely before 30th June 1748. The terms were probably largely a confirmation of those reached in 1730. In addition, Tegbesu must have been told to leave the ports east of Jakin in peace for, until towards the end of the century when Oyo's power would have started to decline. Dahomey never again attacked any place east of Jakin. Obviously, during these negotiations also the annual tribute to be paid perpetually to Oyo was settled. Traditions both at Abomey and Oyo are remarkably agreed on these annual tributes. They consisted of forty one men, forty one young men, forty one guns, four hundred bags of cowries and four hundred corals. (Akinjogbin,1963:24). All this buttressed the fact that the Yoruba of the pre-colonial times did not only employ all manner of diplomatic tactics in cultivating the friendship of their neighbors in international arena, they also knew how to compel obeisance from them.

This was a very heavy tribute. In Akinjogbin's interpretation. A bag (oke) of cowries consisted of twenty thousand pieces; four hundred bags would therefore consist of eight million pieces. In the mid eighteenth century when twenty thousand pieces were worth four pounds, eight million pieces would be worth £1600. When the values of all other articles of the tributes are added, the extent of the Oyo power and the burden which Dahomey had to bear annually through this submission can be estimated. It was paid by Dahomey for the next seventy years until shortly after 1818 when Gazo successfully declared its independence. There seems more to the 1748 treaty than mere annual payments of tributes by Dahomey. The payments portrayed Oyo's hegemonic influence over Dahomey. The fact that the ultimate sovereignty in Dahomey remained with the Alaafin of Oyo, gave Oyo enormous responsibility as well as rights in Dahomey. So overwhelming and totalitarian was Oyo's authority over Dahomey that the former not only controlled the sovereignty of, exerted heavy tributes over, but also made laws for the later. For instance, Oyo undertook the defense of Dahomey against external aggression, and stationed its forces for this purpose in the Atakpame area. In 1764 when one Odanquah of Ashanti trespassed with his soldiers into the area, the Oyo forces wiped out his whole twenty thousand soldiers, (Dupius, 1824:238-239).

Oyo is said to have made laws for Dahomey. We are not certain how many, but one law which Dahomean kings long remembered with wounded pride was that which prohibited any Dahomean, be he king or commoner, from wearing silk damask in Cana, (Akinjogbin, 1963:35). Cana itself appears to have been the Oyo headquarters, where the kings of

Dahomey had a palace but no authority at all and where any Dahomean was free to live. Generally, no Dahomean law bound any Oyo citizen in Dahomey.

Oyo could ask Dahomey to send contingents to any military expedition that it might wish to make, or could commission Dahomey to fight such wars under, or without, Oyo officers. It could prevent Dahomey from undertaking any war. Between 1783 and 1789 Abiodun, the Alaafin, exercised all these rights successfully to the great annoyance of the Dahomean authority.⁶

The kings of Oyo became the heirs of all the most important chiefs in Dahomey, from the kings downwards. In accordance with these rights, when the Mehu died in 1779, Abiodun demanded all his movable property including his wives, (Dalzel, 1793:173). It is not unlikely, too, that every Dahomean king on ascension was required to send presents to Oyo, though we have no concrete evidence of this usage, but there seems a pointer to it.⁷ Certainly, whenever an Alaafin ascended the throne or did something noteworthy, the king of Dahomey sent presents to Oyo. In 1774, when Abiodun defeated Gaha in a civil war in Oyo, Kpengla sent presents, (Dalzel, 1793:158)

These rights are enormous and there may be many more than are known. They certainly show that the over lordship of Oyo over Dahomey was so overbearing and oppressive that only purely internal administration was left to Dahomey; this made the Dahomey regard the rule of the Oyo with a hearty dislike. In some respects even the settlement would seem to have been very generous and its term much lighter than those which Oyo made with some other tributary states, like the Egba towns. Moreover, Dahomey was allowed to retain its own army and seems to have been allowed military initiative northwards and westwards of Abomey, but these strictly, where Oyo national interest was not likely to be harmed (Adegbulu, 2005: 176). In fact, the condition of Dahomey under Oyo hegemony was somewhat akin to the condition of Equatorial Guinea vis-a-vis Nigeria between the 70s and the 80s, which prompted the feeling in certain diplomatic quarters that Nigeria should simply annex Equatorial Guinea.⁸ Perhaps the only difference was the fact that Equatorial Guinea and Nigeria were not known to have engaged in any war of note. But in terms of weakness and liability, Equatorial Guinea was disadvantaged vis-a-vis Nigeria.

Dahomean Independence and the politics of Trade in Slaves

The conclusion of the peace treaty in 1748 was an occasion of the great joy for the Dahomeans as it must have been pleasing to the Oyo. This doctored independence was celebrated all around Dahomey, with pomp and ceremonies. At Igelefe, the war generals and captains, councilors, chiefs, traders and all the inhabitants of the town danced round the fort. The European communities were called upon to provide presents. The English fort alone expended liquors worth £13 on the one day of celebration.⁹ With his own constitutional position secured, the administration put in order and the danger of Oyo invasion removed, Tegbesu could concentrate whole heartedly on the promotion of the slave trade, which he had regarded since his accession, as one of his primary objectives and revenue earner. It was certainly Tegbesu's policy that the energies of the country should be devoted to the slave trade rather than to military adventures. This could be for three reasons.

First, the militarism of Agaja, though successful in its earlier years, had nearly ended in the complete destruction of Dahomey. Second, it may also have been that Tegbesu saw the slave trade as the best way to refill the empty coffers which he had inherited. Third, it may also

have been that the terrible Oyo invasions and Tegbesu's first hand acquaintance with the might of Oyo had convinced him that it was a waste of time and national resources to encourage militarism in Dahomey. However, from 1767 onwards, long-term implications of Tegbesu's economic policies became the dominant issues in the national life of Dahomey. By making the slave trade basis of the economy of Dahomey, Tegbesu had placed the kingdom at the mercy of external factors which the Dahomeans could neither control nor even influence. This became increasingly clear as international conditions became less favorable to the unfettered movement of European shipping.

Besides, Tegbesu, following his policy of "peaceful slave trade", had relied largely on the slave brought in from outside Dahomey and particularly on those supplied by the Oyo traders. That the Oyo supply would not always be available to the Igelefe market was shown by the change in Oyo policy from about 1774 onwards. This was because in May of that year, there was a major policy change following Alaafin Abiodun's overthrow of his Basorun (Prime Minister), Gaha, who had been the de- facto ruler of Oyo Empire since 1744. Being a professional trader before becoming the Alaafin, Abiodun, on settling down on the throne made trading in slaves his economic policy thrust. Like Tegbesu of Dahomey, Abiodun not only encouraged and promoted slave trade, but also monopolized the trade. By 1776 Abiodun's exertion had led to the foundation or extension of a flourishing slave market at Abomey-Calavi, which was wholly stocked and controlled by the Oyo. At that date it seems, slaves were supplied from that market to Igelefe, Epe, Porto Novo and Badagry. In no time, Abiodun decided to make Port Novo, the port of Ajase Ipo, the main Oyo port. He called it his personal "calabash" (a euphemism for monopoly) out of which no one but himself would be permitted to eat. Abiodun's choice of port seems to have been dictated and certainly helped, by the traditional trade regulations at Port Novo, which were more generous than those obtaining at Whydah. Oyo traders at Igelefe normally sold their slaves to the king's traders, who alone could resell to the European exporters. At Igelefe also, certain imported firearms, iron and corals were allowed to be bought only by the king of Dahomey. At Porto Novo, on the other hand, an Oyo trader could buy any kind of European manufactures he wanted. The adoption of Porto Novo as the main Oyo port meant Dahomey was deprived of the most important source of its slave supply. It is instructive to note that the European complaints became loud just when the change in Oyo policy was taking place. The only way by which Dahomey could make up the shortage was to get its own slaves by its own raiding, but that proved impossible, again as a result of Tegbesu's policy of 'trade before war'.

Another grave implication of this policy was the total neglect of the army, which left it weakened. When Tegbesu died in 1774, the whole of the Dahomean infantry numbered three thousand, out of which an inadequate three hundred were posted to Igelefe to guard the beach and protect the forts, the infantry was badly trained and the only tactics was to go in great secrecy and surprise unsuspecting villages. The army had thus, both in number and training, greatly deteriorated from the great day of Agaja.

Perhaps it is pertinent to quickly draw two conclusions from the economic policy of Tegbesu which lead to the decline of the economy of Dahomey. The first is that "peaceful slave trade" was impossible as no one would willingly submit himself to be enslaved. Only wars could provide an ample supply of slaves. The second is that the slave trade itself was not a reliable basis for the economy, because the factors governing it were beyond the control of any one power.

ABIODUN /KPENGLA ERA (CIRCA 1770)

It was in this state of economic cum military decline that Kpengla, the son of Tegbesu ascended the throne of Dahomey in May 1774. Kpengla having ascended the throne at the youthful age of 39, made a very stirring policy speech, when he was being ceremonially coroneted in June 1775. Although the text has not survived, but two points remained vivid in the minds of his hearers.¹⁰ First, he promised that he would revive the declining slave trade and see to it that the slaves exported through the Whydah port were provided entirely from the captives made by the Dahomean soldiers, whose expedition would therefore be made more effective. No slave would be bought from the inland countries. Secondly, he promised that he would shake off the Oyo yoke and secure independence for Dahomey. From the tone of his speech Kpengla's foreign policy was an aggressive one compared to Tegbesu's pacific foreign policy. It shows that Kpengla had grasped another aspect of the problem confronting Dahomey. It was necessary to fight to secure captives and provide one of the conditions that would encourage the ships to come to Whydah. Kpengla also realized that so long as his country remained under Oyo hegemony, it would be impossible to have an independent and effective policy which would give him the control of Porto Novo which was rapidly becoming the greatest rival of Whydah port.

Keen European observers however, thought that these two political objectives were impracticable for many years to come. Dahomean army was still too weak to enforce the first and it was unreasonable at that time for Dahomey to talk of declaring total independence of Oyo in spite of Abiodun's preference for economic diplomacy as against aggressive foreign policy. This was because Abiodun's reign had just begun and this antiwar policy had not started to have biting effect on the Oyo army. As time went by, Kpengla understood better; as nothing more was publicly heard of this policy, and no move, as far as is known was taken to realize it throughout the rest of his reign. Kpengla took several measures to revive slave trade in his country but this measures rather than improving the economic fortune of Dahomey, led to a deep depression. This continued from 1767 to 1782 and caused wide spread hardship. Some of Kpengla's policy which seem to have led to economic dwindling included sending raiders regularly into neighboring towns and villages. But some of these raids failed abysmally because the soldiers were poorly equipped. Also, he had earlier in his reign, driven out the non Dahomean traders; the result of this measure was to cause an even greater increase in the number of slaves available in Dahomey. This coupled with low morale in the army drastically affected the national economy of Dahomey.

This general decline in fortune came at a very awkward time for Dahomey. Owing to the political changes in Oyo, the burden of the tribute paid by Dahomey to Oyo had to increase. Abiodun, even before his ascension to the throne of Oyo in 1774, had seen clearly (being a professional trader) the economic advantages which his country could derive from its tributaries. He decided to extract those advantages much more fully than any of his predecessors are known to have done. There were therefore, many occasions during this period when the impoverished Kpengla was forced to satisfy the Oyo demands under threat of invasion. Two examples, which are probably typical of many more, have been recorded. When the death of the Mehu, the king of one of the kingdoms in Dahomey, was announced on 27th January 1779, Abiodun's ambassador at Dahomey demanded his movable property and one hundred of his wives (Akinjogbin, 1967: 76). Though the Mehu had lived to a ripe old age, he like most Dahomeans at this time, probably left a heavy debt rather than wealth behind, and it fell to Kpengla to find a means of satisfying the Oyo. Kpengla therefore sent a

few items (probably because of poverty). Abiodun soon sent to demand the rest of the Mehu's property, with a threat that if they were not sent promptly, he would send his Basorun to fetch them. Since the Dahomeans greatly dreaded Basorun Gaha, any mention of Basorun (even long after Gaha's death) sent jitters down their spines. Kpengla not only sent what he called the rest of the Mehu's property, but also some of the captives brought back from the Aguna campaign, undertaken just before the death of the Mehu, (Dalzel, 1793:173-174).

The second occasion arose following the refusal of Dahomey in paying the corals which were normally payable to Oyo. During these years of depression (it is not known exactly when) Kpengla withheld this payment with the excuse that coral was no longer available. But when Abiodun discovered that the Oyo merchants were still able to purchase corals from Igelefe, he became greatly incensed at Kpengla's deception and sent immediately to remind Kpengla that he held his dominions no longer than whilst he regularly paid tributes, and when he neglected, Dahomey belonged to Oyo, (Dalzel, 1793:74). Kpengla was forced to pacify the Alaafin with heavy presents. All these go to show that despite the fierce internal squabbles between the Alaafins and Basorun Gaha the empire not only maintained its internal cohesion, it also still held its tributaries, including Dahomey, in its firm grips. Thus, when the news of Abiodun's victory (over Basorun Gaha) got to Dahomey, Kpengla sent a rich diplomatic present to Abiodun the victor (Akinjogbin, 1966: 456).

Another reason to believe that the civil war did not herald a decline in the power of Oyo, was that, in May 1774, when Kpengla sent congratulatory messages and presents to Abiodun on his success over Gaha, Abiodun acknowledged his obedience by sending him a cognomen, (Akinjogbin, 1966:456). Abiodun's act was symbolic. Only an acknowledged superior could give a cognomen to his ward. That Kpengla accepted Abiodun's superiority is shown by causing his cognomen to be announced in his kingdom for a week. The policies of militarism (being strongly advocated by Basorun Gaha) and economic exploitation (which Abiodun and his successors favoured) had been the source of internal strife in Oyo kingdom of the 18th century. Many scholars are wondering why the two policies could not have been harmonized and carried out simultaneously. However, with Gaha, the greatest exponent of militarism removed, Abiodun pursued very vigorously, the policy of economic exploitation of the empire. How well economic exploitation alone without military preparedness, helped an empire sandwiched by neighbors like the Nupe, the Bariba and the Dahomey, who apparently, were envious of Oyo's prosperity, is our next point of consideration.

EFFECT OF ABIODUN'S POLICY

By 1776, two years after Gaha's overthrow and probably, six years of accession to the throne (the actual date of Abiodun's accession is not known), the economic effects of Abiodun's policy had begun to manifest. The slave market at Abomey Calari, which lay north of Godome and wholly controlled by Oyo, became the most important slave market in the Yoruba-Aja country, (Akinjogbin, 1967:141). Porto Novo, the port of Ajase, and the principal Oyo outlet, became one of the most flourishing ports in the whole of the Yoruba-Aja country, competing successfully for the slave ships with the long established ports of Whydah. In the 1780's the French seriously thought of building forts in Porto Novo, and constructing a canal to enlarge the facilities of the port, (Akinjogbin, 1967:247) for various reasons the plans could not be carried out. It can be said with a degree of certainty that the civil war between Gaha and Abiodun had no immediate weakening effect on the Oyo Empire. This is shown by

the way which Abiodun was able to maintain a large part of the empire intact until he died. In Dahomey, he claimed his imperial rights as no king had done since 1748. Apart from receiving the annual presents, he also had asserted his rights to the property of the important chiefs in Dahomey. He commissioned the Dahomean army to fight imperial wars under Oyo generals and whenever Dahomean authorities showed any signs of recalcitrance, he issued such threats that frightened them into submission. For example, when they refused to pay the movable property of a deceased Mehu in 1779, Abiodun threatened to fetch them by force, whereupon the requirements were sent, (Dalzel, 1793:173-177). Again, when Kpengla attacked the port of Ajase in 1786, Abiodun took such offence and thundered such promises of dire consequences as made Kpengla to placate him. It cannot be said for certain that Abiodun's foreign policy and methods could have been applied to Dahomey alone, though we have no evidence of how he treated the other tributaries. It is probable that the majority of the slaves which were sold at Porto Novo by the Oyo traders during the reign were procured, either through raid or through forceful contribution, from these territories. That these tributaries were fully exploited and thoroughly governed can be inferred from the fact that it was exactly known that there were 6,600 towns and villages under Oyo during Abiodun's reign, (Johnson, 1921:183). That these territories felt the yoke of imperialism rather heavily in Abiodun's reign can be inferred from the number of insurrections that started the reign and continued until the empire disintegrated.

During his life time, Abiodun seemed to have been the most popular monarch that Oyo had for the whole of the century. Oyo citizens regarded his reign as one of great blessings. They remembered his reign for being peaceful probably both in the sense that there were not many imperial wars and there were comparatively fewer insurrections in the capital. They also remembered that they were wealthy, measuring money (i.e. cowries) "in bushel" and wearing the best of apparel. This collective opinion of Abiodun's subjects goes to reinforce the contention that the Oyo Empire had not declined until the end of that reign. Abiodun's victory over Gaha should not be seen from the perspective of a mere metamorphosis of policy from militarism to commercialism. It was a more fundamental change of power structure within the Empire and had a lasting effect. It can be argued that for over a century before 1770, the actual powers behind the throne had been the military families. Although they did not aspire to the throne; the Alaafin only remained on the throne for as long as they pleased. And one long-term problem which Abiodun probably meant to solve in his war with Gaha was how to turn power to the princes to whom it properly belonged. The victory gave Abiodun absolute power. Perhaps for the first time in the 18th century, an Alaafin sat on the throne with a sense of absolute security and without the fear of being asked to commit suicide under whatever pretence.

A denigration of hard power tactics in the management of the Oyo empire

That military preparedness plays a major role as an element of national power, is obvious. However, the 'hard power' potentials which enabled Alaafin Abiodun's predecessors to subjugate all their rivals, and upon which the wealth of the empire stood, had begun to wane; an evidence that the Alaafin had underrated the importance of this very crucial element to the detriment of the Empire. Abiodun had weakened the army to the point of non-existence. Between 1774 and 1789, Abiodun fought no expansionist wars. Indeed, the army was hence forth unequal to the task of quelling rebellions among the tributary states. This neglect of the army and his subordination of the other economic activities to the need of the slave trade must have been among the important factors that made the power of Oyo to wane by 1781.

The army became so weak that when ever rebellion reared its head among the Egun dependencies of Weme, Porto Novo or Badagry, the near by Dahomean army was commissioned to put it down; (Akinjogbin, 1967:244). In other areas where there was no ally to help, the Oyo army gave a very poor account of itself. Abiodun himself seemed to be admitting that he had no army worthy of the name, when in 1783 he said Badagry was too far for his army to reach. The famous Oyo Cavalry which scoured scrubs of Allada and trampled the plains of Atakpame, and which Abiodun himself used to maintain the far-flung empire within the first few years of his reign, were no longer heard of. This weakening of the army turned out to be an incalculable mistake, the effect of which Abiodun lived long enough to foretaste. To keep such an Empire which Abiodun inherited together, it needed a strong army. The fact that the Oyo was no longer in control of its Empire was reinforced when in July 1783 Bariba revolted against their tributary status and defeated an Oyo army sent against them to bring them back to their allegiance, (Johnson, 1921:187). Around the same time, the Egba decided to jettison the Oyo yoke which they did very easily since Abiodun had no army with which to oppose them, (however, the actual date of the Egba independence is uncertain). From then on, the vacuum created by the weakness of the army continued to be a source of weakness both in Oyo foreign policy and its domestic policy.

As earlier noted it was not only the neglect of the army that weakened the power of Oyo during this period. Abiodun's economic policy after his victory over Gaha had unpleasant long-term implications. The mainstay of the economy was trade in human cargoes. The very item of this slave trade economy tended to make it absolutely ruinous for the exporting country-Oyo. In a rural economy such as the type Oyo had, large numbers of virile people were needed for work in the fields since there were no machines or any mechanical devices. Any large scale exportation of this class of citizens would tend to harm agriculture. More so, the *modus operandi* of the trade itself made it absolutely impossible to keep it fair and guarantee safety to peaceful citizens; for there was no fool –proof means of preventing a strong man from seizing a weak one. That obviously hampered peaceful agriculture or any other industry which were in any case at a discount since man stealing and slave trading provided a much quicker source of wealth than any other form of profession. The slave trade therefore, not only drained the country of its human resources and prevented the growth of agriculture, it also tended to kill all the other industries and quickly became 'sole export crop'.

The situation was worsened by the fact that this "sole export crop" grew up entirely in response to overseas demand, and not initially as a result of the exporting countries supply. Therefore, the conditions governing demand were completely beyond control of the suppliers and the market was entirely at the mercy of the buyers. By and large, the importers decided what price to pay in exchange for slaves, while the African suppliers only chose from among the range of goods already brought. If peradventure the Europeans had decided no longer to import slaves, for certain economic, political or moral reasons, the African suppliers would be in economic quandary. This was the situation the Africans found themselves in the 19th century, when they simply continued to raid their neighbors for slaves because of their strong belief that the Europeans could not do without them.

But as long as Abiodun was alive to employ diplomacy instead of force, and to regulate the slave trade, the effect of this weaknesses were somewhat mitigated. Trouble seems to have started after Abiodun's death when Alaafin Awole ascended the throne in 1789. No one seems to have had Abiodun's grasp of affair and certainly none had his reputation. Awole

particularly, or his chosen advisers, were frightfully ignorant of the history and constitution of the country. Saddled with a very weak army and the need to maintain the same standard of prosperity as had obtained during the reign of Abiodun, Awole went from one costly mistake to another. Dahomey on the other hand, under Agonglo who ascended the throne in 1789, could not achieve its political independence nor could Agonglo revive its declining economy. The successful resolution of the economic problem was the more urgent task. The depression of the last twenty years affected all the citizens of Dahomey and was therefore potentially dangerous to the stability of the kingdom. Until conditions improved, projects for political independence were not likely going to evoke any general enthusiasm.

In one very important respect, local political conditions within the Oyo empire of which Dahomey was a part, appeared favorable to the solution of both the economic and the political problem of Dahomey. The weakness of Oyo, which was first apparent in 1783, continued and intensified. Awole, Abiodun's successor who lacked the wherewithal to solve the problems he inherited from his predecessor, created new and insolvable problems for himself and Oyo Empire.

His first undoing was the successful revolt of the Tapa (Nupe) in 1791, which, coupled with that of the Bariba eight years earlier, accentuated the economic problems of Oyo. Awole partly in an attempt to solve this, ordered Apomu, a town in Ife territory, to be attacked, contrary to his oath of office. His attempt there having failed he ordered Iwerele, a town with sentimental connections with Oyo, to be attacked. This attempt sparked off the revolt of what remained of the army against the king who was forced to commit suicide. Awole's mistakes, it has been argued, has not only been costly in terms of his own life but also in terms of the Oyo Empire for the circumstances surrounding his death made it impossible for another Alaafin to be vividly appointed immediately after him.

Without an acceptable Alaafin, leaders of some ability tried to control their environments while the general populace ran to wherever they could find security. Had there been a strong army such as Oyo had during the reign of Alaafin Ojigi, or during the supremacy of Gaha, the Empire might have been saved from disintegration until another acceptable Alaafin had been appointed. But without an army, Asamu, the Basorun was helpless to arrest the chaos. From then on started the decay, which steadily overtook the Oyo Empire and finally led to its collapse.

This paper has examined the power relations between the Oyo- Yoruba and the Dahomey in the 18th century. The relations between the two countries seem to predate the 14th century. On the one hand, it can be argued that to a large extent, these relations were tilted in favour of Oyo who by share instrumentality of its 'hard power' and monopoly of the use force, subjected Dahomey under its suzerainty for many years. On the other hand, the relations could be said to be mutually beneficial in the sense that while Dahomeans adopted some Yoruba institutions and started living in kingdoms, the Yoruba, most probably, copied the art of sending spies to enemy territories, from Agaja who practised this diplomatic art elaborately.

The paper also notes some of the characteristics of their relations which included exchange of gifts, royal marriages, exchange of envoys and economic diplomacy. But an essential feature of their interactions which the paper identifies seems to be conflict and war, which more often than not, left the Dahomeans disadvantaged. For several years of their relationship the Yoruba enjoyed a great deal of hegemony over its Dahomean neighbor until the former's

country began to lack cohesion. This had been attributed to a number of factors including the lopsidedness of Alaafin Abiodun's policy. This gave the latter the opportunity to make up leeway and declare their independence. It can be argued, however, that while their relations lasted, it was a master-servant kind as the Yoruba never allowed the Dahomeans to interact with them on equal terms.

Without military preparedness to check external aggressions, the Yoruba country soon lost not only the Dahomey and all the states under it, but also the Nupe and the Bariba successfully rebelled against their masters.

NOTES

- 1.) This was the result of personal research investigations carried out in 2002.
- 2.) Personal communication with Professor Dare Oguntomisin, Head, Department of History, University of Ibadan, 23rd December 1999; His Royal Highness, Oba Lamidi Olayiwola Adeyemi, (the Alaafin of Oyo), corroborated the fact that the mere remembrance of the Oyo's exploit caused the Dahomeans great panic until the end of the century. This was however, reluctantly confirmed in an interview with Pa Zinsou Codjo (c.75) Fisherman, Port- Novo 10 March 2001.
- 3.) Personal communication with Chief M. O. Ogunmola (76), Arokin Oyo (Oyo palace historian) Alaafin palace, 06:02:2000, suggests that since Oyo was at the Zenith of its military glory in the 18th century, it was able to conquer all its neighbours and impose its terms on them.
- 4.) Personal communication with: Chief Olalere Ojo (Bada of Saki) 76, Bada Compound, 02:02:2000, show that Alaafins Amuniwaye and Onisile were great men of war.
- 5.) Personal communication with the current Alaafin of Oyo, Oba Lamidi Olayiwola Adeyemi, reveals that the two Alaafins-Amuniwaye and Onisile were men of great abilities who during their military expeditions, brought many Dahomeans as slaves to Oyo, 28 December, 1999.
- 6.) According to Chief M. O. Ogunmola (Oyo palace historian), the humiliation of the Dahomeans in the hands of Oyo came to a head during the reign of Alaafin Abiodun who controlled virtually everything, including how the Dahomeans lived. Personal interview: 08:03:01. Alaafin of Oyo's palace, Oyo.
- 7.) Personal communication with Pa S. F. Rogers (68) a Benenois diplomat in Lagos, recounted the story of servitude which his forebears went through in the hands of the Yorubas and how terribly the Dahomeans felt under the Yoruba hegemony. He also made reference to how certain gifts were being named after the Alaafin of Oyo until recently. Interview at the Embassy of the Republic of Benin, Victoria Island, Lagos, 27:02:2001.
- 8.) In a personal communication, Professor Jide Osuntokun reiterated his earlier suggestion to the Nigerian Government, as an ex-Ambassador, that because of the seeming un viability and proximity to Nigeria, the Equatorial Guinea should be

annexed by Nigeria. It is not likely that he has changed his view on this matter. Discussion: 2002, Department of History & Strategic Studies, University of Lagos, Nigeria.

- 9.) Personal communication across Porto-Novo with prominent traditional rulers and Chiefs show that Dahomeans (now Republic of Benin) regarded that date (1748) as their day of independence for a long time. Cotonue, Porto-Novo, 2001.
- 10.) The fact is that many Dahomeans still live in the nostalgia of their great kings. In my interviews across the country in 2001, the people still speak glowingly of the attributes of their kings.

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