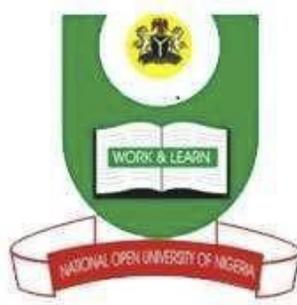


**INR 242**



**NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA**

**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**COURSE CODE: INR242  
3 CREDIT UNITS**

**COURSE TITLE: PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN DIPLOMACY**

**COURE  
GUIDE**

**INR242  
PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN DIPLOMACY**

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## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

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### **INR 242: Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy (3 Credit Units)**

This course examines the nitty-gritty of diplomacy in the pre-colonial period in Africa. The primary aim is to provide students of International Relations a comprehensive knowledge of how Pre-colonial African States maintained diplomatic relations with one another and with the outside world to foster peace and peaceful co-existence. Understanding how diplomacy held sway in pre-colonial African States and experiences of old, will enrich the background knowledge of modern student and future diplomats. Via this course, they will also be able to appraise and do a balanced critique of Pre-colonial African Diplomacy, compare same with the practice of diplomacy elsewhere during the same period, and ultimately apply the experience of workings of Pre-colonial period of diplomatic relations to the present milieu.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

**INR242** Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy is a one semester course for 200-Level undergraduate students in International Relations. It is a three-unit credit course designed to enable you have a bird's eye view of the salient issues in diplomacy during the pre-colonial period in Africa. The materials herein are structured and developed having in mind the Nigerian context in particular and African setting in general. This guide gives you an overview of the course. It also provides you with information on the organisation and general requirement of the course. Other basic and general rudiments of the course are contained here for your perusal. Each module is structured into four units. Each unit guide comprises of instructional material. It gives you a brief of the course content, course guidelines and suggestions as well as steps to take while studying. You can also find self-assessment exercises for your study.

### **Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)**

The primary Intended Learning Outcome (ILO) of this course is to have students of International Relations that have acquired a comprehensive knowledge of how Pre-colonial African States maintained diplomatic relations with one another and with the outside world to foster peace and peaceful co-existence. It is required that you, as a future policy-maker in international relations, will have a good understanding of this historical background in appraising the present for sustainable peaceful co-existence in Africa. This holistic approach will aid meaningful development in all spheres of social interactions.

To achieve this, there are intended learning outcomes that are tied to each unit of this course. By the time you successfully complete this course, you will be able to:

- define analytically Pre-colonial African Diplomacy;
- assess the scope of Pre-colonial African Diplomacy;
- trace the origin and historical perspective of Pre-colonial African Diplomacy;
- assess the impact of foreign influence on Pre-colonial African Diplomacy;
- explain the means and method through which diplomatic relations were carried out in Pre-colonial African period;
- discuss the nature of Pre-colonial Diplomacy;
- analyse how Pre-colonial African Diplomacy was effectively managed;
- appraise and do a balanced critique of Pre-colonial African Diplomacy;
- compare Pre-colonial African Diplomacy with the practice of Diplomacy elsewhere during the same period, and
- apply the experience of the workings of Pre-colonial period of diplomatic relations to the present.

The ILOs of each study unit can be found at the beginning and you can make references to it while studying. It is necessary and helpful for you to check at the end of the unit, if your progress is consistent with the stated outcomes and if you can conveniently answer the self-assessment exercises. The overall ILO of the course will be achieved, if you diligently study and complete all the units in this course.

## **WORKING THROUGH THE COURSE**

To complete the course, you are required to read the study units and other related materials. You will also need to undertake practical exercises for which you need a pen, a note-book, and other materials that will be listed in this guide. The exercises are to aid you in understanding the concepts being presented. At the end of each unit, you will be required to submit written assignment for assessment purposes.

At the end of the course, you will be expected to write a final examination.

## **THE COURSE MATERIAL**

In this course, as in all other courses, the major components you will find are as follows:

1. Course Guide
2. Study Units
3. Textbooks
4. Assignments

## **STUDY UNITS**

There are five modules of 20 study units in this course. They are:

### **Module 1: Definition, Concept and Scope of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy**

Unit 1: Understanding the Notion of Diplomacy?

Unit 2: The Concept and Scope of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy

Unit 3: The Concept and Scope of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy II

Unit 4: The Concept and Scope of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy III

### **Module 2: The Study and Origin of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy**

Unit 1: The study of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy

Unit 2: Political History of Pre-Colonial African States

Unit 4: Trade History of Pre-Colonial African States

Unit 5: Trade History of Pre-Colonial African States II

### **Module 3: External Influences on Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy**

Unit 1: Islam and Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy

Unit 2: The Impact of Islam on Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy

Unit 3: European Contact and Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy

Unit 4: European Influence on Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy

### **Module 4: Natures, Management, Means, Methods, and Practice of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy**

Unit 1: The Nature of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy

Unit 2: The Management of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy

Unit 3: Means and Methods of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy

Unit 4: The Practice of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy

### **Module 5: Analyses and Appraisal of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy**

Unit 1: Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy: The Kanem-Bornu Example

Unit 2: Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy: The Dahomey Example

Unit 3: European Diplomacy during the Pre-Colonial African Period

Unit 4: The Relevance of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy in Present-Day Africa

As you would observe, the course begins with the basics and expands into a more elaborate, complex and detailed form. All you need to do is to follow the instructions as provided in each unit. In addition, some self-assessment exercises have been provided with which you can test your progress with the text and determine if your study is fulfilling the stated objectives. Tutor marked assignments have also been provided to aid your study. All these will assist you to be able to fully grasp knowledge of international law and organisation.

### **TEXTBOOKS AND REFERENCES**

At the end of each unit, you will find a list of relevant reference materials which you may yourself wish to consult as the need arises, even though I have made efforts to provide you with the most important information you need to pass this course. However, I would encourage you, as a fourth year student to cultivate the habit of consulting as many relevant materials as you are able to within the time available to you. In particular, be sure to consult whatever material you are advised to consult before attempting any exercise.

### **ASSESSMENT**

Two types of assessment are involved in the course: the Self-Assessment Exercises (SAEs), and the Tutor-Marked Assessment (TMA) questions. Your answers to the SAEs are not meant to be submitted, but they are also important since they give you an opportunity to assess your own understanding of the course content. Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMAs) on the other hand are to be carefully answered and kept in your assignment file for submission and marking. This will count for 30% of your total score in the course.

### **TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

At the end of each unit, you will find tutor-marked assignments. There is an average of two tutor-marked assignments per unit. This will allow you to engage the course as robustly as possible. You need to submit at least four assignments of which the three with the highest marks will be recorded as part of your total course grade. This will account for 10 per cent each, making a total of 30 per cent. When you complete your assignments, send them including your form to your tutor for formal assessment on or before the deadline.

Self-assessment exercises are also provided in each unit. The exercises should help you to evaluate your understanding of the material so far. These are not to be submitted. You will find all answers to these at the end of the unit.

## FINAL EXAMINATION AND GRADING

There will be a final examination at the end of the course. The examination carries a total of 70 percent of the total course grade. The examination will reflect the contents of what you have learnt and the self-assessments and tutor-marked assignments. You therefore need to revise your course materials before-hand.

## COURSE MARKING SCHEME

The following table sets out how the actual course marking is broken down.

ASSESSMENT	MARKS
Four assignments (the best four of the assignment submitted for marking)	Four assignments, each mark out of 10%, but highest scoring three selected, then total of 30%
Final Examination	70% of overall course score
<b>Total</b>	<b>100% course score</b>

## COURSE OVERVIEW PRESENTATION SCHEME

Unit	Title of work	Weeks Activity	Assessment (End of Unit)
	Course Guide		
<b>Module 1 Definition, Concept and Scope of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy</b>			
1	What is Diplomacy	Week 1	Assignment 1
2	Concept and Scope of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy	Week 2	Assignment 2
3	Concept and scope of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy II	Week 3	Assignment 3
4	Concept and scope of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy III	Week 4	Assignment 4
<b>Module 2 Study and Origin of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy</b>			
1	The Study of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy	Week 4	Assignment 1
2	Political History of Pre-Colonial African States	Week 5	Assignment 2
3	Trade History of Pre-Colonial African States	Week 5	Assignment 3
4	Trade History of Pre-Colonial African States II	Week 6	Assignment 4
<b>Module 3 External Influence on Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy</b>			

1	Islam and Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy	Week 7	Assignment 1
2	The Impact of Islam on Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy	Week 7	Assignment 2
3	European Contact and Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy	Week 8	Assignment 3
4	European influence on Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy	Week 8	Assignment 4
<b>Module 4 Nature, Management, Methods and Practice of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy</b>			
1	Nature of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy	Week 9	Assignment 1
2	Management of Pre-Colonial	Week 9	Assignment 2

	African Diplomacy		
3	Means and methods of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy	Week 9	Assignment 3
4	The Practice of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy	Week 10	Assignment 4
<b>Module 5 Analyses and Appraisal of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy</b>			
1	Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy: The Kanem-Bornu Example	Week 11	Assignment 1
2	Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy: The Dahomey Example	Week 11	Assignment 2
3	European Diplomacy during the Pre-Colonial Africa period	Week 12	Assignment 3
4	The Relevance of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy in Present Day Africa	Week 12	Assignment 4
	Revision	1 week	
	Examination	1 week	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>14 weeks</b>	

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED FOR THE COURSE

This course builds on what you have learnt in the 100 Levels. It will be helpful if you try to review what you studied earlier. Second, you may need to purchase one or two texts recommended as important for your mastery of the course content. You need quality time in a study friendly environment every week. If you are computer-literate (which ideally you should be), you should be prepared to visit recommended websites. You should also cultivate the habit of visiting reputable physical libraries accessible to you.

## **TUTORS AND TUTORIALS**

There are 15 hours of tutorials provided in support of the course. You will be notified of the dates and location of these tutorials, together with the name and phone number of your tutor as soon as you are allocated a tutorial group. Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignments, and keep a close watch on your progress. Be sure to send in your tutor marked assignments promptly, and feel free to contact your tutor in case of any difficulty with your self-assessment exercise, tutor-marked assignment or the grading of an assignment. In any case, you are advised to attend the tutorials regularly and punctually. Always take a list of such prepared questions to the tutorials and participate actively in the discussions.

## **TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS (TMAs)**

Usually, there are four online tutor-marked assignments in this course. Each assignment will be marked over ten percent. The best three (that is the highest three of the 10 marks) will be counted. This implies that the total mark for the best three assignments will constitute 30% of your total course work. You will be able to complete your online assignments successfully from the information and materials contained in your references, reading and study units.

## **FINAL EXAMINATION AND GRADING**

The final examination for **INR242: Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy** will be of two hours duration and have a value of 70% of the total course grade. The examination will consist of multiple choice and fill-in-the-gaps questions which will reflect the practice exercises and tutor-marked assignments you have previously encountered. All areas of the course will be assessed. It is important that you use adequate time to revise the entire course. You may find it useful to review your tutor-marked assignments before the examination. The final examination covers information from all aspects of the course.

## **HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS COURSE**

1. There are 20 units in this course. You are to spend one week in each unit. In distance learning, the study units replace the university lecture. This is one of the great advantages of distance learning; you can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suites you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to the lecturer. In the same way a lecturer might give you some reading to do. The study units tell you when to read and which are your text materials or recommended books. You are provided with exercises to do at appropriate points, just as a lecturer might give you in a class exercise.
2. Each of the study units follows a common format. The first item is an introduction to the subject-matter of the unit, and how a particular unit is integrated with other units and the course as a whole. Next to this is a set of learning objectives. These objectives let you know what you should be able to do, by the time you have completed the unit. These learning objectives are meant to guide your study. The moment a unit is finished, you must go back and check whether you have achieved the objectives. If this is made a habit, then you will significantly improve your chance of passing the course.

3. The main body of the unit guides you through the required reading from other sources. This will usually be either from your reference or from a reading section.
4. The following is a practical strategy for working through the course. If you run into any trouble, then put a call through your tutor or visit the study centre nearest to you. Remember that your tutor's job is to help you. When you need assistance, do not hesitate to call and ask your tutor to provide you necessary assistance.
5. Read this course guide thoroughly. It is your first assignment.
6. Organise a study schedule - Design a 'Course Overview' to guide you through the course. Note the time you are expected to spend on each unit and how the assignments relate to the units.
7. Important information; e.g. details of your tutorials and the date of the first day of the semester is available at the study centre.
8. You need to gather all the information into one place, such as your diary or a wall calendar. Whatever method you choose to use, you should decide on and write in your own dates and schedule of work for each unit.
9. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything to stay faithful to it.
10. The major reason that students fail is that they get behind in their coursework. If you get into difficulties with your schedule, please let your tutor or course coordinator know before it is too late for help.
11. Turn to Unit 1, and read the introduction and the objectives for the unit.
12. Assemble the study materials. You will need your references for the unit you are studying at any point in time.
13. As you work through the unit, you will know what sources to consult for further information.
14. Visit your study centre whenever you need up-to-date information.
15. Well before the relevant online TMA due dates, visit your study centre for relevant information and updates. Keep in mind that you will learn a lot by doing the assignment carefully. They have been designed to help you meet the objectives of the course and, therefore, will help you pass the examination.
16. Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm that you have achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, review the study materials or consult your tutor. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try to space your study so that

- you can keep yourself on schedule.
17. After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Check that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the course objectives (listed in the course guide).

## CONCLUSION

This is a theory course but you will get the best out of it if you cultivate the habit of relating it to contemporary issues.

## SUMMARY

The course guide is designed to enlighten you on what to expect in Pre- Colonial African Diplomacy. You will find the course guide very useful in understanding the main academic and professional thrust of the course. Whether you intend to become a researcher or a practitioner in the field of Diplomacy – especially African Diplomacy, you will find the course guide handy to familiarise you with the basic and potential rudiments of the course. A painstaking and diligent study of this course guide will get you prepared to master the course easily.

We wish you success in the course and look forward to your successful completion of INR242: Pre-colonial African Diplomacy.

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## **Module 1: Definition, Concept and Scope of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy**

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### **Module Introduction**

This is a very interesting course that touches on diplomacy and all aspects of Pre-colonial African life. To broaden our understanding, it is important to begin with conceptual clarification of the concept of diplomacy and its scope in the Pre-colonial African period. It is for that purpose that this module has four units, viz:

Unit 1: What is Diplomacy?

Unit 2: The Concept and Scope of Pre-colonial African Diplomacy

Unit 3: The Concept and Scope of Pre-colonial African Diplomacy II

Unit 4: The Concept and Scope of Pre-colonial African Diplomacy III

### **UNIT 1: WHAT IS DIPLOMACY?**

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- 1.2 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)
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- 1.4 Self-Assessment Exercises(s)
- 1.5 Summary
- 1.6 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 1.7 References/Further Reading
- 1.8 Answers to SAEs



#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Diplomacy is simply the management of relations between sovereign states and other

international actors. This unit is focused on Diplomacy in Pre-Colonial African period, scope of diplomacy, Diplomatic History and Diplomacy as practised by actors in the international system. It is important to understand the basis of African Diplomacy in the Pre-Colonial period so as to determine whether the African experience can really be termed diplomatic from the outset of this course.



## **1.2 INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES (ILOs)**

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- define Diplomacy;
- explain the scope of diplomacy;
- trace the History and origin of diplomacy;
- list functions and qualities of diplomats, and
- differentiate the relationship between diplomacy and Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy.



## **1.3 MAIN CONTENT**

### **1.3.1 Definition of Diplomacy**

In virtually all fields of human endeavour, there is no single acceptable definition of any concept. This might be so because of the dynamic nature of things. There are different views of things depending on sides from which they are considered. So is it with the concept of diplomacy. What we can aspire to get for a clear concept of the term is to be near the term as much as possible.

Diplomacy is defined by one scholar as the application of tact, commonsense and intelligence with foreign officials. Another definition says it is the accomplishing of a country's national interest in the International community through peaceful means devoid of war. This latter definition that stresses peace and denounces war will later be seen as more relevant to this study. Yet, a third well-known definition states that diplomacy is the conduct of business between states by peaceful means.

The working definition for this course, however, will lay emphasis on Diplomacy being a process through which the business of states in the international system is carried out by officials through appropriate means, methods and strategies that will enhance peace and discourage wars. It is used to reach agreement, compromise or settlement where actors' objectives are in conflict or competition in the international system.

The following analysis of the working definition will enhance your understanding of the subject-matter.

- Diplomacy is a process, an action involving actors in the international system.
- The actors are appropriate officials appointed for the process. They are appointed in consideration of their suitability for the task-through their competence, educational background, experience, tact, qualities etc.
- Diplomacy applies means, methods and strategies in the process of getting things done. This implies that appropriate means should be employed in appropriate circumstance – Negotiation, bargaining, financial inducements and aids, exchange of presents, promise of support and of course threat are all strategies of diplomacy.
- The definition stresses the fact that there are conflicting and competing interests in the international system which must be reconciled in a peaceful means for diplomacy to thrive.
- Lastly, in pursuing national interest, the international community should not be thrown into chaos. Peace should be maintained at all cost. For diplomacy to be effective, war should not be the outcome. Simply put, war is a failure of diplomacy.

Though Diplomacy requires the employment of tact, wit, intelligence and common sense, it is not cunningness or craftiness. A diplomat may be shrewd and quick witted but it does not mean he is cunning. A student once attributed that being diplomatic means not being straightforward. He saw the Oyo people of Yorubaland as cunning people who hide their true intentions and the Ekiti as forthright and straightforward. He thereby concluded that the Oyos are diplomatic while the Ekitis are not. But this is an error. Diplomacy employs tact, shrewdness, level-headedness, calculations, quick wit, and apt response to issues, reservation and of course a very deep analytical mind. A diplomat should be quick to hear but very slow to speak. These are just the type of qualities required when dealing with many people from diverse backgrounds and cultures at official level.

### **1.3.2 Scope of Diplomacy**

The study of Diplomacy as an academic activity has been misconstrued over the years. Some scholars think it is the summation of a Nation's foreign policy while others see it as merely projecting the interests of a nation in the international community of conflicting and competing interests. Yet, others see it as a forerunner of the newly emerging course referred to as "Peace studies".

Suffice to say that Diplomacy as a field of study has found a place in the curriculum of many universities in Britain, Europe and the United States. It is studied distinctly from other aspects of International Relations. It is however imperative to state unequivocally that Diplomacy even though distinct from some other units of International Relations is closely related to International Relations. Note that Diplomacy should not be seen as isolated but integrated with all forms of international relations – be it International Economics, Trade, communication, Strategic studies, Peace studies, Conflict Resolution, War, National interest, foreign policy, or International Law and Conventions.

For a clearer picture of the above-mentioned, an analytical comparison will be attempted

to highlight the scope of Diplomacy:

1. Diplomacy thrives in the projection of a state's national interest in the International community
2. More than any other thing, International Economics, trade and commerce shape a nation's interest and the state always seek to defend and maintain this through Diplomacy.
3. Diplomacy and Communication must work together to get desired diplomatic results for a state.
4. Strategic studies is an integral part of diplomacy in order to get states' business done.
5. Peace studies and conflict resolution make extensive use of diplomacy
6. It is the undesirability of war that necessitates Diplomacy.
7. The foreign policy of a nation can only be effectively carried out by sound diplomatic tenets.
8. Diplomacy is conducted in accordance with International Law and Conventions.

Clearly, Diplomacy is an integral part of all other aspects of International relations.

### **1.3.3 Diplomatic History**

The history of Diplomacy can be traced from the earliest times through the medieval periods to the Italian-city states system and even to the Pre-Colonial period. A list of the various historical periods of Diplomacy will be most appropriate, viz:

1. Diplomacy, even though not in the official form, originated with human existence. The history of mankind is replete with forms of Diplomacy. Even in the Bible records, there were diplomatic relations between the Israelites and other Semitic peoples of the land of Canaan. The Quran also stress the existence of diplomatic relations between the Arabs and the other peoples of the world. Note that notable men of God like Abraham, Moses, Isaac, and Jacob used diplomatic methods in resolving land and territorial matters to avoid war.
2. After the primitive society, came the medieval European system which manifested at the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire. The period was characterised by ethnic, religious, political and ideological wars. It was in fact referred to as the Dark Ages. The spread of Islam however put a check on the total collapse of diplomacy then.
3. By the late 15th Century, the Italian city States established permanent diplomatic missions (i.e. embassies), career diplomats and complete privileges and immunities that went with them. By this period the Greeks, Egyptians, Assyrians and the Romans only established ad hoc envoys. Some scholars have argued that the Italian city state system is the bridge between the medieval and the modern

International Society and State System.

4. The treaty of Westphalia which ended the thirty-year war, which engulfed Europe, also gave impetus to modern Diplomacy.  
Get a copy of *History of Europe 1789 – 1919* by Michael Omolewa and read about The Treaty of Westphalia. This treaty gave credence to the concepts of:
  - Sovereign statehood
  - International law
  - Diplomacy
  - Balance of power
5. The Concert System which was an epoch-making event in European periodic summit or conference system meant to discuss or settle matters bothering on common interest is another annal in the World Diplomatic History. The concert system started in 1815 when the Napoleonic wars nearly routed the whole of Europe.
6. The Peace Conference which was convened after the First World War (i.e. The Versailles Treaty) is another annal. The Versailles Treaty encouraged the notion of self-determination in the modern International system.
7. Pre-colonial Africa too could trace the origin of its Diplomatic relations to early times of African existence until the period of the Trans-Atlantic trade in slaves, ivory, beads and other goods. Treaties were ratified solemnly, widely accepted protocol regulated negotiations, sanctions were provided for the observance of treaties and embassies were sent to Europe with emissaries performing official diplomatic duties. These diplomatic activities went on in the pre-colonial period covering a period of four or five hundred years up to the last decade of the nineteenth century before the partition and the establishment of colonies. With the foregoing, you can appreciate with clarity, the historical antecedents of Diplomacy.

#### **1.3.4 Practice of Diplomacy**

For Diplomacy to flourish, there are practitioners officially appointed to perform diplomatic functions. Such appointed officials must be imbued with certain characteristics and qualities which must include the following among others:

- Sound Bargaining power
- Good negotiation skill
- Tact
- Intelligence
- Shrewdness
- Humility
- Sound Analytical mind

- Quick wit
- Apt response to issues
- Self-initiative
- Level-headedness
- Common sense
- Eloquence
- Decency
- Sociability

The diplomat needs all these qualities among others to effectively perform his/her functions amongst which are:

- Representation: A diplomat/envoy/ambassador or emissary is the ‘eyes’ and ‘ears’ of his state, people, culture and country in another country.
- Negotiation and Bargaining: He is the instrument of dialogue for his people. He should know when to sound tough or compromise. He should be firm or soft as the situation requires and at his own discretion.
- Extraction of Information: This has to be cautiously performed so that the envoy will not be labeled a spy or be accused of espionage activities by his host country. A diplomat has to reveal helpful information concerning the host country to his home country. He has to be very careful in doing this.

### **1.3.5 The Relationship between Western European Concept of Diplomacy and Pre-colonial African Diplomacy**

This section relates the concept of Diplomacy by Western Europe to the practice of Diplomacy in Pre-Colonial Africa. Suffice to note that this course is primarily about Pre-Colonial Africa. However, the subject evolved in Western Europe but we seek to apply it to Pre-colonial Africa here.

It is appropriate to draw a parallel between the definition of Diplomacy and some aspects of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy.

- If diplomacy is the conduct of business between states by peaceful means, then Pre-Colonial Africa was no stranger to diplomacy. This is because in Africa before the colonial period, diplomacy as carried out was the same as elsewhere in the World. Treaties were negotiated, frontiers (of trade and authority more often than of territory) were delimited, past disputes were settled and potential crisis argued away.
- If diplomacy uses means, methods and strategies to get state business done in the international community of conflicting and competing interests, then Pre-colonial Africa is a veteran. The means employed by Pre-Colonial Africa Diplomacy include sending of embassies both ad-hoc and semi-permanent, present giving and receiving and the use of regular courier services.
- In the definition of Diplomacy, officials are appointed to carry out the business and so also Pre-colonial African diplomacy made use of emissaries, envoys and

representatives to facilitate the easy conduct of diplomatic relations.

- Diplomacy is guided by International law and conventions which is binding on actors and so also in the Pre-Colonial African experience, customary African laws which were acceptable to all actors were formulated to guide diplomatic relations.

With the foregoing, you should be able to effectively relate the Western European concept of diplomacy to the Pre-colonial African situation.

#### 1.4 Self-Assessment Exercises 1

1. \_\_\_\_\_ is a process through which the business of states in the international system is carried out by officials through appropriate means, methods and strategies that will enhance peace and discourage wars.  
(a) Transnational trade (b) International relation (c) Diplomacy (d) foreign policy
2. War is a \_\_\_\_\_ of diplomacy.  
(a) factor (b) function (c) failure (d) future
3. Diplomacy is an integral part of all except  
(a) International relations (b) undesirability of war (c) foreign policy (d) sub-national politics.
4. Diplomacy originated to discourage wars. True or false?
5. \_\_\_\_\_ is not a function of diplomats.  
(a) Representation (b) extraction of information (c) spying (d) bargaining.
6. Pre-Colonial Africa had no evidence of diplomacy. True or false?



#### 1.5 SUMMARY

This unit drew a parallel between the concept, scope, historical antecedent, practice of diplomacy and relationship with the Pre-Colonial African situation. We can thus see that Pre-Colonial Africa had an experience that can truly be termed “diplomatic”. We thus move on to the other units on a solid foundation.

#### 1.6 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain the working definition of Diplomacy in this unit.
2. Defend the position, with evidence, that Pre-Colonial Africa truly practiced Diplomacy?



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### **1.8 Answers to SAEs 1**

1. C; 2. C; 3. D; 4. True; 5. C; 6. False.

# Unit 2: CONCEPT AND SCOPE OF PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN DIPLOMACY

## CONTENTS

- 2.1 Introduction
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  - 2.3.3 Concept of Geopolitics and Government: Pre-Colonial African Geopolitics
- 2.4 Self-Assessment Exercises 2
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- 2.7 References/Further Reading
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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This second unit exposes the student to specific concept and scope of Pre-colonial African Diplomacy as distinct and at the same time related to the Western European concept of Diplomacy. Specifically, it familiarises the student with key concepts associated with pre-colonial African Diplomacy. Concepts such as Pre-colonial African International Relations and Geopolitics will be discussed. This will enable you to have a clearer understanding of the various concepts and you will be able to effectively apply them to the workings of Pre-colonial African Diplomacy.



### 2.2 INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES (ILOs)

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- identify the key concepts of pre-colonial African diplomacy;
- explain the relationship between the various concepts;
- understand the peculiarity of pre-colonial African Diplomacy in its conceptual setting;
- list and discuss the scope and concept of Pre-colonial African Diplomacy, and
- differentiate concepts of Pre-colonial African International Relations and Geopolitics.



## 2.3 MAIN CONTENT

### 2.3.1 Key Concepts

As earlier mentioned in the preceding unit, Diplomacy as a subject of study evolved in the curriculum of Western Europe. However, it is only through the understanding of the Pre-colonial African experience that its diplomacy becomes manifest and better appreciated. To achieve that end will require familiarity with some key concepts.

These concepts form a related whole and they transcend the scope of the subject matter in this study. The concepts also highlight the range covered by Pre-colonial African Diplomacy. The concept can hardly be divorced or separated from the scope (range of study) and, hence, they are discussed together in the subsequent two or more units.

Of course, the concepts and scope are interwoven as they permeate the whole issue of Pre-colonial African life in relation to Pre-colonial trade, international relations, Geopolitics, Government, Customary laws, Contact Economics, Commercial frontiers and even missionary activities across the African frontiers.

In a nutshell, note these basic conceptions as postulated by a scholar of Pre-colonial African Diplomacy. We may rely on this basic narrative to expatiate more on the issue of discourse. It states that: *International relations in pre-colonial (Africa) were conducted in accordance with customary law, which exhibited broadly similar characteristics over a wide area. Trade and politics, linking the coast, the forest and the Savannah led to the development of diplomacy in the more centrally-organized states.*

The afore-mentioned conception that also highlights the scope of pre-colonial African Diplomacy takes cognisance of the following facts:

- The existence of a customary law
- Similar characteristics over a wide geo-political area.
- External trade, commerce and economy.
- Centrally organised states.

Yet, another idea which we shall consider states that: *“In Africa during the pre-colonial period, several groups of states maintained relationship with one another in time of peace at an official level and on a more or less regular basis”.*

The foregoing underscores the following facts:

- The existence of organised states and governments as actors in pre-colonial African Diplomacy.
- The existence of peace conducive for diplomatic relations.
- The existence of an official level of interaction.
- Long standing diplomatic relations between African states.

### **2.3.2 Concept of Pre-colonial African International Relations**

You should have known by now that the concept of international relations evolved in Western Europe where it has been subject of much study. It has been hardly touched upon by students of the indigenous institutions of Pre-colonial Africa and its history.

Despite this neglect and the unwritten nature of many of the historical sources, there is abundant evidence of formal relations at the highest governmental levels between the different peoples of Africa in the pre-colonial period, and there is even some evidence of the existence of an interstate system. It is this concept of formal relations between pre-colonial African peoples that informs the concept of pre-colonial African Diplomacy. Of course, these relations transcend periods of peace and war with intermediary phases of tension and negotiation.

We can of course argue, reasonably too, that while pre-colonial African Inter-group relations pre-supposes the entire interstate relations at all times, either during the time of war or peace, pre-colonial African Diplomacy is only a part of its inter-group relations which usually thrived in times of peace. As I earlier mentioned in unit 1, war is failure of diplomacy. International Relations or inter-group relations, as applicable to Pre-colonial African scenario on the other hand covers and transcends war and peace, tension and negotiation.

There are various ways in which the inter-group relations of Pre-colonial Africa were based and the tool of diplomacy might be used to forestall crisis within the international system regarding African communities. Their relationship might be based on rivalry from a distance as with Dahomey and Asante. Sometimes it was on conquest as with Dahomey and Oyo. Sometimes, the relationships might be based on common ancestry and traditions as with the Yoruba and Fante states.

I hereby advise you to read more on the relations between the Empires of African during the pre-colonial period. A textbook on the History of Africa will be helpful in this regard. We shall, however, deal with the relations between some pre-colonial African states later on in this course. However, the mutual relationships between these pre-colonial African states called for official contact. This official contact was maintained by methods and procedures which historians of the non-African world describe as diplomatic. We will deal with the methods and procedures in later units of this course.

We see here that in Africa before the imperial period, the subject matter of international relations seemed to have been much the same as with what obtained in other areas of the world. Since one of our earlier definitions stresses that diplomacy is the conduct of business between states by peaceful means, it is thus evident that pre-colonial Africa was well-versed in diplomatic tenets within the scope of Pre-colonial African inter-group relations.

### 2.3.3 The Concept of Geopolitics and Government

These twin concepts of Geopolitics and Government play major roles as actors in shaping the trend of Pre-colonial African Diplomacy. Suffice to reiterate that the concepts are closely related to Pre-colonial African Inter-group relations. Without these concepts, Pre-colonial African Diplomacy is impossible. You will of course discern the nature of the peculiarity of pre-colonial African Diplomacy within the African context of pre-colonial African communal or organized-state government.

**Pre-colonial African Geopolitics:** Geopolitics can simply be defined as: “the global set of relationship that a continent assumes in interacting with other regions of the world in the course of the struggle and competition for power, influence, and economic resources”.

From the above definition are the following key facts:

- The set of relationships should be globally acceptable.
- There is international interaction between global actors.
- There is the struggle and competition for power, influence and economic resources.

With such understanding of the concept of geopolitics, can we surely say Pre-colonial Africa has what is referred to as such? Of course, it shows that Africa, especially Saharan Africa, has been more of a pawn in the hands of outsiders than an independent player in pursuit of the region’s self-interest. This is clearly evident in the history of the transatlantic slave trade during the pre-colonial period and even during the colonial rule. Africa had always been vulnerable to outside interference, manipulation and control. It is difficult to prove that Africa had been an independent player in the control of its destiny in the international community.

However, note that this is more so because of the rise of modern Europe in about the seventeenth century and its incursion into Africa in pursuit of economic exploitation. We can safely posit that in pre-colonial Africa, there was still a semblance of the concept of geopolitics fashioned in line within the context of pre-colonial African diplomatic tenets. We shall thus attempt to highlight the concept of geopolitics in relation to the pre-colonial African experience.

In Pre-colonial Africa, the global sets of relationships are made acceptable by conducting relations in accordance with customary laws, which reflect broad similar characteristics over a wide area. Inter-African embassies enjoyed a degree of prestige and immunity comparable to that which protected European diplomacy.

A widely accepted protocol regulated negotiation. Treaties were solemnly concluded and sanctions were provided for their observance. Embassies were exchanged. North Africa, the Arab world and the Islamised states exchanged embassies and envoys.

There were diplomatic relations with both Muslims and Europeans which tended to increase the influence in West African politics and society of the literate elites. The indigenous system of international relations guided by these set of relationships was flexible and effective.

Clearly, the aforementioned highlight of the concept of geopolitics in relation to the pre-colonial African experience also brings to light the issue of interaction between global actors. I need not repeat that the Pre-colonial African Diplomatic experience within the context of its geopolitics was replete with interaction between global actors. Pre-colonial Africa had diplomatic ties with Western Europe and the Arab world.

Another highlight of the concept of geopolitics is the struggle and competition for power, influence and economic resources. In international affairs, interest, more than anything else is the dominant factor that shapes foreign policy. It may be national interest, regional interest or communal interest as the setting may call for. Interest shapes the foreign policy of international actors. We should however note that the competition for resources and wealth is always the foremost of these interests, with this comes power and influence. Pre-colonial Africa is no exception. Trade and politics, linking the coast, the savannah and the desert led to the development of diplomacy. Transatlantic trade and trade in other goods created economic frontiers which attracted the Europeans. Commercial activities boomed during this period and sound diplomatic tie also developed to sustain the economic prowess of pre- colonial Africa.

You will now see the relevance of the concept of geopolitics in the pre-colonial Africa situation.

## **2.4 Self-Assessment Exercises 2**

1. List key concepts related to Pre-colonial African Diplomacy.
2. Discuss the concept of pre-colonial African International Relations.
3. Analyse the concept of Pre-colonial African Geopolitics.



## **2.5 SUMMARY**

In this unit, we have enumerated the basic concepts of pre-colonial African Diplomacy and you have seen clearly the close relationships between these concepts which explain the peculiarity of pre-colonial African diplomacy both in theory and practice. We are able to bring all the various concepts in this unit together to prove that pre-colonial Africa truly experienced a diplomatic era both in theory and practice. As we move on to the next

unit which is a continuation of the concepts of pre-colonial African diplomacy, we hope to paint a vivid picture of the diplomatic experience of pre-colonial Africa.

## 2.6 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Enumerate and discuss in detail two concepts of pre-colonial African diplomacy.
2. List and discuss the factors that shape international affairs in pre-colonial Africa.



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## 2.8 ANSWERS to SAE-2

1. The key concepts are: The existence of a customary law; Similar characteristics over a wide geo-political area; External trade, commerce and economy; Centrally organised states; The existence of organised states and governments as actors in pre-colonial African Diplomacy; The existence of peace conducive for diplomatic relations; The existence of an official level of interaction and Long standing diplomatic relations between African states.
2. By Pre-colonial African International Relations, we mean evidences of formal relations at the highest governmental levels between the different peoples of Africa before the coming of colonialist. It is the evidence of the existence of an interstate system in Africa. These interstate relations cut across periods of peace and war with intermediary phases of tension and negotiation among early Africa States.

3. Pre-colonial African Geopolitics underscores the place of Africa in global politics. Though it was more of negative recognition on account of the transatlantic slave trade, the geopolitics had positive relationships that were conducted in accordance with customary laws, which reflect broad similar characteristics over a wide area. Inter-African embassies enjoyed a degree of prestige and immunity comparable to that which protected European diplomacy. A widely accepted protocol regulated negotiation. Treaties were solemnly concluded and sanctions were provided for their observance. Embassies were exchanged. North Africa, the Arab world and the Islamised states exchanged embassies and envoys, to mention but a few.

# Unit 3: CONCEPT AND SCOPE OF PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN DIPLOMACY II

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This Unit 3 is dedicated to the concept of pre-colonial African government. As previously noted, this concept is closely linked with pre-colonial African diplomacy and a clear understanding of it will enhance the understanding of the whole course.



### 3.2 INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES (ILOs)

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- state vividly the basic concept of pre-colonial African government;
- identify the basic tenets in pre-colonial African state administration;
- explain the forms of pre-colonial African government;
- list features of pre-colonial African government;
- analyse the foreign relations of pre-colonial African states, and
- evaluate the political culture of early African states.



### 3.3 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.3.1 The Theory and Concept of Pre-colonial African Government

Your understanding of pre-colonial African diplomacy depends largely on the understanding of the theory and concept of the notion of government in pre-colonial African era. The ‘community government’ and centrally organised states played active roles in Pre-colonial African Diplomacy. We should do well to bear in mind that one major actor in pre-colonial diplomacy in Africa was the state represented by competent officials to carry out diplomatic duties at official level.

Suffice to distinguish between two types of government in pre-colonial Africa. These two forms of superlocal centralised governments evolved throughout Africa during the pre-colonial African period. They are: Chieftaincies and States.

### **3.3.2 Chieftaincy**

A chieftaincy is conceived and practised when a local chief becomes a chief of chiefs. The chief is recognized as a leader of a dispersed set of sedentary or nomadic polities. The “paramount chief” heads a council of leaders, including rival members of his own chiefly lineage. The leader-in-council acts for the entire non-local polity in ways reminiscent of the governance of village polities. It is however concerned primarily with coordinating relations among previously independent polities. These include chiefly rituals, public works and most especially, relations with foreign polities. Ritualised exchanges among previously independent co-ethnic leaders shift toward asymmetrical exchanges in which the lower-ranked chiefs send subsistence products to the paramount often in large gatherings; the paramount in turn send specialized goods from foreign trade or weapons symbolizing its more central position. He expands his power by channeling resources to followers and the needy.

You will have to note here that the system of exchange of gifts and presents which will be dealt with more elaborately later in this course is one of the fundamental tenets of pre-colonial African setting. It is this exchange system that the African indigenous government used as a potent tool in fostering its diplomatic antics on its neighbours in inter-group relations. It is a major diplomatic tool that makes diplomacy thrives effectively within the scope of pre-colonial African international relations. A whole unit may be dedicated to this exchange system later on in the course.

Relations to other polities are carried on through trade, marriage relations, raiding, feuds, joint communal hunts and inheritable peace treaties between polities. Household heads establish foreign-trade relations with individuals in other polities using such institutional practices as blood brotherhood and quasi-kinship to protect outsiders. Cross-polity relations emulate kinship, clientage linkages to weaker (including hunting bands) or more powerful (including chieftaincies and states) neighbours, or clanship (i.e. putative unilineal descent relations based on a charter of common ancestry).

Note that the chieftaincy monarch or paramount is vested with the primary duty of representing his polity to foreign authorities. This means relations through warfare,

alliances, traditional ceremonies and gift exchanges. You should also note that the paramount sign treaties of non-aggression and rites of passage. The entire polity or representatives gather at the paramount's residence for annual ceremonies such as war and the death or installation of a new chief.

Chiefs supplicate spirits of the land to renew its fertility and engage the help of chiefly ancestors to foster polity welfare. The most well-known of such rituals is the "Incwala" ceremony of the Swazi now in South Africa.

So far, attempt has been made to describe the concept of pre-colonial African government in relation to its diplomacy. Suffice it to add that there are traits that characterise African indigenous government that do not necessarily influence African external relations in pre-colonial times. Such traits include loyalty to traditional institutions, observance of age-grades system, hierarchy and the inheritance of rank, non-recognition of female equality with males, age and gender distinctions and other such characteristics. You should note that the overall qualities of pre-colonial African government under the chieftaincy only help in fashioning a government peculiar to Africa in the pre-colonial times and which portrays the kind of character traits exhibited in pre-colonial external relations.

### **3.3.3 States**

The term "state" is sometimes used to cover all indigenous African political system, the term "centralised state" (population from 250,000 into the millions) being reserved for what elsewhere are called states. This avoids invidious comparisons by lumping distinct constitutional frame works into one category. For comparative purposes states are centralised polities with a permanent bureaucracy living in a fortified capital under a hereditary ruler who has sovereign powers over a hinterland area and its peoples. True centralised states evolved within most regions of Africa but proliferated in northern, western, and eastern Africa with incipient or proto-states developing rapidly by 1850, that is, in the central and southern regions. Each region, and each state within it, are complex and unique societies with rich histories and both regional and original principles and institutions of governance.

The earliest states of Africa are among the oldest in the world, going back to Egypt (c. 5500 B.P) and early Aksum (c. 2500 B.P) in Ethiopia. The influence of ancient Egypt upon later state development throughout the continent is a matter of ongoing research. Proto-states or chieftaincies in Zaire and both central and southern Africa – Barotse and Zulu, for example – had little or no centralised bureaucracies. Important offices in the hands of rival heirs produced instability and friction. Once the step was taken to a non kin, loyal, and dependent set of central official, centralised statehood quickly followed. Such steps generally occurred in reaction to local scarcity of essential resources, conquest, migration, control over trade, and contagion, amounting to the formation of centrally organised defenses against nearby predatory states. Principles of African statecraft are most clearly seen in their structures of administration, in foreign relations,

and in the political culture associated with centralised governance.

### **3.3.4 State Administration**

State Administration traditionally involved the central government and its relations to outer or peripheral segments of the state. The pinnacle and central symbol of the state was the monarch and his dynastic lineage, the palace organisation, his family, and the other royals. A council of nobles made up the central government, serving as a central executive arm that carried out the decisions of the monarch and a variably constituted inner council of advisers. Within this group was a small group of electors who appointed the next monarch. In addition, there were war councils, religious leaders, and representatives of various districts and segments of the state. In a number of African monarchies, high offices were reserved for women royals or “queen mothers”. Their duties represented the recognition, nurturance, and inevitability of opposing yet complementary interests within the state which must always work together to create its ultimate continuity.

The capital town is highly stratified, with a central place given over to governmental functions – the royal palace and nearby residences of the ruling aristocracy. Market areas, craft specialists, and traders have their special wards, and there is generally a place for foreign traders and emissaries either within the city or close to its walls. The governmental area is also a place for adjudicating civil and criminal cases, for ceremonies, and for public displays of royal pomp and the sumptuary lifestyles of the ruling nobility. The common folk are divided by occupation, wealth, ethnicity, and personal patron-client relations with those in the ruling groups. Those of servile status (slaves, pawns, and client servants) are plentiful but vary in rank from slave nobles in the western Sahel to low-ranking household slaves and pawns.

Relations to the hinterland areas vary by structure and ethnicity, both of which present problems. Structurally, African states allow for consolidated holdings outside the capital under the control of local elites or nobles of the court or both. As with other early states, consolidated holdings were nodes of potential rebellion. Constitutional principles evolved to counteract the problem. Thus, in Buganda, the monarch married polygamously into the local leading lineages of all consolidated districts, giving each one a chance to provide a future monarch through matrification. In Dahomey each district chief was linked to the throne through a queen mother who represented the district chief to the throne and vice versa. In other states particularly Sahel – the peripheries were unconsolidated village holdings under subordinates of the noble fief holders who lived permanently in the capital. Holdings could then be used as rewards and punishments for service to the central government. Whether consolidated or dispersed, peripheral settlements and people were linked to the central government through a hierarchy of officials who collected revenues for the rulers at the center and ensured military manpower for frequent predatory or defensive expedition. Although not universal, the structure of the African states supported the differentiation of ethnicity from citizenship, making for multiethnic

capability under uniform principles of state society relations. Thus, in the Hausa states there were both nomadic and sedentary groups linked to a central government under a common administration and an emergent state religion.

### **3.3.5 The Politics of Pre-colonial African states**

The political culture of early African states centred on the ideology of statehood itself and a particular state's history compared with other polities. The state was considered a superior, more powerful, more prideful system than others, and each particular state was an ethnic force in its territories. The penultimate symbol of the state was the monarch, whose health, welfare, and sacred status represented the society as a whole. Thus, the "Kabaka" (Uganda) was said to "eat" the state. At his coronation, he was seen as consuming the country and its people so as to become the personification of the polity. The Shehu of Bornu was considered to be the "father" of all citizens. He cared for his subjects like a parent for his children or a head of household for those under his care. Widespread as well was the metaphor of the monarch as a lion; a being of great power among those less powerful.

Even in Islamic areas, there was a universal set of beliefs linking the monarch to the royal ancestors who were prayed to for the welfare of the kingdom, and linking the monarch's well-being to that of the kingdom as a whole. His person was therefore sacred. He could not be spoken to directly or touched, and his subjects' actions towards him were symbolic of extreme deference and subordination, for example, the practice of putting dirt or dust on one's head when coming into his presence. In one case (pre-nineteenth-century Borno) he appeared in public heavily robed in a cage that separated him from all other mortals. The leitmotiv of political culture in African states was the primacy placed on inequality and hierarchy, authority, power, and noble obligations of superiors, and deference and loyalty of subordinates made for political and economic stability. This could crosscut ethnicity, as with Tutsi-Hutu relations of the far past in Rwanda, where the conquering Tutsi ruling classes had had patron-client relations (Ubugake) with ambitious underlings including the indigenous Hutu villages. In Buganda ambitious commoners placed their children as clients of "big men" in the royal court. This was certainly true as well in the western Africa states. Personal achievement was determined by the potentialities of deference and loyalty to a higher-ranked individual, household, or aristocratic lineage. Finally, multi-ethnicity and the differences between the capital citadel and the countryside created fundamental distinctions of culture that divided the states into centers of urban court-based life and the more simple life of the country side. Over time the life in the capital, its language, customs, religion and patterns of everyday life, strongly influenced the culture of the hinterlands people. Thus, an African state could be formed from one culture or many. Central governance produced a sumptuary lifestyle at the center and diffused common elements of this style outward. In this sense African states were constantly refurbishing and affecting the lives of the people at their peripheries.

### **3.3.6 Foreign Relations among Pre-colonial African States**

Foreign relations among these states almost always involved some form of control over trade, especially long-distance trade. Thus, states in Western Africa arose at entrepôts of trade on the coast (Dahomey) or at the ends of Saharan trade routes (Ghana, Mali, Songhai, Hausa, Bornu) and the coastal states of eastern Africa. The governments either carried out much of the trade themselves or exacted levies on the trading community. Alliance and tributary relations were in constant flux, varying with the power of a particular state regime at any time period. This, along with the need to control and keep trade routes open, in addition to the need to maintain authority within the state was associated with the importance of warfare. Multiethnic peripheries and an expanding sovereignty meant a large militia. One writer characterizes these states as predatory war machines. Undoubtedly, warfare was a major organizational feature of centralized state government. Military strategies, walled defenses, enhanced war technologies including muskets, cavalry, and sieges were commonplace. Finally, foreign relations included the incursion into Africa of Islam areas of the Near East and the Maghreb. This meant five hundred to one thousand years of common members in a literate world religion, producing trips from internal Africa to Mecca through the east coast and through Egypt that knit large portions of Africa into the wider Islamic world of learning, trade, jurisprudence, and statecraft.

Note that while exchange of gifts characterized the chieftaincy form of African government, trade, especially long-distance trade was a major factor that shaped external relations in the state form.



### 3.4 SUMMARY

So far, we have been able to link the concept of pre-colonial African government with the basic tenet of pre-colonial African diplomacy. We take you through the forms of pre-colonial African government, the administration of the states, the political culture and the foreign relations of African states. I hope this will enable you determine the peculiarity of this concept which plays a very vital role in shaping the concept and scope of pre-colonial African diplomacy.

### 3.5 Self-Assessment Exercises 3

1. The paramount chief heads a council of leaders, including \_\_\_\_ members of his own chiefly lineage. (a) deceased (b) foreign (c) rival (d) delegate.
2. The chieftaincy monarch or paramount is vested with the primary duty of representing his polity to \_\_\_\_  
(a) foreign authorities (b) council in chiefs (c) subjects (d) contemporaries
3. The earliest states of Africa are among the oldest in the world. True or false?
4. All are features of a pre-colonial African State except  
(a) centralised polity (b) fortified capital (c) semi-autonomous ruler (d) sovereign authority.
5. In a number of African monarchies, high offices were never reserved for women royals or queen mothers. True or false?
6. As a personification of the polity, the “Kabaka” (Uganda) was said to “\_\_\_\_” the state. (a) eat (b) drink (c) wear (d) embolise.
7. Foreign relations among Pre-colonial African States were mainly determined by

### 3.6 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Compare and contrast the chieftaincy form of government and the state in pre-colonial African period.
2. Analyse the foreign relations of pre-colonial African state and show how it reflects diplomacy.



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### 3.8 Answers to SAEs 3

1. C; 2. A; 3. True; 4. C; 5. False; 6. A; 7. D.

# Unit 4: CONCEPT AND SCOPE OF PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN DIPLOMACY III

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- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)
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  - 4.3.2 The Concept of Trade
    - Trade by Barter
    - Mainstream Trade
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- 4.4 Self-Assessment Exercises 4
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- 4.6 Tutor-Marked Assignment
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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This fourth unit discusses the concept of African customary law, its application and how it is related to the formulation of external affairs policies in Pre-colonial African Inter-group relations in general and, diplomacy in particular.



### 4.2 INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES (ILOs)

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- deduce the concepts related to pre-colonial African Diplomacy;
- explain in detail pre-colonial African law, trade and warfare;
- analyse how these concepts necessitated the evolvement of Pre-colonial African Diplomacy, and
- evaluate the peculiarity of Pre-colonial African diplomacy.



### 4.3 MAIN CONTENT

#### 4.3.1 The Concept of African Customary Law

The African law which evolved during the pre-colonial period refers to indigenous African legal rules, procedures, institutions and ideas that govern the administration and

dispensation of justice within a particular community and by extension a larger community. These bodies of legal rules must be acceptable to all under the jurisdiction of these rules so as to be binding on them. Note that chiefs in Pre-colonial Africa had extensive jurisdiction over persons, labour and resources of their subjects.

For a highlight on the nature of African customary law, it suffices to bring into focus some misconceptions about the nature of the laws and correct the erroneous impressions. They are errors from the viewpoints of Western historians and missionaries who were in Africa during the pre-colonial period.

Most Western historians never saw anything good in pre-colonial Africa. Anything that was not measured by Western European standard was viewed as barbaric, or of no value and even worthless.

The missionaries too looked and frowned upon African ideas as inhuman practices. They regarded African laws and customs as detestable aspects of paganism which they as missionaries should wipe out in the name of Christian civilisation. African culture was looked upon as an undifferentiated mass of customs, rituals and it was not recognised as part of the social order. Just like a Yoruba man may misconstrue a certain Tiv's way of life concerning matrimony as adulterous, anti-social and not patterned after natural sensible law, so also the missionaries saw African customary law that way. The African customary law to them must be bad for the new religious dispensation and ought to for that very reason be abolished.

Irrespective of these misconceptions however, African customary laws thrived to guide the conduct of affairs among African peoples and it worked effectively to regulate pacts and agreements among African states. For instance, in pre-colonial Africa during the period of Oyo Empire, a pact or agreement with other centralised states of Dahomey or Benin kingdom would always be reinforced before a cult-like shrine in accordance with the customary laws that bound the states.

In Zaire, there was a nail fetish – a three-foot-tall figure called Mavungu. It is studded with over fifty pounds of nails and each nail represents an agreement or promise (contract). To break an agreement sealed by one of the nails is to incur sickness, trouble or even death. Of course, this nail fetish bound all the centralised African states that maintained diplomatic relations with one another. The cult-like adherence to pacts and agreements made pre-colonial African Diplomacy strong and binding on all parties involved. Note the straight-forwardness of these customary pacts and the simplicity of the operations. It is not a complex, deceitful process of modern day diplomacy where international laws are not sacrosanct but subject to power-play and arm-twisting.

Clearly, the African legal system evolved and thrived on its indigenous customs, cultures and ideas. It transcended all the affairs of the people within and without the polity sharing

the same culture. It dealt with relationship, land and boundary affairs and it forestalled crisis. It ensured the success of pre-colonial African Diplomacy.

#### **4.2 The Concept of Trade**

As earlier mentioned, trade, most especially external trade, around which wealth revolved, determined the interest of a state more than any other factor. This is not to deny other factors but most germane to note that the pursuit of wealth breeds conflict and many competing states are jostling for the wealth of others. Indeed, diplomacy is employed to secure one's wealth and if possible enjoy others' wealth too since war in this regard is unpredictable. We cannot fully grasp the workability of pre-colonial African Diplomacy without really understanding the concept of trade in African during the pre-colonial era and how it shaped the diplomacy of this era.

Of course, these are little or no doubt about the existence of a pre-colonial economy in Africa since Africans managed to provide for themselves and to trade with the outside world long before the colonial period. The problem the concept of such trade postulates is the availability of real information we have about pre-colonial African economy, the kind of changes taking place within it, and by what standards or models of growth we should evaluate its development. Relations between Africans and outsiders are however the most visible sector of pre-colonial commerce and the weight we should give to available information concerning this will suffice to determine the level of diplomatic interface between and among African states and the outside world.

#### **Trade by Barter**

Trade as conceived and practiced in pre-colonial Africa was not necessarily a process of selling and buying goods and services done using a medium of exchange but, also by exchanging goods and commodities. Here, a farmer may use his farm produce like yams, millets, sorghum or beans to secure the services of a textile producer. If A has a commodity that B desires, B will use what he has in exchange for that commodity and thus a trade by barter is facilitated.

During the pre-colonial period, trade and exchange system was extensively used for special and preservable items like dried fish, smoked meat, honey, kola, tobacco and ingredients for brewing amongst African states.

#### **Mainstream Trade**

Similarly, pre-colonial Africa had a long record of institutionalised trade system through markets mostly controlled by states. The Yoruba city states had a long record of the market system and so also the Hausa city states. There was the tax system of Addis Ababa. There was, also Samori Toure's tribute system to support his army. We had the slave plantations along the east coast to support an active maritime trade in the 19th Century. Note from the afore-mentioned that many of the regional distribution systems in pre-colonial Africa were non-market. They depended mostly on requisitions and tribute payment. However, in a few city states like the Yoruba and the Igbo local market systems, there were regular food markets for local consumption.

Market and prices for food were institutionalised in the ports of call for trade in other more valuable items. Although currencies have a long and complex history in Africa, purchase of food was not their primary use. The port cities for the slave trade developed food markets for transients where supplies could be bought. Probably the most important markets for food for transients, and the ones that set in place some competitive pricing mechanisms were routes for caravans of hundreds of porters. These serviced the growth of legitimate trade after the abolition of the slave trade. On any of these major routes, thousands of porters, unable to grow or carry their own food passed by every year.

Of course, it is this pre-colonial African trade, mostly controlled by states, that generated a lot of commercial competition for wealth and which in turn made conflicting interest inevitable. For the conflict to be amicably resolved, diplomacy had to be employed and hence the emergence of pre-colonial African diplomacy.

### **4.3 Concept of Warfare**

It is the need to avoid war that warrants diplomacy. That is, the inevitability of war in a competing and conflicting world, and the attendant destruction calls for diplomacy in resolving conflicting interests. The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2018) defines war as a situation in which two or more countries or groups of people fight against each other over a period of time while it describes warfare as the activity of fighting a war using particular weapons or methods.

In pre-colonial Africa, war was commonplace. You would have read or heard about the Zulu wars under emperor Chaka the Great, the Yoruba wars, the Dahomean wars of expansion, the Fulani Jihad and other such wars. What characterised such war were destruction of lives and properties. The armies of centralised polities during the pre-colonial period were composed of specialised combat and logistical teams that supported each other. The Dahomean army for instance had spies sent out to gauge the strength and weakness of other states in preparatory for military attacks on such states. These spies went about like traders and they understood many languages. Actually this later augured well for diplomatic relations as one of the potent qualities of a diplomat is to understand many languages. The Dahomey state was the first pre-colonial African state to use women in its army. The female soldiers were called the “Amazons”.

The pre-colonial African states maintained a permanent standing army in the sense that some soldiers were always on duty. Military campaigns could take years like the endless wars of the Zulu under Chaka and the long Yoruba wars called “Kiriji wars”. The army had command structures that could coordinate the operations of increasingly specialised units. It usually possessed explicit norms specifying group organisation, tactics and strategies. The military force also used specialised killing implements, most of which were hand-held. The military operations were approved by the states.

### **Causes of War**

In pre-colonial Africa, grudges played a role in instigating combat. Most campaigns were grudges-of-state to satisfy aristocratic interests. For instance, Sabun, ruler of Wasai, 1800 A.D., believed that Gaurang I, sovereign of Bagirmi, had married his own sister and that this crime of incest deserved punishment. Sabun accordingly undertook a campaign to administer this chastisement. These interests of the aristocrats were to a large extent excuses to maintain or enhance state revenues.

These state revenues derived from five sources: (a) Booty, which comes as an immediate result of fighting; (b) tribute, paid to the victor states as a result of victorious wars and in some way transferred to officials as part of their remuneration; (c) legal fees, which could be expanded through conquest; (d) taxes upon commerce which also could be expanded through conquest; (e) foodstuffs or labour taken from food producers by officials, ultimately extracted by right of conquest.

The narrative on Sabun's experience is popular among pre-colonial African rulers. Sabun's grudge, albeit on moral grounds, against Gaurang led to war that in turn, led to the reallocation of Bagirmi revenues to Wadaian officials. Sabun's armies occupied and subjected Bagirmi to its rule for the remaining hundred years of its Empire's existence.

Predatory accumulation is the use of force by centralised polities to augment their power—both economically and militarily. The campaign of Sabun allowed him to use violent force to increase Wadan's revenues. It shows that the process of predatory accumulation had the power of strengthening the class of officials in a polity.

With the foregoing illustration of Sabun you will agree that such interests would always instigate rulers to pick quarrels with other states and unless diplomacy comes to the rescue, man will always prey on man violently.

#### 4.4 Self-Assessment Exercises 4

1. Mention and discuss the misconceptions of African customary law.
2. Discuss trade in pre-colonial Africa and its impacts on Diplomacy.



#### 4.5 SUMMARY

We conclude this unit by taking cognizance of the fact that pre-colonial African diplomacy was the most favourable handy tool to resolve conflicting and competing interests in pre-colonial Africa. African laws, trade and wars during this era could best be handled peacefully through reasonable bargaining, negotiation and dialogue. In this unit thus far, we have in detail discussed concepts of African customary law, African trade pattern and lastly, African warfare and how they elicited and shaped pre-colonial African diplomacy.

## 4.6 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Examine interests of rulers in pre-colonial Africa and how they impact on their conducts.
- 2(a) Highlight the causes of war. (b) Discuss the possibility of avoiding wars



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## 4.8 Answers to SAEs 4

1. Early Western historians and missionaries that visited ancient Africa had misconceptions of African customary laws from their biases as people that never saw anything good about pre-colonial Africa. Anything that was not measured by Western European standard was viewed as barbaric, or of no value and even worthless. The missionaries frowned at African ideas as inhuman practices not minding their pragmatic relevance.
2. External trade around which wealth revolves, determined the interest of a state more than any other factor. In pre-colonial Africa period, trade

relations were mainly conducted through the mainstream trade market and barter system in the absence currencies for buying and selling. If A has a commodity that B desires, B will use what he has in exchange for that commodity and thus a trade by barter is facilitated. However, the pursuit of wealth breeds conflict and many competing and aggressive states did jostle for the wealth of others. Diplomacy is therefore employed to peacefully secure one's wealth and if possible enjoy others' wealth too since war in this regard is unpredictable.

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## Module 2: The Study and Origin of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy

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### Module Introduction

Following the conceptual clarification of the concept of diplomacy and its scope in the Pre-colonial African period, this module examines the origin of pre-colonial African diplomacy. It is for that purpose that this module has four units, viz:

Unit 1: The Study of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy

Unit 2: Political History of Pre-Colonial African States

Unit 3: Trade History of Pre-Colonial African States

Unit 4: Trade History of Pre-Colonial African States II

### Unit 1: THE STUDY OF PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN DIPLOMACY

#### CONTENTS

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    - The Historical Approach
    - The Analytical Approach
  - 1.3.2 Relationship of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy to other Disciplines
  - 1.3.3 Why Study Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy
- 1.4 Self-Assessment Exercises (SAEs) 1
- 1.5 Summary
- 1.6 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 1.7 References/Further Reading
- 1.8 Answers to SAEs



#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit will examine the historiography of pre-colonial African Diplomacy. The factors that influence the writings of observers and witnesses and the veracity of the accounts will be determined. We shall also expose the relationship of this course to other

disciplines within its purview and how these courses affect pre-colonial African Diplomacy. Most especially, we shall determine the purpose of this course and the benefits derivable from our academic exercise.



## **1.2 INTENDING LEARNING OUTCOMES**

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss in detail the historiography of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy
- Analyse the various writings by authors concerning the course
- Explain the relationship of other courses to pre-colonial African Diplomacy
- Analyse the purpose of the study of pre-colonial African Diplomacy vividly
- Determine the present and future of African Diplomacy.



## **1.3 MAIN CONTENT**

### **1.3.1 Historiography of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy**

You are aware that the diplomacy that thrived during the pre-colonial era could best be described as a historical event. Of course it is history. Hence, we talk about the historiography of this course. The historiography of Africa has twice changed over the course of the 20th century. These changes correspond to the evolving political demarcation that marked the chronology of the continent; pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial. However, we are concerned with the historiography of the pre-colonial period in this course.

#### **The Historical Approach**

The early histories of Africa before the pre-colonial period consisted of a wide range of oral accounts; including myths, legends, epics, poetries and parables. The early histories – king lists, oral narratives, and metaphorical tales – were often historiographies in themselves, incorporating elements from several analytical traditions, and competing visions of the past were frequently embedded with these various forms of recounting history.

Pre-colonial African historiographies were locally rooted. They were molded by the particular cultural framework of their times and place. Frequently, they also reflected broader literacy styles and traditions with wide regional resource. There are, of course, many coherent, broad cultural (zones) each associated with a set of recognizable historiographical traditions.

- The Western Savanna; the West African forest, the west central forest (roughly between the Niger River and Lake Chad).
- The Nile Valley region; the central African savannah (from Lake Chad to the forest south of the Ubengi River).

- The Central African forest, the region of the great Lakes; the Indian Ocean Coastal area, the Southern Savannah; the Kalchari Pan; the Zimbabwe Plateau and the South African Highveld; and the Nguni Zone.

Written accounts of historical events served as a transition between the diversity of pre-colonial oral forms of historiography and the more constrained style of colonial writers. Actually, pre-colonial written accounts omitted much of the diversity of orality and therefore tended to narrow the focus of historical discussion. African authors writing on African history tended to be more localized than their oral predecessors. Most of them, like Samuel Johnson for Southern Nigeria or Apolo Kogwa for Buganda, wrote extensively on areas of their professional leanings. Thus, in these written works, history came to concentrate on elite politics and tended to glorify a dynasty or a class at the expense of other aspects of historical processes; their diversity emerged from their local specificity.

### **The Analytical Approach**

Writings on pre-colonial African diplomacy, in particular, were rare. Most facts collected and accounted for were from outside observers. Aside from Muslim traders in Africa, 19th Century European observations influenced writings on Africa. However, since European contact with Africa had disrupted earlier political structures and economic patterns, observers often painted an image of Africa in disarray and chaotic situation. You should note that this chaotic situation was a direct product of the presence of the Europeans which the writers failed to acknowledge in their writings. With intensified commercial competition, vast increases in the quantities of fire arms, and a dramatic expansion of the trade in slaves, diplomacy broke down at the expense of warfare. Eighteenth and 19th Century European history on Africa emphasized decadence, violence and barbarism as essential features of the African states.

As you would expect, this historical stance necessitated the reaction of the scholarship of the African Diaspora who are mainly of the African American and Caribbean writers. As European 19th Century works often drew on selective local observations to build on an ideological stance, so did African diaspora scholarship draw on elements of the African record to take the countervailing stance that rather than barbaric decadence and backwardness, the African past was one of elegant grandeur. These observations served as a basis for grandiose generalization when discussing or studying African history.

Coming to the study of pre-colonial African diplomacy *per se*, most works of reference to it are generalised and embedded in historical events. However, outside writers like Robert S. Smith specifically did an innovative study on the relations of the people of West Africa in the pre-colonial period. Smith addresses outside influences but focuses primarily on what happened between African states before the partition and the establishment of colonies. Smith also deals extensively with the subject matter of customary law in Africa as International law. Speaking the mind of the African, Smith opines that irrespective of the unwritten nature of African laws, they still compared well with International laws

elsewhere during the pre-colonial period and they were used to regulate “international relations” among African states of inter-group relations among African peoples.

Graham W. Irwin is another European author who does justice to pre-colonial African diplomacy. Citing the Ashante of pre-colonial Ghana as an example, he observes that the mutual relationships that originated and official contact between pre-colonial African states were maintained by methods and procedures which historians of the non-African world described as diplomatic. Sir Ernest Salow also lends his voice in this regard by adding that in Africa before the imperial period, the subject matter of international relations had been the same as elsewhere in the world.

### **1.3.2 Relationship of Pre-colonial African Diplomacy to other Disciplines**

There is no doubt that pre-colonial African diplomacy belongs to History. It is historical, being an exercise of discourse that occurred in the past – the pre-colonial era. In the observation of the naval historian Arthur Marder, “It is an axiom amongst historians that a knowledge of history can serve as a guide to the present”. This remark is a pointer to the fact that history is the closest and the most related subject to any discourse that occurred in the past. This course is discussed on the premise of what happened between and among African states vis-à-vis diplomatic relations. That is, what shaped the diplomatic relations and how it was conducted. Actually, the historicism of this course is so profound that it informs and encompasses all other similar related courses to pre-colonial African diplomacy – be it Economics (Pre-colonial African Economy), trade (pre-colonial trade), International Relations, warfare, International law, strategic studies, Political Science and Government, Psychology and Sociology, and of course all other related disciplines albeit in the pre-colonial period.

Diplomatic history must serve as a guide to developing the critical faculty for history is never all it seems to be. You should note that it is very difficult to establish what really happened in the past. Observers who witness events suffer from bias, poor memory and from many other defects. In the course of transferred narratives, there are omissions of facts or adding of false speculations. Worst of all, history is often falsified to support a legend, a romantic notion of a king or the aristocrat or the stand point of an observer. In using history as a guide to pre-colonial African diplomacy, these defects have to be borne in mind so that historical accounts of events are treated critically and with care. If there is lack of sufficient knowledge, then you should qualify your writing accordingly and not make categorical statements that will simply serve to consolidate the defects. In dealing with historical events as they relate to pre-colonial African Diplomacy, it is important to be critical, to point out the defects in decision taken and in courses of action as policies might have been executed.

The relationship of history to all other disciplines under the categorization of “pre-colonial Africa” cannot be over-emphasised and this fact you should bear in mind when dealing with such related disciplines. As you might have read earlier on in this course,

African pre-colonial economy is related closely to pre-colonial diplomacy in Africa. Actually, it is the strength of the economy of states and their trade prowess that necessitated the rise of diplomacy. To avoid warfare and its devastating effects, diplomacy had to be resorted to African states to control their trade and economy.

You may probably wonder what psychology has to do with pre-colonial African Diplomacy. I assure you, it goes a long way in determining a people's mind – why decisions are taken, why people go to war, why people want peace to enjoy their wealth and why people study the minds of others to know what they hate and what they like and to be able to capture their minds for their own benefit. A particular African king using a particular gift to curry the favour of another king is simply applying psychology for he would have already researched into what would bring him favour before the other king. Politics and Government are twin concepts closely related to pre-colonial African Diplomacy. The political structure of a state and the constitution of its government would go a long way to influence its diplomatic relations. The more powerful and stable a state is, the more friends it would have in the international community. In Africa, rising states and Empires in the 18th and the 19th centuries had strong diplomatic ties with other states who wanted their favours while no state wanted to embrace a weak and failing state. Political power coupled with economic power really influenced, Pre-colonial African Diplomacy.

You cannot separate international law from international relations which breeds diplomacy. In Pre-colonial Africa, African customary laws served as international law regulating and guiding Pre-colonial African Diplomacy among African states. These states were bound by these laws and it ensured compliance among state actors in the pre-colonial international system which bred diplomacy.

From the foregoing, it should be clear to you by now that the study of pre-colonial African diplomacy is not isolated, but closely related to the other disciplines of that era.

### **1.3.3 Why Study Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy?**

You may ask why pre-colonial in this neo-colonial era? Professor Richard Olaniyan, writing on the piece entitled: *Nigerian Diplomacy: The Burden of History* has this to say about history: “It is not a call to abandon the past but rather it is one to employ the knowledge of the past to enlighten the serious consideration of the great issues of our time” (Olaniyan, 1990:2). He further-on admonishes the professional historian not to consign the role of history only to the elucidation of the ancient past. Professor B.O. Oloruntimehin also opines in his study that: “The intention of history is to cast some illumination on the society, thereby providing an opportunity for the society to gain a better understanding of its past and its present as pointers to the future” (Oloruntimehin, 1976:10).

Of course, an almost flawless grasp of a past event will stand one on a sure pedestal to understanding present and future re-occurrence of such event. Since diplomacy is a relevant contemporary issue in Africa, it is sound wisdom if we attempt to take a critical look at the beginnings of Africa's diplomatic culture, how its peculiar historical development has contributed to shaping its initiatives and responses in its external relations.

The central thrust of this study is that Africa's foreign policy and diplomacy, like any other continents, can hardly be meaningfully appreciated outside its history. This will serve as a guide to an in-depth scrutiny of internal political structures and institutions, economic interdependence as well as forces from the external environment impinging upon its diplomatic behaviour and responses; and how a modification will suffice for a better working diplomatic relation in contemporary Africa.

Since the concept of diplomacy, defined as the "process of dialogue and negotiation by which states in a system conduct their relations and pursue their purposes by means of short war" (Lauren, 1979: 13), the study of pre-colonial African Diplomacy may be explored to proffer diplomatic solutions to contemporary African issues instead of incessant wars that is now rife in Africa. We hereby stress that the historical dimension is vitally important to the unraveling the paradoxes of our time, and to understanding our contemporary predicament. To buttress this view, I hereby cite a quotation from Paul Gordon Lauren (1979):

To construct a clear and accurate record of the formal relations and interactions among sovereign nations, analyzing and interpreting the ways in which they formulate their policies, the foreign and domestic factors with which they must contend, the techniques and modalities they employ and the results they achieve in attempting to realize their objectives. (Ibid)

The foregoing quotation says it all on historical account of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy. You should well be aware that no significant conclusions are possible in the study of foreign affairs – the study of states acting as units – without an awareness of the historical context. We hope to emphasize the unity of the past and the present and of course to proffer solutions for a better future as regards diplomacy in Africa in this course.

## 1.4 Self-Assessment Exercises 1

1. The early histories – king lists, oral narratives, and metaphorical tales – were often \_\_\_\_ . (a.) ethnographies (b) geographies (c) historiographies
2. European contact with Africa disrupted earlier political structures and economic patterns to warrant chaotic narratives about pre-colonial Africa. True or false?
3. History is rarely falsified to support a legend, a romantic notion of a king or the aristocrat or the stand point of an observer. True or false?
4. Pre-colonial African Diplomacy is not related to this discipline. (a) Economics (b) Psychology (c) History (d) None.
5. There is no significant conclusion in the study of foreign affairs without an awareness of the historical context. True or false?

## 1.6 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Justify the study of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy.
2. Appraise the historical accounts of Pre-colonial African Diplomacy.
3. State briefly the relationship between History and Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy.



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## 1.8 Answers to SAEs 1

1. C. 2. True. 3. False. 4. D. 5. True.

## UNIT 2: POLITICAL HISTORY OF PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN STATES

### CONTENT

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)
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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will familiarise with the origin of pre-colonial African Diplomacy with particular reference to the political history of some major pre-colonial African States. The emergence of strong, viable, well-organised and stable pre-colonial African states will be discussed and we will be able to deduce how this stability enhanced the practice of Pre-colonial African Diplomacy. The necessity of interdependence among pre-colonial African states, and the inevitability of the Pre-colonial African International system will be fully ascertained.



### 2.2 INTENDING LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- Trace the origin of the emergence of African states during the Pre- colonial period;
- discuss vividly the administration of Pre-colonial African States;
- name concrete examples of pre-colonial African states and list their administrative uniqueness;
- determine the ingenuity of Pre-colonial African rulers in political administration; and
- deduce the political interaction between and among pre-colonial African states.



## **2.3 MAIN CONTENT**

### **2.3.1 Historical Political Contact**

You should note that in any human history, different political entities would always interact. The interaction can be on the basis of politics, culture, trade, technological transfer or even religion. African States also interacted from the ancient times through the medieval times to the Pre-colonial time, which concerns us in this course. Pre-colonial African states never acted in isolation but rather depended on the dictates of other states within and outside the region. Of course, whether you like it or not, the strategic position of one entity will always impact on that of the other – more so in international politics. This principle informs the relationship of states during the pre-colonial period and it leads to the fashioning out of diplomacy.

The pre-colonial period in Africa is a period that can best be described as a transitional age in Africa. The eighteenth and nineteenth century to which it belongs was a century of Islamic revival and in most states, Islam was installed as state religion. It was also a century when the slave trade was abolished and trade in agricultural products flourished.

The writing of the leaders of the Islamic revival movements as well as European traders and missionaries erroneously depicted Africa as being in general decline and decadence at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The collapse of Shongai Empire was regarded as the beginning of “Dark Ages”. They exaggerated the effects of slave trade in strong and well organised Empire like Oyo whereas slave trade was never deeply rooted in well organised and strong states. These strong states raided their weaker neighbours who did not have strong central government.

Let us give a brief survey of some African states during the pre-colonial period to highlight the political situation of pre-colonial African states.

### **2.3.2 African States during the Early Pre-colonial Period**

Let us get familiarised with the growth and positions of some various African states in the early part of the pre-colonial period. This will enable you to know the stability and administrative prowess of pre-colonial African states which augured well for diplomatic relations among them. I advise you to read textbooks on African History for a further intellectual grasp of this study.

Since we cannot actually decipher when a particular historic period began, it may be inadequate for us to limit the pre-colonial period to only the eighteenth and the nineteenth century. As P.O. Olatubosun says in his textbook of West African History,\* “Historians divided the past into periods for convenience and to make the study of history easy”. We

should note that one period merges into the next in history. I will, however, take you through the period from 1000 A.D. as the pre-colonial period although references may be made to earlier times. This is because from about 1000A.D. adequate written records are available to support oral traditions and ancient remains. This gives a reliable historical record of African activities.

Egypt in North Africa had an early long-standing relationship with East Africa, Ethiopia, the Horn and sub-Saharan Africa. It had commercial, technological and religious relations with the rest of Africa. Throughout the period from 500 to 1500 A.D., Egypt was economically the most powerful state within the African continent. With economic prosperity came organised polity, good administrative skill, intellectual and religious activity, technological innovation and artistic achievement, the influences of which filtered down the trade routes into sub-Saharan Africa. We will deal more about the influences of Egypt on the rest of Africa in later discussions in this course. Our concern here is the extraordinary stability and good governance enjoyed by Egypt during this period. This provided for the thriving of diplomacy with other African states of the period.

The Wolof Empire which extended between River Senegal and River Gambia and far inland to Mali emerged through some states coming together to form a confederation. The Wolof Empire was governed as a federation. Each state was autonomous in the administration of its internal affairs but certain matters of common imperial interests like trade, defence and provision of imperial revenue were administered by the emperor. In the Wolof system of government, relations and co-operation between the federating units and the central authority was voluntary.

The Ghana Empire also had a stable government strengthened by its viable economy. Gold was the mainstay of its economy and it brought fabulous wealth to the Empire. The emperor was the head of the legislative, executive and judicial arms of government. He had divine rights and Kumbi Saleh, the capital was the seat of the central government. After the introduction of Islam, Kumbi Saleh was divided into two sections. The king and indigenous population lived in one section, while the Muslim population, mostly immigrants and traders, lived in the other section. The emperor (King) was helped by a council of advisers or ministers. The chief councilor acted as the prime minister. From the 11th century when Islam had been introduced, the king chose some of his councilors from the Muslim scholars because of their education, exposure and experience. There were courts of various grades in the Empire for dispensation of justice. The system of government ensured peace and order throughout the Empire. With peace, order and stability, trade and commerce flourished attracting the Berber merchants from North Africa and the inhabitants of the northern belt of the Guinea forest. The political and economic arrangements of Ghana were backed up by a strong, virile military organisation. All these, together served as a sound recipe for the flourish of Ghanaian diplomatic relations with other African states of its time.

Mali rose after the fall of Ghana Empire in West Africa. Like Ghana, it had a stable government, organized trade contact and stupendous wealth, and a strong standing army. Moreover, Mansa Musa exposed Mali to the outside world. In 1324 AD on a pilgrimage to Mecca, he carried so much wealth (gold), camels and men to the extent that Mali was recognized the world over as a wealthy Empire. The affluence made Mali appear on the maps produced by the Italians in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The pilgrimage attracted to Mali more traders and Muslim scholars who contributed to the economic, social and cultural development of the Empire. Architects who built beautiful bricks palaces in Niani, and mosques in Gao and Timbuktu were also attracted. Most especially, the pilgrimage gave an opportunity to Mali to open diplomatic relations with the states of North, especially Fez. Mansa Musa displayed a remarkable capacity of the Negro for political and diplomatic organisation.

Shongai Empire also boasted of an efficient central government. Askia the Great of Shongai was a good administrator and he also opened Shongai to the outside world by his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1495. He, like Mansa Musa also displayed much opulence on the pilgrimage and he attracted traders, scholars and investors into Shongai. On his return, he was made the head of the Muslims in West Africa by the Caliph of Cairo. This gesture in itself is a method of diplomacy in pre-colonial African period. This will definitely ensure a close bond between Cairo and Shongai. Askia introduced the Salary system and Leo Africanus on his visit to Shongai, mentioned many judges, doctors and priests, all receiving salaries from the king.

The first Kanuri Empire, apart from its administrative and economic prowess was noted for its diplomatic relations with North African states particularly with Tunisia. During the flourish of the second Kanuri Empire of Kanem-Bornu, Mai Idris Aloma was also noted for his expansionist policy, his diplomatic strategy, and system of war by proxy without always resorting to naked force to expand his territories. He employed the tactics of giving military support to a friendly state to harass another state hostile to Bornu. An example was the support he gave to the Kotoko, the neighbours of Tetala to harass the Tetala by continuous invasions with their boats until the Tetala retreated into the swamps of the Lake Chad. Another was the order he gave to Kelwati to invade the territory of the Tuareg continually until the Tuareg were forced to make peace. Mai Idris Aloma established good government which contributed to the fame of the Empire. He maintained diplomatic relations with the states of North Africa. This enabled him to get firearms from Tripoli to aid his expansionist policy. He encouraged and went on pilgrimage to Mecca and he fought Jihads to promote the practice of Islam in a pure way. As a boost to diplomatic relations, he built a hostel in Cairo for Borno pilgrims. His reign was accurately referred to as the “golden age” of the second Kanuri Empire.

If the seven Hausa states had been united at their emergence, they would have been a formidable union but each chose to go its own way with separate governments and

pursuing different foreign affairs policies. In spite of this disunity, Kano, Gobir, Katsina, Daura, Zaria, Biram and Rano each still maintained stable administrative, commercial and cultural skill until they fell to the Fulani Jihadists of 1804.

The Jukun, the Igala and the Nupe also rose in succession, maintained governments and later disintegrated within the period under discussion.

I want to intimate you with the government of Benin in this unit because of its uniqueness in diplomatic prowess. The reign of Oba Ewuare the great was a “golden age’ in Benin. He imposed a strong government in Benin different from the weak, undermined one he inherited. He extended the frontiers of Benin through military campaigns into Iboland and Yourbaland. He was a very good administrator, reformer and provider of welfare service. The constructions of good roads which impressed and attracted Europeans into Benin were credited to him. During Oba Ozolua’s reign, a Portuguese agent, Afonso d’Aveiro visited Benin in 1485-1486. Oba Ozolua asked the king of Ughoto to follow Afonso as his ambassador to Portugal. As a result, commercial relations were established between Portugal and Benin. With the cooperation of Ozolua and the chief of Ughoton, the Portuguese set up a trading factory in Ughoton. Oba Esigie who reigned from about 1504 to 1550 after Ozolua in Benin also extended Benin into Idah and Lagos. D’Aveiro visited Benin again during his reign and he seized this opportunity to become a Christian and he too like Ozolua asked Ughoton to follow D’Aveiro to the king of Portugal to demand for missionaries and firearms. The king of Portugal obliged by sending Oba Esigie firearms, missionaries and gifts of a big umbrella, coral beads, a copper stool among others. Portuguese traders also followed the missionaries to trade in pepper, ivory and Benin clothes. English visitors testified that Benin achieved her greatest glory and Military achievement under Esigie. They claimed that Benin had thirty straight streets about one hundred and twenty feet broad, with feeder streets at right angles to them. Oba Orhogbua who reigned after Esigie became a Christian and also an educated king. During his reign, trade with the Portuguese developed fast and Benin became an important post in the Western Niger Delta. This was important because Benin was linked by trade routes with Hausaland and trans-saharan trade. Benin was uniquely the first African power in Southern Nigeria to maintain regular diplomatic contact with a European state as early as the fifteenth century.

### **2.3.3 African States during the Later Pre-Colonial Period**

African states at the beginning of the nineteenth century recorded a great degree of progress and stability, despite the erroneous impression created by Islamic and European writers. There are few exceptions however but this does not erode the stability of the time on which diplomatic relations thrived.

The decline of Islam from about the seventeenth century enabled non- Muslim dynasties to start to rule in Tekrur, Segu and Masina. The kingdom of Segu was founded. A rival

dynasty also founded the kingdom of Kanta. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, these kingdoms were already stable. Their caste-systems and traditional religious cults were replaced by Islamic institutions. The explorers of the nineteenth century were greatly impressed by the size of Segou and the volume of commercial activities there.

While the Bambara states were pagan at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Hausa states mixed Islam with Paganism. This does not however mean that the Hausa states were in decline. Gobir expanded from the eighteenth century into the beginning of the nineteenth century. Kano enjoyed economic prosperity and political stability. Katsina became a centre of Islamic learning and culture. Borno still wielded some degree of military and political might by the beginning of the nineteenth century. It continued to receive tributes from some of the Hausa states. The Mai of Borno no longer led their army to war but they dedicated their time to the improvement of arts, culture, and literature. El-Kanemi re-organised Borno after its sack by Islamic Jihadists, resisted the Jihadists and built a new capital and introduced reforms. Under him, Borno entered into a period of intellectual revival.

Oyo entered the nineteenth century with the economic prosperity started from the eighteenth century during the reign of Alaafin Abiodun. Oyo was however weakened considerably due to the eighteenth-century wars with Nupe and Borgu. The eighteenth-century crisis during the reign of Basorun Gaa also left indelible mark on the imperial constitution. Oyo therefore entered the nineteenth century, where she faced the greatest imperial challenge, with a weak army and a constitution already undermined. The decline of Oyo early in the nineteenth century gave opportunity to vassal states to declare their independence. The fall of Oyo created a vacuum for leadership in Yorubaland and the struggle for leadership led to civil wars, and the desire to have slaves prolonged the wars. It was the fall of Oyo that brought the full impact of slave trade into Yorubaland.

Before the arrival of the Europeans, Dahomey had a dynamic political structure characterized by efficient civil service, absolute kings and loyal citizens. Dahomeen kings were accessible unlike the Oyo or Benin kings. Wegbaja contributed outstandingly to a highly centralized and efficient government laying the foundation for royal absolutism in Dahomey. The king was the head of the legislature, executive and the judiciary. There was a senior official in charge of foreign affairs and who controlled all dealings with Europeans. To back this up, the army was well organized and disciplined.

Early in the nineteenth century, Dahomey continued the expansionist policy which was started by Wegbaja in the seventeenth century. Agaja pursued the expansionist policy vigorously in the eighteenth to the early part of the nineteenth century. Although slave trade became the main basis of the economy of Dahomey about 1840s, and Dahomey suffered the devastating effect of slave trade more than any other West African state, yet it was strong enough to adjust and adapt itself to the changing situation of the nineteenth

century. Dahomey as an independent state in 1822 fought for political survival and economic self-reliance.

Early in the nineteenth century, Ashante was well established as a state and it continued to expand in order to have and to retain a direct access to the coast. The Fante who was a close rival of the Ashante also wanted to maintain status quo and retain its position as middlemen in the trade between the interior and the Europeans. Their rivalry, bitter as it was, led to Ashante-Fante-Batish wars which started in 1806 and the British later took advantage of the war for imperialist purpose.

Benin was a powerful state by the beginning of the nineteenth century. It received tributes from Lagos, Southern Ekiti, Akure, Urhobo and Ibo countries. Although the change from slave trade to trade in palm oil and ivory favoured the Urhobo and Itsekiri more than the Benin, yet it will be misleading to depict a general decline in Benin and regard it as a “City of blood” at the beginning of the century. The Oba of Benin, a divine king, provided a stable government which welded the kingdom together until Benin became a victim of British imperialism and was destroyed in 1897.

Before concluding discussion on the stability of well-formed and well-organised states in Africa, I will make reference to the Zulu of South Africa. The Zulu was the most widely-known state of South Africa by the eighteenth and the nineteenth century. Zululand, a very popular Bantu state rose to eminence during the reign of Dingiswayo. He maintained an organized state and a standing formidable army. Shaka (Chaka) who reigned after Dingiswayo brought Zululand to its height of military might. Emperor Shaka the Great altered the course of South Eastern African history. His impact was felt over half of the continent of Africa. His kingdom sprawled through Mataberland (Rhodesia) to Mozambique and his influence covered a very wide African range in the early eighteenth century. He improved tremendously on military strategy and combat tactic. His reign witnessed disruption of peace and he was reputed to be a cruel and blood thirsty tyrant. Irrespective of this negative side however, he left behind a formidable Empire by the time he was assassinated in a palace coup by Dingane, his brother who reigned in his stead. Under Dingane, Zululand flourished in commerce, trade and industry and most especially agriculture and livestock. The Boers, Britons and other Western powers however put an end to the Zulu might by conquering the Zulu in the war of 1879.

The Igbos and Ibibios had no centralized state structures. Their system of statehood can best be described as a cephalous. They had the village democratic system and the system had a resemblance of true democracy because every male adult in Igboland had a right to voice out his opinion at the village assembly. He took part in the decision making. This notwithstanding, the Igbos also related well, with sound diplomatic tenets, with their contemporaries in pre-colonial times. This is more so through trade contact, a topic we are going to deal with later on in this course.

#### **2.3.4 The Political Interdependence of Pre-Colonial African States**

What do you imagine would occur in such a conglomeration of stable, strong, and well-organised pre-colonial African states? Of course, it would engender either mutual relationship or mutual rivalry. International system would have to develop and since war might be devastating with the “balance of power” or “balance of terror” existing, diplomacy would become the most preferable tool to use among states.

From the foregoing discussion on the various administrative prowess of the pre-colonial African states, you can easily deduce that the states would rely on one another to be at peace and prosper. As I earlier postulate, it is an established fact that no state can stand in isolation of others in international politics. It is either a state becomes so powerful as to scare away potential invaders or resort to diplomatic antics to keep predating rivals at arm’s length. The diplomatic relations between established African states and outsiders cannot be overruled during the pre-colonial period and this underline the basic importance of this course – pre-colonial African diplomacy.

## **2.4 SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISES 2**

1. Discuss the nature of historical contacts in Pre-colonial African states.
2. Briefly discuss the impact of the pilgrimage of Mansa Musa on Pre- colonial African Diplomacy.



## **2.5 SUMMARY**

We have so far traced the emergence of some Pre-colonial African states. We vividly describe their mode of governance, their uniqueness, their strength and potentials and what made them viable for diplomatic relations within and without Africa during the pre-colonial period. As we launch into the other unit which will further highlight the diplomatic history of pre-colonial Africa, we sincerely hope that you will by now realize that politically, pre-colonial Africa competed well with other civilized states elsewhere during the same period.

## **2.6 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Compare and contrast the administrative style of Dahomey and Oyo during the Pre-colonial period.
- 2a. Critically examine the contributions of the Benin Obas to diplomacy generally during the earlier period of pre-colonial Africa.
- b. Discuss what makes Mai Idris Aloma unique in military tactic.



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## 2.8 ANSWERS TO SAES 2

1. Typical of the social nature of man, human communities interact with one another. The interaction can be on the basis of politics, culture, trade, technological transfer or even religion. African States also interacted from the ancient times through the medieval times to the Pre-colonial time. The pre-colonial period in Africa is a period that can best be described as a transitional age in Africa. The eighteenth and nineteenth century to which it belongs was a century of Islamic revival and in most states, Islam was installed as state religion. It was also a century when the slave trade was abolished and trade in agricultural products flourished.

2. The story of Mali Empire is akin to that of Mansa Musa. Mali rose after the fall of Ghana Empire in West Africa. It had a stable government, organised trade contact and stupendous wealth, and a strong standing army. Moreover, Mansa Musa exposed Mali to the outside world. In 1324 AD on a pilgrimage to Mecca, he carried so much wealth (gold), camels and men to the extent that Mali was recognized the world over as a wealthy Empire. The affluence made Mali appear on the maps produced by the Italians in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The pilgrimage attracted to Mali more traders and Muslim scholars who contributed to the economic, social and cultural development of the Empire.

Architects who built beautiful bricks palaces in Niani, and mosques in Gao and Timbuktu were also attracted. Most especially, the pilgrimage gave an opportunity to Mali to open diplomatic relations with the states of North, especially Fez. Mansa Musa displayed a remarkable capacity of the Negro for political and diplomatic organisation.

## UNIT 3: TRADE HISTORY OF PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN STATES

### CONTENTS

- 3.1 Introduction
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  - 3.3.1 Historical Trade Contact among Pre-Colonial African State
  - 3.3.2 Trade within West African Pre-Colonial States
  - 3.3.3 Trade between North and West Africa
    - The Trade Routes between North and West Africa during the Pre-Colonial Period
  - 3.3.4 The Impact of Pre-Colonial African Trade on Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy
- 3.4 Self-Assessment Exercises (SAEs) 3
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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

In furtherance of the preceding unit, we discuss the historical precedence of trade among pre-colonial African states. We will go on to trace the trade contact of Pre-colonial African states in West Africa internally and then attempt a link between North Africa and West Africa. Of course, the other parts of Africa will be discussed. Trade (commerce) as the most potent single factor that led to the development of Pre-colonial African Diplomacy will be examined in the historical perspective of Africa. The impact of pre-colonial African trade on pre-colonial African Diplomacy will also be determined.



### 3.2 INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- State the importance of trade to a state;
- describe trade within Africa during the Pre-colonial period;
- discuss trade between North and West Africa during the pre-colonial period;
- list and examine the importance of the trans-Saharan trade routes during the pre-colonial period;
- discuss trade in other parts of Africa during the pre-colonial period, and
- list and discuss the impact of pre-colonial trade on pre-colonial African Diplomacy.



### **3.3 MAIN SECTION**

#### **3.3.1 Historical Trade Contact among Pre-Colonial African State**

Recall the earlier assertion that trade (commercial link), more than any other factor, shapes a state's interest. Indeed, trade facilitates the interaction and interdependence of separate political entities in the international system. It is the urge to flourish economically that breeds competing interests which at best necessitates diplomacy or at worst war among states. The life-wire to support a political or military set-up is a vibrant and buoyant economy. You ought to know that a weak economy is a recipe for a failed state. Having this in focus, pre-colonial African states sought to maintain trade contacts that would boost their economies and this inevitably led to the emergence of pre-colonial African diplomacy. This concept informs the age-long interaction of pre-colonial African states. For a very clear understanding of pre-colonial African trade history, I will trace the trade interaction and relations of various African states through the ancient to the medieval and pre-colonial African periods.

#### **3.3.2 Trade within West African Pre-Colonial States**

It is imperative to treat West Africa separately because most renowned Empires during the pre-colonial period sprang up there. Another factor is that commercial activities linking the Savannah region in the north and the coastal forest belt in the South was more pronounced because of the rich agricultural land and mineral deposits available in West Africa.

Allowing for variations within a climatic region, West Africa may be divided into two: the Savannah hinterland in the North and the coastal forest belt in the South. Each climatic region produced agricultural products conducive to it and which the other region depended upon. For example the Savannah North produced cattle, African sheep, goats (mesuro), gum, cotton, groundnuts, millet, shea butter, rice and minerals such as iron and gold. On the other hand, the forest region produced a variety of timber such as mahogany, iroko, ebony, baobab, bamboo, and raised wood; and other edible products like kolanuts, pepper, yam, cassava, coco-yam, sweet –potato, banana, palm oil and minerals such as gold, brass, copper; and other items such as ivory, fish, and sea salt. You can easily deduce that this diversity would naturally give rise to economic interdependence among Pre-colonial West African states and it surely did. A variety of occupations necessitating interdependence also emerged.

Apart from pastoral farming, West Africans in the Savannah hinterland engaged in such industries such as iron works and blacksmithing, leather works and livestock husbandry. In the South, the people took to brass and bronze works, pottery and arable farming. Of

course, in the absence of total self-sufficiency of the people within any one single climatic region and in the two regions as separate entities, exchange of goods inevitably gave rise to trade. In the villages, the women engaged in retail trade of farm products in exchange for their own domestic needs. This took place in the village markets once or twice during the week. Regular markets were also held at dusk daily. Bigger markets in the towns; Kumbi Saleh in Ghana, Gao and Timbuktu in Mali, Jenne in Shongai, Kano, Old Oyo, Benin, Quidah, Kumasi, Borno, Ashante and many others across West Africa served as centres for wholesale exchange of commodities once or twice every month.

Before the introduction of money as a medium of exchange, the mode of commodity-exchange was by barter. The pot maker, for example, brought his ceramics to the market and could exchange them for either palm-oil, soap, dried fish or a basket of yam. With the introduction of the cowry-shells, iron bars and gold weights as money during the fourteenth century, it became easier for professional traders to transact business on a larger scale. Merchandise which were hitherto transported by human carriers, oxen and asses were later carried by camels and horses.

In the markets, various conventions developed and these were later given the force of law by local rulers. For example, the markets had their own officers, commodity agents and market guards to ensure order on market days and intervened in business disputes. I hope you can follow this development and can easily deduce from the trend, the emergence and sustenance of pre-colonial African Diplomacy through the market experience.

The ruler also collected tolls or sales tax to run his administration. For example, the king of old Ghana during the eleventh century collected a trade tax of about ten shillings from every merchant leading a donkey-load of salt into the imperial capital and doubled this amount from every trader leading a donkey-load of gold out of the Empire. This can be likened to excise, export and import duties of international trade nowadays. This of course was the practice of other commercial centres of West Africa. The great kingdoms (states) of West Africa depended on and enjoyed great material prosperity arising from this exchange of commodities in trade. The tolls and levies on goods served as a viable income-earner to the states.

### **3.3.3 Trade between North and West Africa**

As you are already aware, the production of surplus farm crops, availability of abundant mineral resources and other crafts produced by artisans in West Africa, created a productive atmosphere for trade with communities outside West Africa. The trade link between North Africa and West Africa is popularly called the Trans-Sahara trade. This trade cut across the arid, hot Sahara Desert linking people and cultures together all over Africa. Although sea-salt was produced in the coastal forest belt in the south West Africa, it was difficult to transport large quantity of it for a long distance to the Northern climatic region. Consequently, the Savannah states of West Africa had to rely on the supply of

rock-salt brought by the Mediterranean Africans from the Sahara desert. This was how the trans-Sahara trade developed. The camel which was introduced into North Africa from Asia made the transit possible. The prime motive of the North African Arabs for coming into West Africa was initially trade. You should note that the cause of the Moroccan invasion of the Songhai Empire in 1591 was the control of the Teghaza salts mine and this will enable you to realize the importance of trade connection between North and West Africa during the pre-colonial period.

For a long time, the salt mines of Teghaza were in the hands of the Berbers of North Africa. Other salt-mines which provided the basis for this trade were at Taodeni, Bilma and Taodek. North Africans found ready markets in savannah West Africa such as textiles, trinkets, horses, beads, figs, date palm, copper, swords and at later period guns and gunpowder. In exchange, the West Africans supplied commodities secured from the coastal forest belt such as kolanuts, ivory, honey and cotton. In addition to such savannah products as leather works, dye- stuffs, gum and cotton, Slaves and gold were the two West African commodities greatly cherished by North African merchants. Of course, gold and slaves were in so great demand by North African merchants that, the Northern and Western African traders became intimately connected during the pre-colonial period.

With the decline of Kumbi-saleh as the most important centre of trade in Old Ghana, other West African towns became renowned as centres of trade at various times in the West Africa historical experience. Gao became a centre of commercial consequence during the ascendancy of Mali in the fourteenth century. Timbuktu Jenne and Walota rose to fame during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries under the Shongai Empire.

Generally, the trade initiative was taken by the Berber merchants of Mediterranean Africa and it was they who organized and financed the camel caravans that regularly crossed the sahara into savannah West Africa. The Moslem traders usually traveled together in large caravans for safety. Sijilmasa, Ghadames and Murzuk were the towns where the traders met and set out at the beginning of every dry season for West Africa. The caravan trail moved from oasis to oasis and at certain points, guides were picked up to give direction for their journeys. You should bear it in mind that, south of the sahara, travels were both easier and safer. The reason for this as you should note is that there was relative peace and stability, and well-ordered organized states abound. Although the guides were still needed, relative order existed there and there was no need to travel in a convoy or to carry food.

The Berbers provided the guides, maintained the wells in the oasis, and kept strict control of the merchants. For example, the merchants were compelled to use guides who also acted as toll collectors for the services rendered. There were also agents at the gathering points to provide warehouse and accommodation for the traders during their stay.

One very important function of the agents I want you to note carefully for the purpose of our course – Pre-colonial African Diplomacy – is that, the agents were responsible for maintaining friendly relations between the Berbers and the West African rulers by offering regular gifts to the latter. This practice – a method of pre-colonial African diplomacy, – post-dated custom tariff in West Africa.

### **The Trade Routes between North and West Africa during the Pre-Colonial Period**

There were four main caravan routes between North and West Africa that were used by the traders, which in turn facilitated the contact and led to the development of diplomacy between North and West Africa during the pre-colonial period. The first, the most westerly route started off from Morocco beginning at Sijilmasa and went through Toghata to Walata in old Ghana. Thereafter the caravan followed the path of the internal trade eastwards to the river ports of Jenne, Timbuktu and Gao on the Niger. Here the Berber merchants exchanged goods. The trade evolved a mixed system of commodity exchange and money transactions. Gold was used as a medium of exchange although such units did not bear any value identification. Iron coinage and cowries were also used as money during the sixteenth century.

A second route connected Tunisia with central West Africa directly with Gao from where internal Trade route linked it with Timbuktu and Jenne. A third route started off from Ghadames, South of Tunis via Ghat, Agades, to the commercial towns of the Hausaland including Kano and Katsina. The fourth and the oldest route connected North Africa from Tripoli through Fezzan and Tibesti to the Chad basin towns of Njimi, Ngazargamu and Kukwa.

From the foregoing, you will realize that the main caravan routes linked Fez and Marakesh in Morocco, Constantine in Algeria; Tunis in Tunisia; and Tripoli in Libya with the savannah hinterland cities of old Ghana, Mali, Jenne, Gao, Timbuktu, Kano, Katsina and Kukwa. The contact and economic prosperity of these areas had a far reaching effect on the development of pre-colonial African Diplomacy.

#### **3.3.4 The Impact of Pre-Colonial African Trade on Pre- Colonial African Diplomacy**

More than any other factor, the history of trade contact brought pre-colonial Africans together and led to the development of pre-colonial African Diplomacy.

- Friendly relations developed among pre-colonial African peoples.
- Methods and means of diplomatic relations developed. Gifts were exchanged between rulers and traders.
- Embassies, inns and lodgings were built for residents of one state in another state for business and pilgrimage purposes.

- Agencies developed for intervention and settlement of business disputes which later augured well for diplomatic rows.
- Rules and regulations developed to regulate business transactions and this in turn became widely accepted all over Africa.
- The collection of tolls, fines, levies and duties developed and of course this helped diplomacy to thrive because all major Empires embraced the practice to source revenue for their administrations.
- Traders and travelers were able to learn many languages – a fact which helped communication and quick diplomatic tenets.
- Social interaction brought acculturation and the respect for the culture of others. This point also made diplomacy flourish.
- The pre-colonial markets themselves served as centres for dissemination of information. Social, local, political and international news were brought by foreign traders. Of course, all the information might not be true yet most information about other states were brought by trade merchants, missionaries and travellers.

### 3.4 SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISES 3

1. The life-wire to support a political or military set-up is a vibrant and buoyant ..... (a) economy (b) empire (c) diplomacy (d) citizenship.
2. Pre-colonial period and trade of \_\_\_\_\_ are unique because of its renowned empires, rich agricultural land and mineral deposits. (a) East Africa (b) Central Africa (c) West Africa (d) North Africa.
3. Before the introduction of money as a medium of exchange, the mode of commodity-exchange was by .....
4. The trade link between North Africa and West Africa is popularly called the ..... route (a) Savannah trade (b) trans-Sahara trade (c) Sahel trade.
5. The Savannah states of West Africa had to rely on the supply of \_\_\_\_\_ brought by the Mediterranean Africans from the Sahara desert. (a) gold-dust (b) rock-salt (c) firearms (d) sea-salt.
6. There were \_\_\_\_\_ main caravan routes between North and West Africa that were used by traders. (a) four (b) five (c) two (d) three.



### 3.5 SUMMARY

Thus far, in presenting and discussing the trade history of Pre-colonial African states, we have shown how the pre-colonial African states related commercially. The needs of a particular state always made it to seek material prosperity by connecting to another state. This informed the principle of interdependence and a team player in the international community. This inevitably led to the development of pre-colonial African Diplomacy with all its characteristics.

### 3.6 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Describe in detail the trade link between North and West Africa during the pre-colonial period.
2. Discuss how pre-colonial African Trade led to the development of pre-colonial African Diplomacy.



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### 3.8 ANSWERS TO SAEs 3

1. a 2. c 3. barter 4. b 5. b 6. a

## **UNIT 4: TRADE HISTORY OF PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN STATES II: COMMERCIAL FRONTIERS AND CONTACT ECONOMICS IN SOUTH AND EAST AFRICA**

### **CONTENTS**

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Intended Learning Outcomes
- 4.3 Main Content
  - 4.3.1 Historical Trade Contacts in other Parts of Pre-Colonial Africa
  - 4.3.2 Trade Links between Pre-Colonial East Africa and North Africa
  - 4.3.3 East Africa and the Indian Ocean
  - 4.3.4 East Africa, the Portuguese and Omani Trade Contracts
  - 4.3.5 The Impact of Pre-Colonial East African Trade
- 4.4 Self-Assessment Exercises (SAEs) 4
- 4.5 Summary
- 4.6 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 4.7 References/Further Reading
- 4.8 Answers to SAEs



### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This unit continues with the discussion on the historical perspective of trade contact in pre-colonial African states, with focus on East African states. Because of the availability of materials, and limitation of our research, we will beam the searchlight of our discussion on Zululand in South Africa and some trading centres in East Africa. Even though trading activities existed between people of pre-colonial East Africa, a more sustained commercial link existed between these people and the outside world – most especially Egypt and North Africa, India and the Persian Gulf, and Portugal and Oman. This trade link orchestrated by the availability of valuable goods which abound in East Africa and which the outside world needed eventually led to the emergence of diplomacy in the region.



### **4.2 INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES**

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the Zulu trade;
- trace the trade link between East and North Africa;
- analyse the trade link between East Africa, the Persian Gulf and India;
- examine the trade link between East Africa, Oman and Portugal;
- determine the Impact of East African Pre-colonial trade; and
- analyse the influence of East African trade on Pre-colonial East Africa.



## **4.3 MAIN SECTION**

### **4.3.1 Historical Trade Contact in Other Parts of Pre-Colonial Africa**

We have it in mind that this course deals with the whole of pre-colonial Africa. This informs our intention to do justice to other parts of Africa during the pre-colonial period in Africa. Due to available recorded material, however, we will discuss extensively the trade contact between East Africa and the outside world, to the detriment of internal trade within the East and South African region itself.

The Zulu kingdom, emerging in the 1820s and 1830s, was a powerful state whose influence was felt both commercially and politically in the whole of East and South Africa. Zulu under Shaka, a very charismatic and extraordinary military ruler brought about great military innovation that made Zululand a very great nation. Cattle, gold, diamonds and other mineral resources were abundant in East and South Africa and since other parts of the world needed these commodities, this facilitated economic interdependence and gradual development of diplomacy.

### **4.3.2 Trade Links between Pre-Colonial East Africa and North Africa**

Note is that the East African commercial frontier was a coast region that is more isolated from its hinterland and more integrated into an international system than were the Sahelian port of West Africa. The ocean provided possibilities for external contact. Ports along the Red Sea of Egypt connected directly to Ethiopia, the Horn, and the Indian Ocean monsoon trading system.

Marked trade routes crossed the eastern desert to the Red Sea coast from the Nile valley. The shortest and most convenient route was from Qus to Quseir. The more southerly routes were also favored, such as Aswan and Aidhab and Suakin, which avoided the fickle winds and piracy problems of the Northern Red Sea. From Suakin, it was possible to take a single monsoon to Southern Arabia, the Horn, and India, or with slightly different timings to reach east Africa directly.

The dhow, a canoe-like ship, was used to transport trade materials. You should do well to note that the innovation of the dhow transport on the seas enabled products to be transported in larger quantities than the caravan camels could ever carry in the case of pre-colonial West African trans-Saharan trade.

Another phase of more sustained contact between North Africa, especially Egypt and East Africa occurred between the thirteenth and the fourteenth century. During this period, Quseir el-Qadim was re-established on the Red Sea coast to handle the transit of African commodities which ultimately passed into the Mediterranean economy. Ivory, Copper and other commodities were sourced from Shanga (Kenya), Tumbatu (Zanzibar),

Buguda (Uganda), and Kilwa (Tanzania). Arden became the main port serving East Africa.

It is discovered that the motive to trade so far south might have been to obtain supplies of high quality ivory for the Byzantine court. You should read more about the trade link between North and East Africa yourselves. Avail yourselves with reading the recommended reference books listed at the end of this unit.

### **4.3.3 East Africa and the Indian Ocean**

There was no one location in pre-colonial East Africa situated so as to remain for long the focal point of overseas trade. The internal geography of the region favoured the coast south of the Zambezi valley, where contact with the interior was most feasible and, because of local gold deposits, most profitable. However, the path of the monsoons influenced shippers from the Persian Gulf to favour the northern ports. In response to this incongruity an entire string of towns developed, mainly on offshore islands stretching from the southern Somali coast to Sofala in Mozambique. Each of these ports exported products from its own hinterland and also (except for Sofala) functioned to some degree as an entreport for goods (particularly gold) originating farther to the south.

In the case of East Africa trade, the greater efficiency of sea transport made it have an edge over the Sahara in the export of products. The product recorded as of greatest value by Egyptian accounts of East African trade is ivory which retained its paramount position up to the end of the 19th Century. Slaves are constantly mentioned in medieval sources of East African trade but it was difficult to decipher its magnitude unlike West Africa. Demand for East African slaves varied with the shifting needs of Persian. Gulf agriculture and pearl fishing, and the servile military forces of Arabia, Iraq and India.

You should note that a more consistent mainstay of the dhow trade was mangrove tree poles which provided a basic material of house construction – even dictating its dimensions – throughout the southern Persian Gulf. Also, iron – a commodity whose local scarcity helps account for the persistence of sewn-boat construction – was sent northward from East Africa.

Gold, the great staple of the trans-Saharan West African trade, could be found in East Africa only south of the Zambezi. However, like the larger and steadier supply for West African gold, the gold eventually found its way into India. On the way, however, it had to pass through several coastal ports, first Sofala in Mozambique, then Kilwa in Southern Tanzania, and finally northern towns like Mombasa and Malindi in Kenya. At the peak of East African gold production, Kilwa enjoyed a period of near monopoly over its export and this achieved impressive internal development. By the end of the fifteenth century, India merchants began to trade with the coast in larger vessels whose seasoned voyaging

patterns would not allow them to venture south of Kenya. Mombasa and Malindi thus they began to compete with Kilwa and one another for shares in the gold traffic.

You would have realised by now that the trading activities in East Africa brought much internal development to the pre-colonial East African states. This in turn brought about much interaction, between East Africa and the outside world which led to the development of economic and political interdependence. And in a logical sequence, diplomacy developed.

#### **4.3.4 East Africa, the Portuguese and Omani Trade Contacts**

When the Portuguese arrived to trade with East Africa, they attempted to police and tax the trade but it led to numerous local rebellions. However, in contrast to India, South East Asia and East Asia, no rival European powers attempted to displace Portugal here. Instead, this role was left to Persian Gulf Arab state of Oman.

During the pre-Portuguese period, Oman had sent merchant vessels to East Africa without seeking any political control over the area. In response to a period of Portuguese control over their home base, the Omanis adapted the construction and armament of their shipping to European styles and then undertook a counter-attack against the Portuguese at Mombasa.

Port Jesus at Mombasa fell to the Omanis in 1698 and representatives with small garrisons were soon sent to other coastal towns as far south as Kilwa. The Portuguese remained in control of the Mozambique coast while the Omanis finally established their own East African capital on the island of Zanzibar and became a firm fixture on this part of the coast. Economic development in East Africa thus centered on these two hegemonic powers. The influence of these two powers thus became profoundly felt in pre-colonial East Africa.

The Omanis brought mainly Persian Gulf goods (particularly dates) to East Africa and sought in return mainly slaves. Indian trades specialized in the exchange of textile goods for ivory. By the early nineteenth century, the Omanis of Zanzibar had become an East African rather than an Arabian power. One branch of the ruling Omani Busaid dynasty made Zanzibar its permanent residence. On the more northern part of the coast from Mombasa in Kenya to Mogadishu in Somalia, Zanzibar influence was felt until well after the mid-nineteenth century.

Later in the nineteenth century, the ports of Bagamoyo, Pangani and Tonga emerged from obscurity to serve as major entry ports for Zanzibari long –distance caravans. However, these trading centres also exported a considerable quantity of goods produced by local agricultural enterprise.

I want you to note that the nineteenth century witnessed a vast expansion and acceleration of trade which affected not only the traditional international staples such as ivory, which was still the leading singular export, slaves and timber but also commodities circulating within the interior. These commodities range from foodstuffs, iron (and iron implements), copper and salt. Added to these were a whole new range of major export goods like cloves, cowries, gum copal, copra and cereals – to name a few.

You can easily deduce as usual that such array of goods, products and commodities would attract traders from within and without, and, it surely did. The interaction facilitated interdependence between East Africa and the outside world, albeit first economically, but later politically. International political system emerged and diplomacy featured prominently – a complement of our course – Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy.

#### **4.3.5 The Impact of Pre-Colonial East African Trade**

We are going to examine the impact or rather put more clearly, the consequences of the East African trade with the outside world. In which way did these trading activities relate with this course? You will furthermore want to know how pre-colonial African diplomacy was enhanced by the interdependence of states. Of course, the solutions to these puzzles are not far-fetched.

As you might have earlier been aware, the interaction between people, either economically, politically, culturally or in any other way will always engender a modality for behavioral pattern among the said peoples. Human beings will not operate in anarchy or chaos. There will be conscious attempts at regulating human relationships. This assertion applied to East Africa and the people it traded with.

- Culturally, biologically and politically, the Swahili society of East African state became an extension of the Middle Eastern world.
- The East African society became an amalgam of foreign and indigenous elements.
- The Swahili language, which became not only the lingua franca but also the mother tongue for most of the merchant groups, was purely Bantu in structure with a great input of Arabic vocabulary. The oneness of language aided a lot in diplomatic relations because of the ease of communication and information dissemination.
- The Portuguese and Omani Arabs who came later assimilated into the local population and culture. They however retained, at least at their ruling levels, closer political and social ties to their respective metropolis.
- There was an increase in ship building for sea transport and commercial purposes which in turn facilitated easy transportation and contact between pre-colonial East Africa and the outside world. You can deduce for yourselves that this is a sure recipe for diplomatic ties.

- The political, military and economic competition between Oman and Portugal expanded the trading frontiers of East Africa.
- There existed the integration of a very wide region into a single market and the maintenance of a certain degree of autonomy by the East African states.
- Diplomatic relations sprang up between the coastal states of East Africa and Arab and European world and even farther to India in Asia.
- Embassies were built abroad and envoys exchanged between pre- colonial East African states and the outside world.
- Trade routes opened the way for the transmission of religious knowledge, and with it, artistic, legal, technological and administrative connections. The existence of land, coast and sea routes provided a means for missionaries and pilgrims to travel, while traders themselves were keen to see the spread of religion, especially, book religions, as a guarantee of the security of their operations.

#### **4.4 SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISES (SAEs) 4**

1. Briefly state what facilitated economic interdependence between Zululand and the outside world.
2. Mention the products of trade between East Africa and the Persian Gulf.



#### **4.5 SUMMARY**

We briefly summarise this unit as follows:

- The Zulu Kingdom under Shaka, its charismatic emperor, in the nineteenth century emerged as a powerful political and economic power and its influence was felt politically and commercially throughout East and South Africa.
- The East African trade with North Africa was made easy by Ocean and coastal links.
- The Persian Gulf, India and Asia were attracted to East Africa to trade in ivory, gold and other essential commodities.
- Portugal and Oman formed rival powers in East Africa and they impacted profoundly on pre-colonial African politics, economy and diplomatic relations.

#### **4.6 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Give a critical analysis of Omani and Portuguese control of East African trade.
2. Give a succinct description of the consequences of the trade between pre-colonial East Africa and the outside world.



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#### 4.8 ANSWERS TO SAEs 4

1. Besides the great influence of Shaka Zulu, a very charismatic and extraordinary military ruler, cattle, gold, diamonds and other mineral resources were abundant in Zululand of East and South Africa and since other parts of the world needed these commodities, this facilitated economic interdependence and gradual development of diplomacy.
2. East African trade revolved around efficient sea transport that gave it an edge over the Sahara in the export of products. The product recorded are ivory, agriculture, fishing, gold, iron and even slaves. Of greatest value by Egyptian accounts of East African trade is ivory which retained its paramount position up to the end of the 19th Century. Slaves are constantly mentioned in medieval sources of East African trade but it was difficult to decipher its magnitude unlike West Africa. Demand for East African slaves varied with the shifting needs of Persian. Gulf agriculture and pearl fishing, and the servile military

forces of Arabia, Iraq and India. A more consistent mainstay of the dhow trade was mangrove tree poles which provided a basic material of house construction – even dictating its dimensions – throughout the southern Persian Gulf. Also, iron – a commodity whose local scarcity helps account for the persistence of sewn-boat construction – was sent northward from East Africa.

Gold, the great staple of the trans-Saharan West African trade, could be found in East Africa only south of the Zambezi. However, like the larger and steadier supply for West African gold, the gold eventually found its way into India. At the peak of East African gold production, Kilwa enjoyed a period of near monopoly over its export and this achieved impressive internal development. By the end of the fifteenth century, India merchants began to trade with the coast in larger vessels whose seasoned voyaging patterns would not allow them to venture south of Kenya. Mombasa and Malindi thus they began to compete with Kilwa and one another for shares in the gold traffic.

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## **Module 3: External Influence on Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy**

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- Unit 1: Islam and Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy
- Unit 2: The Impact of Islam on Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy
- Unit 3: European Contact and Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy
- Unit 4: European Influence on Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy

### **UNIT 1: ISLAM AND PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN DIPLOMACY**

#### **CONTENTS**

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)
- 1.3 Main Content
  - 1.3.1 Islam in Africa
  - 1.3.2 The Jihads of the 19th Century
  - 1.3.3 The Consequence of the Jihads
- 1.4 Self-Assessment Exercises (SAEs) 1
- 1.5 Summary
- 1.6 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 1.7 References/Further Reading
- 1.8 Answers to SAEs



#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, discussion centres on the external influence of Islam on Pre-colonial African Diplomacy, albeit in historical perspective. We hope to trace the historical incidence of Islam in pre-colonial African states. Because of the limitation of availability of recorded historical materials, however, emphasis will be laid on West Africa. We hope that through the highlight on West Africa, a suitable logical deduction will be used in measuring what happened in other parts of Africa during the pre-colonial period.

In line with the afore-mentioned study plan of this unit, we will make mention of the Jihads of the nineteenth century and the effects they had on Africa generally and pre-colonial African Diplomacy in particular.



## 1.2 INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- determine the external influences on indigenous African International Relations;
- examine how Islam affected pre-colonial African Diplomacy;
- discuss Islam in pre-colonial African states;
- describe the effects of the Jihads on West Africa;
- analyze how Africa was affected by Islam generally during the pre-colonial era, and
- evaluate the contribution of the Jihads to Diplomacy in Pre-colonial Africa.



## 1.3 MAIN SECTION

Perhaps, you would have known by now that the two most visible external influences that affected pre-colonial African indigenous international relations and diplomacy were Islam on one hand and Western Europe on the other. Islam contributed literacy and led to the Islamized states and in Ashanti to the evolution of chanceries. It also introduced the destination for international law and practice between Muslims and non-Muslims. The Muslim states exchanged embassies. Bornu, for example, maintained intermittent relations with North Africa and Istanbul for three centuries. The spread of Arabic language aided communication between African themselves as well as with outsiders.

We will go further to trace the historical perspective of Islam in pre-colonial Africa.

### 1.3.1 Islam in Africa

Note that there is no logical way to discuss the origin of pre-colonial African Diplomacy without tracing the emergence and contribution of Islam. In a very vital way, Islam affected pre-colonial African Diplomacy.

Islam was introduced to North Africa from the Middle East and it was later on introduced into other parts of Africa, especially West Africa from North Africa. The Berber merchants who settled peacefully in big towns, trading centres and trading post along the trans-saharan trade routes, and nomadic tribes in search of pasture were mainly responsible for the spread of Islam.

#### Islam in Tekrur

Islam was introduced to Tekrur from Audaghast, a Sanhaja Berber state by Muslim Merchants who moved from central Mauritania to Audaghast which was the southern terminus of the trans-saharan trade route from sijilmasa. Historical record has it that from

Audaghost, Islam first spread to Tekrur and later to Kumbi Saleh. The skill possessed by the Muslim merchants in trade with their ability to read and write and to communicate with others during their long distance journeys made them very suitable as advisers to the kings of established Empires in Africa. Just imagine, which king would not want such literate and well-exposed people to be part of his cabinet to boost his administration? Of course, the literate traders became handy tools for fostering of diplomacy among the various pre-colonial African states and outsiders. This enhanced their importance and influence.

### **Islam in the Senegal Valley**

Islam came to the Senegal valley from Audaghost and as early as the eleventh century, a Lamtuna Berber leader named Tarsina made attempts to propagate Islam in the Senegal valley but he was killed in 1023. Yahaya, the successor of Tarsina went to Mecca and on his return brought Abdullahi Ibn-Yacin to the Senegal valley as a Muslim missionary. Later, Ibn Yacin started to train a body of militant followers, known as the Almoravids. These Almoravids later spread Islam through Jihads. You should note that the Almoravids conquered Old Ghana Empire in 1076 A.D. The spread of Islam and its adoption as states' religion in no small measure, contributed to the emergence of Islamized states with its attendant diplomatic tenets.

### **Islam in the Ghana Empire**

Muslim traders from Audaghost which was the entrepot of trans-Saharan trade to Ghana first took Islam to Ghana. At that time, Audaghost was under the rule of the Sanhaja Berbers. Later, Ghana conquered Audaghost and incorporated it into her Empire. This rapidly promoted the spread of Islam in Ghana Empire.

In the administration of old Ghana Empire, the capital, Kumbi Saleh had a foreigner's quarters where the inhabitants were mostly Muslims. Their influence contributed greatly to the spread of Islam in Ghana cities as a result of their trading activities. However, the ruling dynasty in Ghana remained pagans until the conquest of Ghana by the Almoravids in 1076 A.D. You should note that the conquest of Ghana made traders among the Dyula speaking group of Madinke to disperse and their trading activities took them far and wide throughout West Africa in search of gold. As you can note yourselves, the dispersal encouraged more the spread of Islam to other parts of Africa, most especially West Africa.

### **Islam in Mali Empire**

According to an Islamic historian, Al-Bakri, the ruler of Mali was converted to Islam after a prolonged drought was brought to an end by Muslim rites. Mansa Uli went on pilgrimage early in the second half of the thirteenth century. It was during the reign of Mansa Musa that the Mende people were Islamized.

I would like you to read the history of Mansa Musa and his development to Islamization in Mali. I do not need to remind you that we had discussed extensively on Mansa Musa who popularized Mali by his opulent pilgrimage to Mecca. You would furthermore, have known by now that the pilgrimage attracted Muslim scholars and clerics to Mali.

However, Ibn Battuta, an Islamic scholar and writer who visited Mali in 1353 during the reign of Sulayman recorded that in Mali, Islam was mixed with traditional cults and practices at the time of his visit. This was of course after the death of Mansa Musa. What is clear to us is that the reign of Mansa Musa was a period of territorial expansion, economic prosperity, rapid Islamization and expansion and increase in culture and learning. When Mansa Musa died in 1332, he left behind a remarkable Empire, wealth, prosperous, well-organised, Islamized cities and cities remarkably renowned for learning and culture. Bovil, impressed by what he saw wrote that when Mansa Musa died in 1332, he left behind him an Empire which in the history of purely African states was as remarkable of its wealth, and which provides a striking example of the capacity of the Negroes for political organisation.

You will particularly recollect how the achievement of Mansa Musa's pilgrimage to Mecca, an Islamic fundamental principle, facilitated diplomatic relations with states of North Africa, especially Fez.

### **Islam in Shongai Empire**

Although Islamic religion had been practised in Shonghai Empire centuries back, its era really started during the reign of Askia the Great (1493-1528). Mohammed Toure, an erstwhile general of Sonni Ali took the title of Askia the Great on his ascension to the throne of Shongai after he overthrew his boss's son. Askia the Great contributed immensely to the growth of Islam in Shongai. He went on a pilgrimage to Mecca where he was given a sword, a turban and made the Caliph of Western Sudan by the ruler of Mecca. This gesture evidently portrayed sound diplomatic relations between Mecca and Shongai, and Western Sudan. To enhance the spread of Islam in his Empire, he received Al-Maghili at his court to advise him. He made many enquiries about Islam to which Al-Maghili gave written replies which were read by Askia the Great and copies were circulated to other parts of Shongai Empire and Hausaland where many, including Uthman Dan Fodio later read them.

Although rulers after Askia abandoned the pro-Islam policy of Askia, Timbuktu remained a centre where Islamic learning and culture were either pursued or carried to other parts of Shongai Empire until the Moroccan invasion of 1591.

### **Islam in Kanem Borno**

Islam was introduced to Kanem Borno in the eleventh century during the reign of Ume Jilmi (1085-1097). He became a Muslim but Islam did not have a significant influence in Kanem-Borno until the middle of the twelfth century. Kanem-Borno became really

Islamized during the reign of Idris Aloma. Idris Aloma propagated Islam, made reforms and made Islam the state religion.

As you are already aware, the contributions of Idris Aloma to the propagation of Islam in Kanem-Bornu had far reaching effects on Africa. Aloma was a devout Muslim who encouraged the spread of Islam. He fought Jihads to promote the practice of Islam in the pure way. He encouraged and went on pilgrimage to Mecca. He built a hostel for Borno pilgrims in Cairo. He builds beautiful brick mosques for worship and substituted certain customary law with Islamic laws in his territory. His religious reforms really enhanced, aided and facilitated pre-colonial African Diplomacy.

### **Islam in Hausaland**

It is on record that the Wangarawa Merchants introduced Islam during the fourteenth century. It was introduced to Kano during the reign of Ali Raji (1349-1385) and to Katsina in the middle of the fourteenth century although it did not gain much ground there until the end of the fifteenth century when Timbuktu scholars began to visit the city. Katsina became a famous centre for Islamic culture and learning in the seventeenth century and produced many famous scholars like Don Marina and don Masanih. Islam made significant impact in Zaria after the Jihad of 1804 A.D.

### **1.3.2 The Jihads of the 19TH Century**

It is imperative to discuss the Islamic movement known as the Jihad in Western Sudan in the nineteenth century. I want you to see how these Jihads or holy wars contributed to the entrenchment of Islam as state religions, its impact on states' administration during the pre-colonial era and how it informed the formulation of foreign relation policies among pre-colonial African states.

Uthman Dan Fodio was the protagonist of the Fulani Jihad of 1804. He was a devout Muslim and a renowned Islamic cleric. He drew many people to himself by his Islamic teaching. The main aim of Dan Fodio for waging the Holy War was to reform Islam in Hausaland where Islam was mixed with paganism. He wanted a return to pure Islam. He could only achieve this aim by the establishment of the rule according to Sharia. The Sharia regulates for the Muslim his entire life in religious, political, economical and social aspects. The Sharia regulates a Muslim's marital and civic relations as well as his relations with non- Muslims.

Another Jihad worthy of our discussion here is the Masina Jihad. It is on record that the Masina Jihad derived its inspiration from the Sokoto Jihad of 1804. The protagonist of the Masina Jihad was Shehu Ahmed. Like Dan Fodio, Shehu Ahmed's primary aim for declaring the Jihad was religious. Shehu Ahmed's Islamic Empire extended from Jenne to Timbuktu. He established a new capital at Hamda Ilahi. The Empire was famous for its

Islamic character and good organisation. Ahmed, like Uthman enthroned Sharia as the law and regulation guiding the Islamic states.

### 1.3.3 The Consequences of the Jihads

For relevance, let us focus mainly the political consequence of the Jihads which eventually aided pre-colonial African Diplomacy. Politically, the Jihads created large Empires in Hausaland and Masina. The Jihads welded together many independent states and kingdoms and put them under unified governments at Sokoto, Gwandu and Masina. Moreover, the Jihads promoted unity by imposing unified political system over areas where there had been many governments. The Jihads knit together the history of many ethnic groups.

As a result of unified political system and internal security in an area where there had been rival states, trade flourished and expanded among the different ethnic groups in the areas the Jihads were declared.

Investments were attracted and internal and external relations were intensified. You will agree with me that the organised and serene situation will aid pre-colonial African diplomacy among the states.

### 1.4 SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISES (SAEs) 1

1. Islam contributed \_\_\_\_\_ and led to the Islamized states and in Ashanti to the evolution of chanceries. (a) civility (b) literacy (c) state organisation (d) diplomacy.
2. Islam was introduced to North Africa from the \_\_\_\_\_ and it was later on introduced into other parts of Africa, especially West Africa from \_\_\_\_\_. (a) Middle East, North Africa (b) Asia, North Africa (c) Turkey, Middle East.
3. The main aim of Dan Fodio for waging the Holy War was to \_\_\_\_\_ Islam in Hausaland where Islam was mixed with paganism. (a) practice (b) expropriate (c) reform (d) propagate.
4. The Masina Jihad derived its inspiration from the Sokoto Jihad of \_\_\_\_\_. (a) 1802 (b) 1803 (c) 1804 (d) 1805
5. The Jihads welded together many independent states and kingdoms and put them under unified governments at \_\_\_\_\_, Gwandu and Masina. (a) Sokoto (b) Borno (c) Kano (d) Mali.

### 1.5 SUMMARY

We discovered in this unit that the introduction of Islam into the pre-colonial African states followed almost the same pattern. Muslim traders from Audaghost, nomadic Fulanis and Muslim clerics played major roles in this regard. So also were the later Jihadists of the nineteenth century. The states also used Muslim scholars and missionaries to enhance the efficiency of their administration. They made use of Islamic scholars as

their advisers and this in turn led to a unified system of administration all over West Africa. This unification of administration was even given a boost with the Jihads of the nineteenth century. We realize that the external impact of Islam greatly facilitated the emergence of Pre-colonial African Diplomacy.

### 1.6 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss in detail the penetration of Islam into pre-colonial African states.
2. Evaluate the Jihads of the nineteenth century.



### 1.7 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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### 1.8 ANSWERS TO SAEs 1

1. b 2. a 3. c 4. c 5. a 6.

## UNIT 2: THE IMPACT OF ISLAM ON PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN DIPLOMACY

### CONTENTS

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)
- 2.3 Main Content
  - 2.3.1 General Contribution of Islam
  - 2.3.2 Political Importance of Islam in Pre-colonial African States
  - 2.3.3 Economic Importance and Contribution
  - 2.3.4 Educational and Cultural Importance
  - 2.3.5 Technological Importance
- 2.4 Self-Assessment Exercises (SAEs) 2
- 2.5 Summary
- 2.6 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 2.7 References/Further Reading
- 2.8 Answers to SAEs



### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In further consideration of the external influence of Islam on Pre-Colonial African diplomacy, we are going to discuss how Islam contributed to the progress of pre-colonial Africa and how it facilitated its diplomacy through politics, economy, education, culture and technology. You ought to have known quite well by now that Islam contributed immensely to the enhancement of diplomacy in Pre-colonial African states. It was also one of the major external factors that influenced pre-colonial African diplomacy, the other being European influence.



### 2.2 INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- mention the general contribution of Islam to pre-colonial African diplomacy;
- discuss the political contribution of Islam to pre-colonial African diplomacy;
- evaluate the economic importance of Islam to pre-colonial African diplomacy;
- analyse the link between Islamic education and pre-colonial African diplomacy;
- explain the relationship between Islamic culture and pre-colonial African diplomacy; and
- examine the importance of Islamic technology and its contribution to pre-colonial African diplomacy.



## **2.3 MAIN SECTION**

### **2.3.1 General Contribution of Islam**

In the earlier discussion of this module, we saw how Islam had impact upon the development in pre-colonial African states. Islam was an agent of political, economic, cultural, artistic and educational development in pre-colonial Africa. In some ways, it was a factor of change. However, take note that Ghana Empire was not developed by Islam. Ghana was already a developed, stable and economic viable state before the advent of Islam. Islam only caused the downfall of Ghana because it was invaded by the Almoravids in 1076. Note that the Almoravids were Muslim Jihadists and adventurers.

Nonetheless, Islam in no small measure contributed immensely to the development of diplomacy in pre-colonial African states which also affected Ghana. We shall discuss this presently, under political, economic, cultural, artistic, educational and even technological sub-headings and attempt a linkage with pre-colonial African Diplomacy.

### **2.3.2 Political Importance of Islam in Pre-Colonial African States**

The introduction of Islam in Pre-colonial Africa brought a radical change in administration and unity of states. You should as well know that coherence, peace and unity in governance are a fertile breeding ground for the thriving of diplomatic relations. Islam contributed immensely in this regard. For instance, in West Africa, the peoples were pagans, worshipping numerous gods before the advent of Islam. After Islam was introduced however, things changed. The belief in monotheism (one God) and the universality of Islam welded its adherents together. Coherence and unity reigned supreme and the system of administration became almost the same all over. Laws and regulations became Islamized. Most African states replaced local and customary laws with Islamic law (Sharia). This augured well for the uniform regulations to guide diplomacy and the complexities of various customary laws were removed. Most states adopted Islam as their states' religion.

Note that real technicality and generally accepted protocol guiding international relations and by extension, diplomacy gathered momentum due to the influence of Islam. What do you think made diplomacy flourish in the Western world? Of course, diplomacy was aided in Europe and elsewhere by the uniformity of religion, ideology and common laws. This was exactly what Islam impacted on Africa and you can readily decipher that understanding thrived among the states.

Islam fostered the development of and sustained good relationship between the pre-colonial African states, especially between Sudanese Empires and North Africa. It also fostered diplomatic relations between East Africa and Arab countries in the Middle East. Recall that Oman, a Muslim Arab world had a long-standing trade contact with East

Africa. It maintained a political hegemony in Zanzibar and Oman's influence was felt in the whole of East Africa where it traded in ivory, copper, gold dusts and other items.

In like manner, Kanem Bornu maintained diplomatic relations manned by Muslim scholars with Fez, Morocco, Egypt and other North African states. This enabled Kanem Borno to procure firearms before many other Sudanese states. With firearms, warfare became greatly revolutionized. This led to the expansion of states' territories and frontiers, and again oneness of administration was sustained.

Advanced political organization developed side by side. Islam contributed immensely to the growth, and good and stable government in Mali, Shongai, and Kanem Borno. Uniform terms like "Sultan"; 'Vizier', 'alkali' etc. were used for state functionaries. Learned Muslim scholars became advisers to the kings. In some states, Islam was declared the state religion and such states were ruled according to the Sharia law which regulated their political, economic, social and religious lives. And by extension, most of international laws regulating pre-colonial African diplomacy had to be Islamized to fit into the new trend then.

### **2.3.3 Economic Importance and Contribution**

You are well aware that Islam followed trade to Africa, be it west, east or North Africa. Missionaries and Muslim scholars followed the trade routes. Pilgrims to Mecca and North Africa also made use of the routes. This facilitated easy contact and communication, and information about foreign lands were gathered. The routes aided the contact of many states who later became diplomatically related. It aided the establishment of the international system with established pre-colonial states as actors.

Trade aided the growth of Islam, so also, Islam aided the growth of trade. Those who went on pilgrimage had more exposure and they understood foreign people more. Such understanding contributed greatly to the growth of international trade. International trade in turn contributed to the efficiency of diplomatic relations in settling disputes amicably and fostering of peace for the growth of trade and prosperity.

The pilgrimage of notable African rulers made Africa known to the outside world. The opulence and affluence displayed by Mansa Musa of Mali, Askia the Great of Shongai; and Mai Idris Aloma of Borno attracted states from North Africa and the outside world to the Empires. The world regarded their Empires as "lands of gold". You should note that as cattle attract the egret, so also wealth attracts investors. Everybody wants to be recognised by the rich. This happened in the case of these rich Empires. Many African states and the outside world sought diplomatic relations with them. Diplomacy flourished. Embassies were built. Envoys were exchanged. Pacts were made and regulations existed to guide the conduct of diplomatic relations.

We shall however, discuss this aspect later on in this course under the means and methods of pre-colonial African diplomacy.

However, of paramount importance is the fact the Islam made possible a unified system of regional markets. States were welded together. Unity and prosperity went hand in hand. There was the influx of foreigners to the pre-colonial African states and as diverse as their interests were, they were able to negotiate, bargain, compromise and amicably resolve conflicting interests – albeit through diplomatic means.

### **2.3.4 Educational and Cultural Importance**

The introduction of writing and especially the emergence of institutions of higher learning is an immense contribution by Islam to the development of African states in all spheres including diplomatic relations. Learning and writing revolutionised acquisition of knowledge and dissemination of information in Africa. Writing makes possible the keeping of records of events and accounts of trade. Note that most of the materials we study for this course is made possible by the record keeping of most Islamic and African writers. Their writings influenced the knowledge of African history generally and their diplomatic relations in particular, which concerns us in this course.

Education brought exposure and more civilisation. The institutions taught those who had no opportunity of traveling to foreign lands and they got knowledge of happenings around the world. Of course, you as students are having the knowledge of what happened in the past through education. You were not there but by attending the National Open University of Nigeria, you now have the opportunity of knowing about Pre-colonial African states.

Institutions of higher learning emerged at Jenne and Timbuktu. Academic standard attained in these universities was high. Surgical operations were performed in these universities as far back as the sixteenth century, two centuries before Europe had a knowledge of surgical operation. Scholars went to the universities of Jenne and Sankore in Timbuktu from beyond the Coast of Africa.

There were institution of culture and learning in Borno and, the cultural and artistic relations made the peoples of pre-colonial Africa relate with the outside world. There was rapid acculturation and technological transfer.

Forms of dressing and mode of greetings were transferred from the Islamic world into the African world. White robes and turbans were worn. Muslim faithful in Africa kept long beard like their counterparts in the Arab world. All these formed a code of unity among the Islamized people of Africa. Since Islam taught that Muslim brothers are one and should not do any wrong to one another, this unity went a long way in preserving peace, conducive for pre-colonial African diplomacy.

Arabic language became the medium of communication among the people of pre-colonial Africa due to the influence of Islam. It became the second language of scholars and teachers and it was used for academic and religious instructions. Since most rulers made use of Islamic scholars as advisers, Arabic language became the royal language. What do you expect in such a linguistic situation? What do you think would be the probable impact on diplomacy?

Of course, the answer is not far-fetched. The oneness of the language and the dominion it had over other local languages would facilitate easy understanding among the diverse peoples of pre-colonial African states. Language barrier was removed and peoples communicated with one another easily. Pre-colonial African states' actors in the international system used this advantage for diplomacy to be effective.

Writing also introduced written rules, agreements and regulations guiding human affairs. Hitherto, there were agreements among pre-colonial African states before Islam was introduced but these were largely unwritten. The written nature of laws however made official interaction between states easier, less cumbersome and more formal. Dates and events were kept properly and almost flawlessly. It is on record that most of the diplomatic transaction between Empires in East and West Africa, and North Africa and the outside world (especially Arab) were guided by written, widely accepted, bi-lateral and multi-lateral agreements and pacts.

### **2.3.5 Technological Importance**

Islam contributed immensely to architectural development in Africa. Pre-dominant features of oriental architecture appeared in many buildings especially mosques, institutions and emirs' palaces. Through pilgrimage, Islam brought Africa in contact with the oriental world and the most advanced technology of that time. This enabled pre-colonial Africa to be progressive in relation to that time. For instance, while Mansa Musa was returning from Mecca in 1324, he brought Es-Saheli who built with bricks, a palace in Niani and mosques in Timbuktu and Gao. These buildings regarded as the first brick buildings in the Sudan added to the fame of the Empire. You can clearly see how the technological improvement would have attracted more people from the oriental world. Of course, it would have impact on pre-colonial African diplomacy in the long run.

In the area of war technology, we can readily call to mind how Mai Idris Aloma of Borno on his return from Mecca procured firearms from the oriental world. He introduced firearms into his Empire and this enhanced his status as a military reformer. He used the superior fire power to establish his Empire, expanded it and protected it from preying adventurers. He went ahead and propagated Islam further through Jihads. He became a favourite of the Muslim world and he maintained steady diplomatic relations within and without Africa during the pre-colonial period.

## 2.4 SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISES (SAEs) 2

1. Describe the political importance of Islam to pre-colonial African states.
2. Justify the claim that the growth of Islam and trade are directly proportional.



## 2.5 SUMMARY

In this unit, we realize that Islam immensely contributed to the progress and stability of pre-colonial African states which in turn affected its diplomacy very favourably. Politically, African states were welded together in unity with states adopting Islamic law to regulate their affairs. This brought about oneness and similarity in governance, a situation conducive for diplomacy.

Economically, trade boomed and routes opened pre-colonial Africa to the outside world and this attracted foreigners who later on maintained diplomatic relations with Pre-colonial Africa.

Educationally, writing was introduced and it enabled the keeping of records and recording of pacts and agreements and signing of treaties at an official level.

Culturally, the pre-colonial African peoples imbibed the culture of the orientals, spoke their language and copied their Sharia laws.

Technologically, the Arab world impacted on pre-colonial African states through architectural transfer and military innovation.

Thus, all the above-stated factors facilitated diplomacy in pre-colonial Africa.

## 2.6 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Critically examine the role of Islam in pre-colonial Africa vis-à-vis education.
2. Evaluate the roles of two African rulers in attracting foreigners to Pre-colonial Africa.



## 2.7 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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## 2.8 ANSWERS TO SAEs 2

1. Islam brought a radical change in administration and unity of states in pre-colonial Africa. Islam contributed significantly in promoting coherence, peace and unity in governance. For instance, in West Africa, the peoples were pagans, worshiping numerous gods before the advent of Islam. After Islam was introduced however, things changed. The belief in monotheism (one God) and the universality of Islam welded its adherents together.

Notably, Islam fostered the development of and sustained good relationship between the pre-colonial African states, especially between Sudanese Empires and North Africa. It also fostered diplomatic relations between East Africa and Arab countries in the Middle East. Recall that Oman, a Muslim Arab world had a long-standing trade contact with East Africa. It maintained a political hegemony in Zanzibar and Oman's influence was felt in the whole of East Africa where it traded in ivory, copper, gold dusts and other items.

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2. Islam did followed trade to Africa. Pilgrims to Mecca and North Africa also made use of the routes. Therefore, trade aided the growth of Islam, so also, Islam aided the growth of trade. Those who went on pilgrimage had more exposure and they understood foreign people more. Such understanding contributed greatly to the growth of international trade. Also, the pilgrimage of notable African rulers made Africa known to the outside world. The opulence and affluence displayed by Mansa Musa of Mali, Askia the Great of

Shongai; and Mai Idris Aloma of Borno attracted states from North Africa and the outside world to the Empires. The world regarded their Empires as “lands of gold”.

## UNIT 3: EUROPEAN CONTACT AND PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN DIPLOMACY

### CONTENTS

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)
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  - 3.3.1 The History of European Contact with Africa
  - 3.3.2 The Portuguese Contact with Africa
    - Prince Henry, the Navigator
    - Voyages After Henry's Death
  - 3.3.3 Contacts with Other Europeans in Africa
- 3.4 Self-Assessment Exercises (SAEs) 3
- 3.5 Summary
- 3.6 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 3.7 References/Further Reading
- 3.8 Answers to SAEs



### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Recall that in this module, we examined the external influences on pre-colonial African diplomacy, one being Islamisation and the other, Europe and its activities. Here, Europe and its economic, political, hegemonic and missionary activities will be discussed. There will be elaborate discussion on the explorative attempts and successes of Europeans in navigating Africa up to the interior of West Africa. In this regard, the activities of Portugal and its ebullient navigators from the time of Prince Henry the great navigator to the time of individual navigators will be discussed. Our discussion will also centre on the contributions of England, Spain, Holland, Sweden and Germany to the navigation of Africa in pursuance first, of wealth and later political hegemony.



### 3.2 INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- trace the historical contact of Europe with Africa;
- suggest the motive of the Europeans for searching out Africa;
- describe the contributions of Prince Henry the Navigator to the discovery of pre-colonial West Africa;
- discuss the contributions of other navigators;
- examine the role of the Portuguese in the navigation of Africa; and
- deduce the challenges against the monopoly of Portugal by other European powers.



### 3.3 MAIN SECTION

#### 3.3.1 The History of European Contact with Africa

The quest for knowledge induced voyages of discovery by European navigators and explorers. After the discoveries of many lands in America, the Far East and New world, the Europeans beamed their searchlight on Africa. It is on record that as early as 610B.C, the Phoenicians sent by King Neccho of Egypt completed the circumnavigation of African going through the Red Sea and returning through the strait of Gibraltar. The Romans also knew the Western Coast of Africa as far as the Canary Islands which they called “Fortunate Islands”. This was added to their knowledge of Mediterranean Africa. During the barbarian invasion of Europe and North Africa, their West African Coast settlements were abandoned and Europe was consequently cut off from Africa by the Arab invasions of Europe.

However, useful and reliable information about Africa had been preserved in the records of Ibn Battuta (1304-1355), a widely traveled Berber of Tangier who visited Old Mali about 1324 on his return from India and China. His writings might not have been well known to the Europeans. Leo Africanus, a Moorish scholar from Granada in Spain also kept records of his travels to the court of Askia Mohammed of Shongai, and the great cities of Timbuktu, Mali, Jenne, Gao, Kano and Borno during the 15th Century.

Like Asia, Mediterranean Africa was better known to the European merchants than other areas because Algeria, Morocco, Tunis and Egypt were more closely bound up with the economic life of the Europeans on the Mediterranean Coast. There was also the possibility that the antagonism between Christian Europe and Muslim North Africa prevented penetration further south.

Note that, nonetheless, European adventurers ventured into the interior of Africa. Historical records showed that one Ariselm Desalguier, Frenchman from Toulouse sailed along the African coast to Guinea and went up the Niger where he lived for about eleven years until about 1417. It is also noted that the Italians showed a great interest in Africa which they knew to be a continent before the era of Portuguese exploration. A particular Italian, Giovanni Malfante visited West Africa and described the Negro people and land he saw after his return in 1447. All these explorative efforts however were not given prominence as the adventures of the Portuguese.

The much orchestrated adventures of the Portuguese into West African Coast marked the beginning of a profound European contact and influence on African affairs. The fifteenth century adventures of the Portuguese drew greater attention of the Europeans than the earlier ones partly because the voyages were backed up by the co-ordinated efforts of the Portuguese government, partly because of the interest of other European states in the

discovery of a new route to India, and partly because of the comparative ease with which news were disseminated following the invention of the printing press.

These explorative interests made the contact between the Europeans and the African continent inevitable. As our earlier discussion has consistently proved, contact between peoples would in the long-run bring about interaction and modalities for the regulation of the interaction would have to be fashioned out and enhance the application of diplomacy.

### **3.3.2 The Portuguese Contact with Africa**

Portugal was the first widely popularised European state to embark on a career of discovery. The Portuguese expressed yearning for an outward expansion beyond the Atlantic. They had genius for seamanship and the Portuguese state encouraged alien traders to visit Lisbon. Its state policy encouraged the employment of foreign Genoese seamen into the Portuguese navy.

During the 14th Century, Portuguese vessels visited Canary Islands, the Madeira, and the Azores. Maritime crusades against the Moors called for the building of strong ships while the state encouraged seafaring enterprise by providing timber free to Portuguese ship-builders. However, in spite of the insular position of Portugal, the earlier seafaring enterprise of its people, the economic viability and the political stability of the state, the advent of the Portuguese into West Africa was due mostly to the career of Prince Henry, the Navigator (1394-1460).

#### **Prince Henry, the Navigator**

He was the fourth son of King John I and a grandson of Edward III of England. A devout Christian, he was an ardent student of science and practical businessman. Prince Henry was doggedly committed to the exploration of West Africa. He was involved in the crusades against Moslems from Morocco, Tunis and Algeria who had earlier invaded Christian Europe. While in Ceuta where he was a Portuguese garrison commander, he heard of the legendary Christian King, Prester John whose kingdom was thought to be flowing with milk, gold and honey.

He also heard of the interior of Africa as far as the Senegal River which was supposed to transverse the Guinea whose people were not yet contaminated by the Moors. He also heard of the Caravan trade into the heart of Africa by which the Moors enriched themselves in gold, slaves and ivory. Henry built an imperial design upon these rumours. He planned the exploration of West African coast to ascertain the extent of the Moorish power southward. He planned that the Negro people were to be Christianised while the inland trade which the Moors carried on with West Africa was to be diverted by an ocean route to Lisbon. Henry also thought that if he gained the friendship of Prester John, he would secure a competent ally with whom he was to drive away the Moors from the northern west of Africa. Above all, he thought that his exploration would open a new

route to India, while Portugal would achieve an imperial greatness of Africa such as would not have been capable of realization in Europe.

As the life governor for the Southern province of Portugal, Henry built a small town, Villa de Infante (better known as Sagres) on the tip of Cape Vincent which he made the centre of his maritime activities. At Sagres, he founded a marine school where his students studied the charts, navigational instruments, and books which he had collected from the Moors, the Jewish map-makers, and the Arabs. He also erected an observatory at Sagres where he busied himself, with the studies in Mathematics and cosmography. He used his personal money to equip expeditions in a systematic course of exploration and to provide his mariners with the best instruction in the art of navigation.

The mariners of Henry amidst great difficulties in their voyages of discovery continued to penetrate the hinterland of West Africa. These voyages dispelled fearsome rumours that the south Atlantic was impenetrable. By 1441, a caravel under Goncalves rounded Cape Blanco, landed on the African coast and returned to Lisbon with a sample of gold dust and a number of Negro slaves. These West Africans were Christianized in Portugal and trained as interpreters for future ventures. Note that the Christianised “negroes” who served as interpreters later on played major role in facilitating pre-colonial African diplomacy, we shall however come to this point later on in the next unit.

Enthusiasm now greeted Prince Henry’s scheme previously considered as devoid of material gains. Slave-hunting became lucrative and later navigators sent out to discover the Guinea Coast preferred to stop and capture the West African people. Those captured were either ransomed by their kins with ivory and gold and in the absence of any ransom, they were taken to Europe and sold as slaves.

Henry the Navigator of course condoned slavery as a pretentious means of Christianising the West Africans of the 15th Century and more honestly because of the material benefit it gave to his scheme. Above all, the Africans taken to Portugal more than anything else established his conviction that his explorers had actually passed beyond the land of the Moors.

The explorers of Henry reached the Arguin Bay which became the first Portuguese base for slave-hunting and fishing. In 1445, Dinis Diaz reached the mouth of river Senegal and mapped Cape Verde Islands. In 1446, a Venetian, Alvise Cadamosto, under the service of Prince Henry reached Cape Verde and the estuary of river Gambia and sailed some sixty miles up the river.

Before the death of Henry, Pedro de Cintra reached Sierra Leone in 1460 which he named “Serra Lyoa” meaning wild mountains”. Henry died the same year but by that time his mariners had explored about two thousand miles of the West African Coast from Ceuta to Sierra Leone. You should, however, note that Henry never went on any voyage

himself, his commitment to and inspiration of voyages earned him the title of a great navigator.

### **Voyages after Henry's Death**

After Henry's death, the voyages continued. His nephew, King Alfonso V organised the voyages on a new basis in 1469. A rich Lisbon Merchant, Fernao Gomez, a relative of Prince Henry was granted a five- years contract to discover the African coast further at the rate of about three hundred miles a year in return for a monopoly of trade. In 1471, Pedro Escebor and John Santarem under the licence of Gomez explored the Guinea Coast from Sierra Leone to modern Ghana. The explorers obtained larger quantities of gold in this region than they had earlier come across and for this reason, they called the place "El-Mina" meaning the "Gold Coast". They established another base there. In the same year, they discovered the Niger delta and found that the Guinea Coast was not the southernmost point of the peninsula but merely a gulf. In 1472, they explored and mapped the islands of Fernando Po in the Bight of Biafra. The islands of Sao Tome and Principe were discovered during the same year. By this, the exploration of the West African coastline was already completed.

At the expiration of Gomez' contract, the Portuguese government refused to renew his charter. The large deposits of gold discovered in Gold coast made the government take over the monopoly of trade in the guinea Coast. Nonetheless, because of improved chart making and navigation, individual navigation became commonplace. Navigators, apart from the Portuguese government found great incentives in trade in slaves, ivory, gold dust and pepper. Between 1487 and 1488, Bartholomew Diaz had rounded the southern extreme of Africa which he named "Cape of Storms" after his ship had been blown out of sight for about thirteen days.

### **3.3.3 Contacts with Other Europeans in Africa**

Recall that the Portuguese were not the only Europeans that had contact with medieval and pre-colonial Africa. The French and the English interlopers were the first to pose an initial challenge to the Portuguese monopoly in Africa. In 1492, a French privateer seized a Portuguese caravel home bound with gold from the Gold Coast in the north Atlantic. During the first thirty years of the sixteenth century, French pirates engaged in the lucrative venture of capturing the Portuguese cargoes and about two hundred and fifty Portuguese ships suffered in the hands of the French interlopers. The French were however more interested in gold dust and pepper than in slaves. The first English to break Portuguese control of trade in West Africa was Thomas Windhem who led an expedition to the Gold Coast and Benin in 1553. This was followed by John Lock and a number of prominent Englishmen under the title "company of Merchant Adventurers" in 1561. John Hawkins and William Hawkins made their first shipment of Africans in West Coast to America in 1562. However, all these were individual efforts which did not uproot

Portuguese monopoly because both the English and the French had no strong forts to rival Portugal successfully.

Suffice to note that the first serious challenge to Portugal in West Africa came from Holland – which was known as the Northern Province of the Spanish Netherlands in the sixteenth century. As late as 1580, the kingdom of Portugal came under the same crown as that of Spain as a result of the annexation of Portugal by Phillip II of Spain. Before this date the Dutch revolted against Spain and Holland gained independence by the treaty of Westphalia in 1648. Under the able leadership of William of Orange, the Dutch saw the Portuguese as their enemy. Consequently, the Dutch began a systematic undermining of Portuguese positions in West Africa in order to gain supplies for the prosecution of their war against Spain and to diffuse Spanish efforts in the Netherlands. The war against Spain had strengthened the Dutch navy and by the time of the truce after the eleven years war, the Dutch were in a position to take over the full control of the Portuguese trade in West Africa.

The Dutch West Indies Company founded in 1621 was the first adversary of Portuguese monopoly. To ensure a steady flow of slave-labour for the planters of Brazil, the Dutch turned their attention to Portuguese West Africa. In the end, Arguin, Goree, Sao Tome and Portuguese forts in the Gold Coast came under the Dutch power by 1642. In the 1660s, the French and English companies engaged the Dutch in a fierce struggle for the whole of the West African trade. After 1640, Portugal once more gained its independence from Spain and was able to regain Sao Tome and some isolated sections on the Coast including Cape Verde and what today remains as Portuguese Guinea. In addition, it managed to cling on to the control of Angola which henceforth provided the bulk of slaves for the Portuguese.

By 1700, the new demands for slaves in Brazil forced the Portuguese to establish another station in Dahomey and Portugal again entered a new era of prosperity. Nonetheless, Portugal could not drive out the new comers such as the Swedes, the Danes and the Brandenburgers (Germans) who had come to West Africa since the middle of the seventeenth century.

As a result of the Spanish war of succession 1702-1713 in which England, Holland and France were involved, England succeeded in displacing the Dutch in some of the West African posts by the treaty of Utrecht in 1713. During the eighteenth century, the various forts were constantly changing hands as a result of capture, sale or abandonment. By the end of the 18th Century, Holland still retained 11 posts, England eight and Denmark one on the Coast of West Africa.

By the time of the abolition of slave trade and the era of legitimate trade in the 18th and 19th centuries, European influence through trade, politics and missionaries activities

intensified in Africa. This went on with intensity until the colonisation period. Actually, you should have logically deduced by now that, more than any other factor, it is the influence of Europe and colonisation that brought about the prefix “pre-colonial”, a study in which we are presently engaged.



### 3.5 SUMMARY

In this unit so far, we discover that Portugal was at the fore-front of the Europeans powers that sought out Africa for the purpose of trade. The navigating activities of Prince Henry the Navigator and other subsequent mariners opened up Africa, especially West Africa to European contact. Later on, the other European powers like England, France, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Holland (The Dutch) were attracted. Their trading activities and competition for the soul of the trade in gold, ivory, slaves and other commodities changed the life-style and political landscape of pre-colonial Africa. This would definitely lead to the effect of Europe on Pre-colonial African Diplomacy.

### 3.4 SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISES (SAEs) 3

1. Before the Portuguese ventured into West African Coast there was no European contact and influence on African affairs. True or false?
2. \_\_\_\_\_ was the first widely popularised European state to embark on a career of discovery. (a) England (b) Spain (c) America (d) Portugal
3. Prince \_\_\_\_\_ was doggedly committed to the exploration of West Africa. He was involved in the crusades against Moslems from Morocco, Tunis and Algeria who had earlier invaded Christian Europe. (a) Henry (b) Charles (c) Edward (d) Lugard.
4. By \_\_\_\_\_ a caravel under Goncalves rounded Cape Blanco, landed on the African coast and returned to Lisbon with a sample of gold dust and a number of Negro slaves. (a) 1341 (b) 1441 (c) 1541 (d) 1641
5. Slave-hunting became lucrative and later navigators sent out to discover the Guinea Coast preferred to stop and capture the West African people. True or false?
6. A rich Lisbon Merchant, Fernao Gomez was granted a five-year contract to discover the African coast in return for a monopoly of trade. True or false?
7. Navigators, apart from the Portuguese government found great disincentives in trade in slaves, ivory, gold dust and pepper. True or false?
8. The \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_ interlopers were the first to pose an initial challenge to the Portuguese monopoly in Africa. (a) American and English (b) Spanish and French (c) French and English (d) English and Spanish.
9. England succeeded in displacing the Dutch in some of the West African posts by the treaty of Utrecht in \_\_\_\_\_ (a) 1713 (b) 1714 (c) 1712 (d) 1715.

### 3.6 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

State the reasons why the Dutch were able to displace the Portuguese in West Africa.



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### 3.8 ANSWERS TO SAEs 3

1. False 2. D 3. A 4. B 5. True 6. True 7. False 8. C 9. A

## UNIT 4: EUROPEAN INFLUENCE ON PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN DIPLOMACY

### CONTENTS

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)
- 4.3 Main Content
  - 4.3.1 Importance of European Incursion into Pre-colonial Africa
  - 4.3.2 Political Impact of European Incursion into Pre-colonial Africa
  - 4.3.3 Economic Influence
  - 4.3.4 Social and Religious Interaction and Impact
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- 4.6 Tutor-Marked Assignment
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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we plan to further our discussion on the external influence on pre-colonial African diplomacy with particular attention to Europe. As we earlier postulated, European discovery of Africa, its eventual trade with it and later its missionary activities in no small measure had its influential consequences. We shall discuss how the political, economic, social, religious and cultural influences of Europe impacted on Pre-colonial Africa. In the end, we shall attempt to harmonise all these influences with particular focus on pre-colonial African diplomacy.



### 4.2 INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the general influence of Europe on Pre-colonial Africa;
- examine the political impact of Europe on pre-colonial Africa;
- enumerate the economic impact of Europe on Pre-colonial Africa;
- list the achievements of European Christian Missionaries in Pre- colonial Africa;
- measure the influence of English as a lingua franca in pre-colonial Africa, and
- evaluate the overall influence of European incursion into Africa on Pre-colonial African Diplomacy.



## 4.3 MAIN SECTION

### 4.3.1 Importance of European Incursion into Pre-Colonial Africa

The incursion of the Europeans into Africa imprinted an indelible influence on the peoples of Africa. Many things were revolutionised, namely: the political, economic, religious, cultural, social and all areas of public and private life. The states' administration was influenced and western ideas were used as a measure for civilisation. European ideas, mode of dressing and language became domineering in pre-colonial Africa. The Europeans erected trading forts all over Africa, cutting across the East, west and the hinterlands of the continent. As you would have expected, the trading forts later on translated to political bases and hegemonic administrative outposts. Here the European a-field became instrument of imperial administration of their home governments.

Europeans intermarried with Africans and begot half-castes and mulattoes. The emancipated slaves also came back with European ideas and being widely read and traveled, they became perfect tools for the understanding between Pre-colonial African peoples and their European trade-cum-political partners. This of course led to the easy conduct of diplomatic relations between pre-colonial African states themselves and between Europe and Africa during the pre-colonial era.

### 4.3.2 Political Impact of European Incursion into Pre-colonial Africa

The trade in slaves had been in existence before the Europeans came to the scene but it assumed a very high dimension when the Europeans joined the fray. This singular trade greatly affected the political settings of pre-colonial African states that engaged in it. Slave trade was a source of unprecedented wealth during this time and the various African Empires needed the wealth derived from it for expansionist purposes and income-earning for their administrative activities. This obnoxious trade and its attendant income-earning power completely changed the international the political terrain of the states and relationship was based on rivalry and competition. This does not however suggest that diplomacy broke down completely but the pattern and nature of pre-colonial African diplomacy was altered in the context of the prevailing political situation then. We shall come to this aspect later on in this course – that is how diplomatic relations was still maintained despite the chaotic political situation brought about by the slave trade.

Throughout pre-colonial Africa, east or west, south or North, where Europeans penetrated, political cultures were overhauled alongside diplomatic relations. It is noteworthy that the reason why European contact with North Africa was not given historical prominence was that, the Arabs and Muslim religion had already been firmly established there. Furthermore, the region was not considered as economically viable as West Africa where immense wealth abounds. Again you should call to mind that even North Africans were keen competitors in the trade with the interior of pre-colonial Africa.

During this period the Omani Arabs and the Portuguese were keen rivals in the Indian Ocean trade with East Africa.

More rivalry developed among the Southern states than there had ever been for supremacy and the control of the trade routes to the coast. Pre-colonial African states competed to have direct access to the European forts at the Coast and got firearms and other articles. For example, the Yoruba states of Egba, Ibadan and Ijebu struggled to control the trade route through Egbaland to the coast while the Ashante which had benefited greatly from the Trans-Saharan trade also sought to control the coastal trade in Ghana.

The coastal trade had direct impact on southern areas which were isolated from direct impact of the trans-Saharan trade, particularly in the guinea region, east of the Niger and the West of Ghana. In these areas, political developments, and of course its international relations were inspired mainly by the trans-Atlantic trade. As both the trans-Saharan trade and trans-Atlantic trade contributed immensely to the growth of Ashante, so it contributed to the growth of Oyo. The strategic position of Oyo which enabled it to participate in both trans-Sahara and the Atlantic trades made it to become pre-eminent. Oyo extended its influence to as far as Porto Novo in modern Dahomey.

The European contact enabled the formation and growth of new states. For instance, the rise of Allada and Whydah along the coast was mainly due to the trans-Atlantic trade. The rise of Abomey was due to the efforts made by the Fon of Abomey to organize a strong defence against the Oyo, Allada and Whydah who constantly raided them for slaves. Many small principalities emerged along the coast to take part in the trans-Atlantic coastal trade. You should note however that unlike the trans-Saharan trade, the Atlantic trade could not inspire formation of large Empires. This of course prepared the ground for the ability of the Europeans to eventually easily colonise the small states.

What do you think would be the implication of the emergence of the new states in response to the coastal trade? Of course, the answer to that is not far-fetched. You should know that there would be increase in international actors. More states would take part in diplomatic relations and each state would want to be reckoned with. Of course, there was intense rivalry, competition and attendant tension and friction. We will soon see how they were managed within the purview of pre-colonial African diplomacy and how the unmanageable ones contributed to the failure of diplomacy.

Along the Eastern coast of Nigeria, especially in the Niger Delta area, “House system” was formed to meet the challenge of the European trade. Even though slave trade was later unfashionable because of its abolition, Europeans found expression in other “legitimate” trading activities. Palm-oil trade brought Britain to the Delta region. We can conveniently argue that palm-oil trade with Europe shot the Delta states to lime-light capable of political forces to reckon with in the international community. The enthusiasm to develop the new “legitimate” trade involved Britain in Delta politics, and it culminated

in the declaration of a British protectorate over this riverine region. The Benin, Ijaw, Efik, Ibibio, Calabar and Ibo formed various political entities in the riverine region to trade with Europeans in palm-oil.

The “House System” developed in this riverine region in response to British trade, served as a local government institution although it was also a co-operative trading unit. A well-to-do trader usually had a large body of slaves with whom he formed the nucleus of a House. The head of a House was responsible for the maintenance of law and order in his section of the community. The king had no direct power over the House of his chiefs but he could constitutionally settle Inter-House disputes, confirm the election of new House heads, and he could conduct foreign policy on their behalf. The king could also sign treaties of co-operation with foreign states.

### **4.3.3 Economic Influence**

The various pre-colonial African states had easy access and contact with one another through the trans-Atlantic trade routes. The trade routes from the Coast, through the Guinea forest to the Savanna belt developed and were in greater use than before. This increased the prosperity of the states along the trade routes. These states emerged as prosperous, powerful and well-organised trading entities and this enhanced their political status. Their international relevance became imminent and their diplomatic worth surfaced. Hitherto unknown states sprang up and more actors arrived the international scene.

Of course, the emergence and importance of the Niger Delta states, the Guinea states and other discovered states were sustained by the economic gains brought about by the European contact. Most of the states were able to ward off aggressors and predators due to the firearms they obtained with their trade wealth. You should note that war or threat of war can also facilitate peace since it is an expression of how powerful a state is. Of course, one state will think twice before invading another militarily powerful state. Military power helps to keep enemies at bay.

Note that the stupendous wealth acquired by the states through the economic and commercial relations with Europe empowered them militarily. They got firearms with which they withstood rivals and checked ambitious interlopers. They thereby enjoyed peace and stability for a certain period and they were among other things, able to maintain diplomatic relations with one another.

### **4.3.4 Social and Religious Interaction and Impact**

Missionary activities had tremendous impact on virtually all spheres of pre-colonial African life. The European missionaries introduced the Christian religion, teaching one God and His Son the redeemer of mankind. The idea of one God fostered unity and

brought the peoples of different traditional religions together. This augured well for a unified political ideology although there were no Christian states. Christianity did not promote the mingling of politics with religion but it did capture the hearts of political actors and this reflected in their interaction with one another. To some certain extent, the equality of people was stressed. Slave trade was abolished. Freedom was proclaimed. With the abolition of slave trade, wars became minimised. Pre-colonial African states enjoyed relative peace and stability. With the Christian ideology of love, the quality of life was enhanced and there was serenity. With the foregoing, you will obviously see that Pre-colonial African diplomacy had a fertile and conducive situation to thrive. Diplomacy became effective to dissuade wars and chaotic political upheavals. This was exactly the achievement of Christian missionaries as regards pre-colonial African diplomacy.

It was to the credit of missionary activities that European education entered into Africa. Schools and colleges where natives were taught to read and write were established. The knowledge of reading and writing, and figures helped the people to keep records and accounts. This brought about the knowledge of law and the maintenance of formal diplomatic relations between states. There was also the emergence of Afro-Europeans who were freed slaves. These came back with the knowledge of the outside world and these they successfully taught the natives. They influenced political ideologies. They, coupled with the education attained by the African elites, promoted nationalists' struggles.

The English language became widely used in Africa. Or rather European languages like the French, Portuguese, Italian and German, to mention a few became lingua franca. This united African states and removed language barrier. This was effective in the promotion of pre-colonial African diplomacy. What would you have expected? One political ideology, a common religion, one unifying language will of course make diplomatic relations very easy to conduct and this it did. The Europeans even went as far as renaming states like Gold Coast, Syra Loa (Sierra Leone), The Wild mountains etc. for easy identification. This is a further extent to which the Europeans attempted to weld the states together. Of course, this eventually made colonisation very easy and the Europeans' success in lumping diverse states together for easy imperial administration.

Another impact is that of technology. The Europeans brought the printing press. There was easy accessibility to news and information dissemination. Communication became easy even though it was regulated to favour the imperialistic fervour. Foreign news became handy and it filtered easily into the African region. With the aid of well-read elites, the conduct of international relations became less cumbersome. Letters were exchanged and newsletters made the world seemed smaller and easier to transcend. In fact, the European era in pre-colonial Africa could be called the beginning of the world becoming a global village. It made contact easy among states and less attention was given to rumour and fantastic tales about other lands. Real facts began to emerge. As you will

realise, this helped in no small measure with the easy conduct of diplomacy in the latter period of pre-colonial Africa.

#### **4.4 SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISES (SAEs) 4**

1. Assess the political influence of the European contact with Pre-colonial Africa.
2. Highlight the achievement of Christian missionaries as regards pre-colonial African diplomacy.



#### **4.5 SUMMARY**

In this unit, we can obviously see how Europeans like the Arabs influenced Pre-colonial Africa. Politically, they fostered a unified system of government on many pre-colonial African states. They contributed to the emergence of new pre-colonial African states in response to the trade that developed between Europe and pre-colonial Africa. Furthermore, the missionary activities led to the establishment of schools and the educated elite.

The abolition of slave trade brought about peace and stability because wars to capture slaves for economic purposes were no longer fashionable as new “legitimate” trade developed. The technology of the print media aided news dissemination and the world became considerably reduced to a global village. This led to easy communication and gathering of factual international news.

The contact between Europe and Pre-colonial Africa brought about economic prosperity and prosperous states emerged to compete in the international community. Trade cartels were formed to protect interests of international traders. It is noteworthy that the freed slaves who later came back to Africa helped a lot in using their wealth of experience and contact to benefit their peoples in international affairs. They acted as interpreters and bridge between the outsiders and their peoples. Moreover the introduction of European languages, especially, English and French helped in no small measure to unite the various peoples. The lingua franca formed a common language to weld peoples together.

With all the foregoing, we can safely conclude that the Europeans impacted tremendously on pre-colonial African diplomacy.

#### **4.6 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Give a summary of European activities in pre-colonial Africa.
2. Compare the influence of Europe and that of the Muslim Arabs on Pre-colonial African diplomacy.



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#### 4.8 ANSWERS TO SAEs 4

1. The political influence of the European contact with Pre-colonial Africa is enormous, especially through the trade in slaves, trade route, attendant rivalry among States, diplomatic relations and creation of new States. The trade in slaves had been in existence before the Europeans came to the scene but it assumed a very high dimension when the Europeans joined the fray. This singular trade greatly affected the political settings of pre-colonial African states that engaged in it. Slave trade was a source of unprecedented wealth during this time and the various African Empires needed the wealth derived from it for expansionist purposes and income-earning for their administrative activities. This obnoxious trade and its attendant income-earning power completely changed the international the political terrain of the states and relationship was based on rivalry and competition.

Similarly, throughout pre-colonial Africa, east or west, south or North, where Europeans penetrated, political cultures were overhauled alongside diplomatic relations. More rivalry developed among the Southern states than there had ever been for supremacy and the control of the trade routes to the coast. Pre- colonial African states competed to have

direct access to the European forts at the Coast and got firearms and other articles. For example, the Yoruba states of Egba, Ibadan and Ijebu struggled to control the trade route through Egbaland to the coast while the Ashante which had benefited greatly from the Trans-Saharan trade also sought to control the coastal trade in Ghana.

Lastly, the European contact enabled the formation and growth of new states. For instance, the rise of Allada and Whydah along the coast was mainly due to the trans-Atlantic trade.

2. Christian Missionary activities had tremendous impact on virtually all spheres of pre-colonial African life. The European missionaries introduced the Christian religion, teaching one God and His Son the redeemer of mankind. The idea of one God fostered unity and brought the peoples of different traditional religions together. This augured well for a unified political ideology although there were no Christian states. Christianity did not promote the mingling of politics with religion but it did capture the hearts of political actors and this reflected in their interaction with one another. To some certain extent, the equality of people was stressed. Slave trade was abolished. Freedom was proclaimed. With the abolition of slave trade, wars became minimised. Pre-colonial African states enjoyed relative peace and stability. With the Christian ideology of love, the quality of life was enhanced and there was serenity. Pre-colonial African diplomacy, therefore, had a fertile and conducive situation to thrive. Diplomacy became effective to dissuade wars and chaotic political upheavals.

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## **Module 4: Nature, Management, Methods And Practice of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy**

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- Unit 1: The Nature of Pre-colonial African Diplomacy
- Unit 2: The Management of Pre-colonial African Diplomacy
- Unit 3: Means and Methods of Pre-colonial African Diplomacy
- Unit 4: The Practice of Pre-colonial African Diplomacy

### **UNIT 1: THE NATURE OF PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN DIPLOMACY**

#### **CONTENTS**

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)
- 1.3 Main Content
  - 1.3.1 The General Nature of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy
  - 1.3.2 The Political Nature of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy
  - 1.3.3 The Economic Nature of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy
  - 1.3.4 The Legal Nature of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy
- 1.4 Self-Assessment Exercises (SAEs) 1
- 1.5 Summary
- 1.6 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 1.7 References/Further Reading
- 1.8 Answers to SAEs



#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

This unit discusses the nature of Pre-colonial African diplomacy. It will 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. In pursuance of this intention, we will see how politics, economics and customary law characterised 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.



#### **1.2 INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES**

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the general nature of pre-colonial African diplomacy;
- assess the political nature of pre-colonial African diplomacy;
- enumerate the economic nature of pre-colonial African diplomacy;
- discuss the legal nature of pre-colonial African diplomacy;
- determine whether pre-colonial African diplomacy was comparable to that of elsewhere; and
- examine pre-colonial African market and the conduct of Pre-colonial African diplomacy.



## **1.3 MAIN SECTION**

### **1.3.1 The General Nature of Pre-colonial African Diplomacy**

By ‘nature’ of a thing, we mean the main features or characteristics of that thing. That is what makes the thing unique or distinguishable. The qualities possessed by that thing make it distinct. This is exactly what we are applying to pre-colonial African diplomacy here. As we had earlier stated in this course, diplomacy or its parent discipline, international relations, evolved in the scholarship of Western Europe. It is in line with the nature of European diplomacy that we also logically deduce that Africa also practiced diplomacy during the pre-colonial period. What evolved between African states during this period can best be described as diplomacy with its peculiar technicalities and practices.

It may be true to some certain extent that the technicalities of pre-colonial African diplomacy might not be so profound as to lead to complexity as that of West Europe. It might not be rigid or written. This only portrays the nature of pre-colonial African diplomacy as flexible and effective, responding in an ad-hoc manner to the dictates of the time.

You should note that, naturally, pre-colonial African diplomacy is a response to pre-colonial African politics, trade, customary law and other social contact among African indigenous settings. Robert Smith who agrees that what transpired between pre-colonial African states could be described as diplomacy has this to say, - “International relations in pre-colonial period were conducted in accordance with customary law, which exhibited broadly similar characteristics over a wide area. Trade and politics, linking the coast, the forest and the Savannah, led to the development of diplomacy in the more centrally-organised states”. Smith states further, “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 hereby summarises the nature of pre-colonial African diplomacy. Of course, diplomacy elsewhere, especially in Europe also started in an ad-hoc manner. The systematic and calculated study and practice of international relations really had a proper consideration in the early twentieth century after the world wars. Nonetheless, diplomatic practice had been in existence – albeit in response to political and economic circumstances as early as the existence of man’s relation with man.

The means and methods employed in the practice of pre-colonial African diplomacy also enhance its uniqueness but it is arguable that these means and methods compared favourably with elsewhere during the same period. This we shall see in our subsequent discussions.

### **1.3.2 The Political Nature of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy**

You should be aware by now that pre-colonial African diplomacy had a profound political undertone. The existence of stable, centrally-organised and militarily-powerful Pre-colonial African states inevitably called for diplomatic relations. Indeed, no state can ever operate as an Island – most especially, an economically viable one. As the saying goes, a city situated on a mountain cannot be hidden. A centrally-organised state maintained diplomatic relations with others in pre-colonial Africa. Naturally, the evolution of large Empires cutting across North Africa to West Africa and by extension East and South Africa facilitated the practice of diplomacy in a peculiar African way. 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 realised 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. With the foregoing fact, it is certain that virtually almost all the pre-colonial states exhibit the same political traits which made diplomatic relations with one another easy. What we ought now to determine is whether the relationship was formal and official as to be seen as diplomatic.

Of course, it was formal and official because certain procedures regulated diplomatic relations. This area we will discuss elaborately when we come to the legal nature of pre-colonial African diplomacy.

The political nature of pre-colonial African diplomacy is aptly captured by Graham W. Irwin below:

*In Africa, during the pre-colonial period, several groups of states maintained relationships with one another in time of peace at an official level and on a more or less regular basis. Sometimes, the member states of these groups had once belonged to the same Empire, as was the case in parts of the Upper Niger,*

*in Senegambia and in the interlacustrine region of east Africa. Sometimes, their relationship was based on rivalry at a distance, as with Dahomey and Asante, sometimes 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 however, 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.*

Of course, 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 buttresses this point by 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.

Igboland, which had no centralised political system for example, was also an excellent model of practical pre-colonial African diplomacy. Igboiland reached a near-perfection in the use of dialogue to settle disputes. Friendly communal gatherings were established to negotiate in inter-group affairs and mutual understanding was arrived at.

Clearly, the political nature of pre-colonial African diplomacy was only peculiar to the political terrain it found itself. It was a political response to groupings within pre-colonial Africa itself and influence from the outside world.

### **1.3.3 The Economic Nature of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy**

Indeed, the major determinant in a relationship between organised states is the interest each state wants to protect. In contemporary international relations, it is called “National Interest”. Of course, 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. We hope to come to this under the management of pre-colonial African diplomacy in the next unit. What however concerns us in this part of this unit is economic interest and how it informs the nature of pre-colonial African diplomacy.

More than any other thing, 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. Recall that trade in slaves, gold, ivory, pepper, salt, diamond and other precious commodities found in abundance in pre-colonial Africa attracted internal and external trade in pre-colonial Africa and this contributed immensely to the emergence

of political structures and, inevitably, the emergence of pre-colonial African diplomacy. The intention to control the trade and the routes automatically contributed to rivalry and tension. Interests clashed and this led to shape the nature of pre-colonial African diplomacy.

For instance, Dahomey intensely rivaled Oyo. The Fante states rivaled Asante. The rivalry between Omani Arabs and Portugal in a bid to control the trade in East Africa also brought intense rivalry among East African states. 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. All these attendant tensions had to be resolved the Pre-colonial African way. If war was to be avoided, diplomacy remained the only option to reconcile the various competing interests and hence the emergence of pre-colonial African diplomacy.

Note an important feature of pre-colonial African market and how it shaped the nature of 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/ruler's 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 and international crisis were argued away. As they bargained and 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. It was in the market that foreign news was easily gathered. Of course, the pre-colonial African market places really portrayed pre-colonial African diplomacy in practice.

We shall discuss this extensively later on in this course under the practice of pre-colonial African diplomacy.

#### **1.3.4 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 Islam and the emergence of Islamic law, customary law guarded pre-colonial African diplomacy. This customary law though unwritten, exhibited broadly similar characteristics over a wide area. You should remember that most of the pre-colonial African states belonged to the same ancestry and Empires. 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 polities that were not originally of the same ancestry.

Customary law is accepted by a community and domestic conduct is regulated by this 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. As you would have realized by now, 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. It is the nature of this regulation that shaped the relationship of pre-colonial African states vis-à-vis their diplomacy. You should note that treaties were solemnly concluded and there were sanctions against its non-observance.

Of course, there may be argument to the effect that African customary law might not be so widespread as to be termed international law in Africa. I will however want you to note that 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 however enabled the overthrow of the law by Islamic law later on during the pre-colonial African period.

#### **1.4 SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISES (SAEs) 1**

1. Diplomacy or its parent discipline, international relations, evolved in the scholarship of Western\_\_\_\_\_. (a) Asia (b) Region (c) America (d) Europe
2. What evolved between African states during the pre-colonial period can best be described as diplomacy with its peculiar technicalities and practices. True or false?
3. \_\_\_\_\_realised by trade with North Africa and the outside world shaped the political structures of Ghana, Mali and Shongai Empires. (a) Wealth (b) Culture (c) Contacts (d) Laws
4. More than any other thing, \_\_\_\_\_contributed to the emergence, strength and viability of pre-colonial African states. (a) military might (b) trade contact (c) colonial interloper.
5. Pre-colonial markets were often situated near the king's/ruler's or the emperor's palace and were a place of contact both for domestic and foreign relations. True or false?
6. Before the influence of Islam and the emergence of Islamic law, \_\_\_\_\_law guarded pre-colonial African diplomacy. (a) constitutional (b) monarchical (c) international (d) customary.



## 1.5 SUMMARY

In this unit, we discover that the politics, trade contact and the law of pre-colonial African states contributed immensely to the type of diplomacy that evolved during the period. The main features or characteristics that distinguish pre-colonial African diplomacy can thus be summarized as follows:

- The existence of centrally-organised and non-centralised Empires and states inevitably called for diplomatic ties during the pre-colonial African period. These states 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.
- The market place in pre-colonial Africa 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.

These and many more which we may not discuss here now, all characterized pre-colonial African diplomacy.

## 1.6 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Give a succinct appraisal of the nature of pre-colonial African diplomacy.
2. Determine what you would call the interest of states in pre-colonial African period.



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### **1.8 ANSWERS TO SAEs 1**

1. D 2. True 3. A 4. B 5. True 6. D

## UNIT 2: MANAGEMENT OF PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN DIPLOMACY

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall discuss the management of pre-colonial African diplomacy. We shall see 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 rabid mistrust and competing trade interest, how was there peace and stability enough for diplomacy to thrive? All the foregoing questions and more will be answered in the following discussion.



### 2.2 INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the management of diplomacy in general;
- state the political provisions of pre-colonial African states for diplomatic management;
- examine the economic influence on the management of pre-colonial African diplomacy; and
- evaluate the management of pre-colonial African diplomacy.



### 1.3 MAIN SECTION

#### 2.3.1 Management of Diplomacy

Suffice to note that for success to be achieved in any human endeavour, there should be good management. This assertion applies to diplomacy. It is quite true that diplomacy thrives in an atmosphere of peace and stability, and surely war or crisis is a failure of diplomacy. Nonetheless, for war to be avoided, sound management 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. Management of diplomacy on one hand largely informs the management of war on the other. How best do you think diplomacy can be managed? Of course, 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 hitherto prosperous states became ruins. Arthur Marwick in his work, “the consequences of War” opines that war is a destructive force interrupting the normal course of human progress and civilisation.

We shall view the management of Pre-colonial African diplomacy from various angles; political, historical, military, customary and economic. I advise you to read extensively about war and its effect on human progress and civilisation in *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relation* by Aron R.

### **2.3.2 The Political Management of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy**

It is assumed that you are now familiar with the political set-up of major pre-colonial African states. 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-centralised states of Igboland 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.

Mali and Shongai Empires ensured that the officials in charge of foreign affairs were well learned, widely-traveled 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. We shall discuss this in more detail when we come to the

“Attributes of Envoys” later on in this course. 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.

Kanem-Borno, on its own part, also made provision for foreigners in the Empire and maintained intermittent diplomatic relations with North Africa and the outside world. A notable ruler, Mai Idris Alooma 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.

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. Igboland 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.

From the foregoing, you can reasonably argue that pre-colonial African states, kingdoms and Empires made political provision for international affairs among themselves and with the outside world. This of course, forestalled wars and allowed for peace, stability and progress. This was a proof of sound diplomatic management.

### **2.3.3 Economic Management of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy**

For emphasis, 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. Simply put, 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. Thus, 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.

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 bi-lateral or multi-literal decisions. However, to avoid digression from our main discussion, I suggest we focus on what transpired during the pre-colonial era.

Yes, it may be quite true that Africa danced to the tune of others when bargaining or negotiating for goods. We must have it in mind however that Africa had a surplus of the commodity they were exchanging. They were only using what they had in abundance to get what they did not have. If outsiders needed gold dust, ivory and diamond, why wouldn't they get it when 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.

Of course, 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 or 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 era

On the other hand, the ready and stable trade pact between Kanem-Bornu of Mai Idris Aloomu and the Hausa states facilitated a steady economic management of diplomatic relations between them. Of course, you should know that during the pre-colonial period. Trade management transformed to diplomatic management between African states and the outside world.

#### **2.3.4 The Military Management of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy**

A witty axiom has it that "if you want peace, be prepared for war!" Military might, even though may be destructive, is also a guarantee for peace. You may wonder how paradoxical the world is. Yes, the world is full of paradoxes, my dear students. 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. 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. You should note 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. Of course, they fought wars by proxy – that 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 states would easily identify with militarily powerful and economic viable states. Prosperous, mighty kingdoms would attract others and such states often dictate the management of diplomacy. Pre-colonial African states often used military threat to manage diplomatic ties while others, used trade sanctions or embargoes for diplomatic management.

### **2.3.5 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. You should 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. Of course, 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.

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.

## 2.4 SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISES (SAEs) 2

1. With at least two examples, discuss the political provision for diplomatic management in pre-colonial Africa.
2. The exchange system first brought about idea of comparative advantage in international and diplomatic relations. Do you agree?



## 2.5 SUMMARY

By the time we come to the end of this unit, we have seen how pre-colonial African states managed their diplomacy devoid of tension and crisis. War, even though a common phenomenon was not desirable for diplomacy to thrive. In the midst of bitter trade rivalry and tense competition, we discover that, the effective employment of sound political and administrative structures enhanced the management of pre-colonial African diplomacy.

So also, pre-colonial African rulers made use of economic, legal and military means to manage diplomatic relations among one another. 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.

## 2.6 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Appraise African customary laws and assess their acceptability as international law in pre-colonial Africa.
2. Critically examine the necessity of peace by the means of military threat during the pre-colonial African period.



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## 2.8 ANSWERS TO SAEs 2

1. Pre-colonial African states, kingdoms and Empires made political provision for international affairs among themselves and with the outside world. Examples of that abound in 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, which had political structures that made provision for the practice of international relations, forestalled wars, allowed for peace, stability and progress. 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. Kanem-Borno, on its own part, also made provision for foreigners in the Empire and maintained intermittent diplomatic relations with North Africa and the outside world. A notable ruler, Mai Idris Alooma 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.
2. The exchange system did bring about idea of comparative advantage in international and diplomatic relations. This is because 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. Thus, 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. 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.

## UNIT 3: MEANS AND METHODS OF PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN DIPLOMACY

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will discuss the means and methods employed for the smooth running of pre-colonial African diplomacy. 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. We shall discuss here how all these aforementioned methods aptly described the operation of pre-colonial African diplomacy.



### 3.2 INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- derive the means and method of pre-colonial African diplomacy;
- define negotiation and assess how it impact on the conduct of pre- colonial African diplomacy;
- explain how the sending of embassies aided pre-colonial African diplomacy;
- analyse the involvement of the method of exchange of gifts and presents in pre-colonial African diplomacy; and

- evaluate the method of using courier services on a regular basis in pre-colonial African diplomacy.



### **3.3 MAIN SECTION**

#### **3.3.1 The Conduct of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy**

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 Salow (1976), “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, which of course you know by now. 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”. Of course, Salow should know. He is one of the historians of the non-African world.

What then are the methods, procedures and means by which pre-colonial African diplomacy was carried out?

#### **3.3.2 Negotiation**

One of the most handy method and means of pre-colonial African diplomacy was negotiation. Going by the 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 harmonise interests that are conflicting”.

Of course, negotiation is a method used to avoid war or crises in settling disputes. It harmonises 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.

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. You should know that 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. Of course, there were wars 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.

Of course, before you 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.

In pre-colonial Africa, negotiation involved bargaining, dialogue, compromise and even threat to arrive at an agreement.

## **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. This advantage was widely used to get concession from other groups by one group.

The militarily strong states of Mali, Shongai, 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.

## **Dialogue**

A dialogue is a formal discussion among groups of people or countries when they are trying to reach an agreement over problematic issues. Of course, dialogue is 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, agreement formalised 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**

Simply put, 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 states 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 disputed territories to his vassal states in order for hitch-free diplomacy to thrive. The East African states had to delimit their trade with Portugal and Oman among one another and this enabled diplomacy to flourish.

As you are already aware, 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.

## **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. 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 organised, centrally- based pre-colonial African states was used to threaten weaker states into submission during negotiation. 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.

### **3.3.3 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 Alooma 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.

### **3.3.4 Exchange of Presents and Gifts**

Another method to discuss 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.

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 brought profound alliance among them.

### **3.3.5 Use 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-centralised peoples of Igboland; among the Niger Delta states; between groups of states in East and South Africa; among the Hausa states and between Ashante and other states related to it. 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 attributes we shall later discuss in the next unit. Note also that 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. This we shall also discuss in more detail in the next unit.

What we should note here is that the use of regular courier services kept mutual agreement intact and dissemination of information easy. 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.

### 3.4 SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISES (SAEs) 3

1. According to Sir Ernest Salow (1976), “\_\_\_\_\_ is the idea of the conduct of business between states by peaceful means”. (a) diplomacy (b) negotiation (c) international trade (d) foreign policy.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ harmonises conflicting interests and it is used to reach an agreement or for the purpose of exchange among states. (a) diplomacy (b) negotiation (c) international trade (d) foreign policy.
3. In pre-colonial Africa, negotiation involved bargaining, dialogue, compromise and even\_\_\_\_\_ to arrive at an agreement. (a) threat (b) appeasement (c) litigation (d) bribery.
4. Inter-African Embassies in the pre-colonial period did not enjoy a degree of prestige and immunity comparable to that which protected European diplomacy. True or false?
5. Exchange of gifts and present among pre-colonial African states, and between them and outsiders was used to seek \_\_\_\_\_ (a) favour and recognition (b) recognition and power (c) power and favour (d) control and affection.
6. The use of regular courier services kept mutual agreement intact, enabled pre-colonial African states to enjoy unity, and kept them abreast of local and international news... True or false?



### 3.5 SUMMARY

In this unit so far, we have clearly seen the methods and means through which pre-colonial African diplomacy thrived. We realise that 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. We also realise that pre-colonial African states sent embassies among one another, exchanged gifts and presents, and used regular courier services among one another and the outside world. This enabled the effective maintenance of diplomatic relations among pre-colonial African states.

### 3.6 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Define negotiation. Discuss all it entails in pre-colonial African diplomacy.



### 3.7 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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### **3.8 ANSWERS TO SAEs 3**

1. A; 2. B; 3. A; 4 False; 5. A; 6. True

## UNIT 4: THE PRACTICE OF PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN DIPLOMACY

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- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)
- 4.3 Main Content
  - 4.3.1 The Practice of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy
  - 4.3.2 Actors and Practitioners in Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy
  - 4.3.3 Emissaries and Their Functions
  - 4.3.4 Qualities of Emissaries
  - 4.3.5 Immunities for Emissaries
- 4.4 Self-Assessment Exercises (SAEs) 4
- 4.5 Summary
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- 4.8 Answers to SAEs



#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, discussion shifts to the actual practice of pre-colonial African diplomacy. We shall see pre-colonial African diplomacy in action and how the practitioners were qualified to make use of the means and methods for easy facilitation of diplomatic relations. Subsequently, we shall list the functions of emissaries, their qualities and immunities surrounding their personalities. We shall see how they assisted their states as agents and representatives to perform their diplomatic duties. Of course, trading merchants and, Islamic scholars and Christian missionaries and their agents will also be examined as practitioners of pre-colonial African diplomacy.



#### 4.2 INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- identify and discuss the practitioners of pre-colonial African diplomacy;
- list and discuss the functions and roles of emissaries;
- list and discuss the attributes and qualities of emissaries during the pre-colonial African era;
- explain the immunities enjoyed by emissaries in discharging their duties, and
- compare the functions of emissaries in pre-colonial Africa to that of diplomats in modern day diplomatic practice.



## 4.3 MAIN SECTION

### 4.3.1 The Practice of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy

Having discussed the means and methods through which pre-colonial African diplomacy was carried out in the previous unit, we are now set to discuss the actual practice of the diplomacy peculiar to pre-colonial Africa. 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.

### 4.3.2 Actors and Practitioners in Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy

#### The State

In most pre-colonial African states since the medieval period, organised 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 evolvement of prosperous and organised states in pre-colonial Africa, it led to the inevitable evolvement 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 commodities. They all had a well-organised 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 in Mali Empire, "trade was well organised. 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:

*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.*

Just like the case of Ghana and Mali, Shongai and Kanem-Bornu had a well-organised 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 these 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, Ashante, 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**

I want you to note that 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 rulers 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 made possible because of the oneness of the lingua franca used all over.

With the foregoing, you can easily realize that actors that made pre-colonial African diplomacy practicable were not only state governments but also there were the involvement of others.

### **4.3.3 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**

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. You should note however that during the pre-colonial period, emissaries had no

permanent representation. The representation might be ad-hoc or semi-permanent as the situation might call for – just as inter-state embassies were ad-hoc or semi-permanent.

## **Communication Agents**

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. Mind you, I said threat and not inflammatory statements that could cause war or crisis. Actually, 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 Alooma 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 and Presents

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.

## **Signing of Treaties and Pacts**

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 agreements.

### **4.3.4 Qualities of Emissaries**

Recall that the appointment of emissaries during the pre-colonial era was by the ruler of a state in consultation with the council of 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 evolution of Islamised 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. You must have known that most of these emissaries were once itinerant traders and this experience in their travels they applied to their tasks as emissaries.

With the evolution of Islamised 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. You should know that one who stammers is not fit to be an emissary or don't you think so? 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. Of course, 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. You will recall that African rulers like Mansa Musa, Askia the Great and Idris Alooma 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.

### **Other Attributes**

Note that there are many other qualities possessed by emissaries during this era in discussion. 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. You should be able to think about other qualities you think an emissary should possess yourselves by now. You will do well to read more about functions and Attributes of Emissaries. You will be rigorously examined on this topic.

#### **4.3.5 Immunity for Emissaries**

Suffice to note that 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. Of course, Kurunmi was severely punished for this for 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.

#### 4.4 SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISES (SAEs) 4

1. Discuss the notion of State as an actor and practitioner in pre-colonial African diplomacy.
2. Highlight and briefly discuss three qualities of emissaries during the pre-colonial African period.



#### 4.5 SUMMARY

We have seen that 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.

We also discover that emissaries 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, expressed in this unit, helped tremendously in charting an easy way for the conduct of pre-colonial African diplomacy.

#### 4.6 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Critically analyse the role of states practitioners of pre-colonial African diplomacy.



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#### **4.8 ANSWERS TO SAEs 4**

1. The State, by its nature and functions, is the main actor and practitioner in the pre-colonial African diplomacy. This is so because, first, the states' administration made provision for foreign relations and affairs with other states. 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.

Second, most commercial activities had the direct involvement of the state concerned and since trade contact induced the evolvement of prosperous and organised states in pre-colonial Africa, it led to the inevitable evolvement of interdependence and later, diplomatic relations. For instance, 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 commodities. They all had a well-organised system of trade tax which they effectively used and harmonised for the development of their respective states and their expansionist purposes. These connote that the governments of these Empires were the direct actors in inter-state relations.

2. Emissaries are special representatives of both the king and the state. Among their revered qualities are: sound education, training and experience, tact, eloquence, multilingual ability, decency and sociable, among others. First, an emissary must be vast in wisdom and intelligence. He or she must virtually know the customs, cultures and behavioural patterns of other people they were dealing with. Emissaries must be well experienced and widely travelled. Emissaries of the pre-colonial Africa were once itinerant traders and this experience in their travels they applied to their tasks as emissaries.

Second, they must be people of tact, that is, the ability to deal with difficult or embarrassing situations carefully and without worsening them. 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.

Also, they must be possessors of the gift of eloquence. Emissaries need not be the most eloquent of men, but they must be fluent and be able to carry along their audiences. An emissary weighed his choice of words carefully, to be suitable for any circumstance of discussion. He or she conveys his messages with clarity and use signs that would be understood by the receiving state.

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## Module 5: Analyses/Appraisal of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy

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Unit 1: Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy: The Kanem-Bornu Example

Unit 2: Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy: The Dahomey Example

Unit 3: European Diplomacy during the Pre-colonial African Period

Unit 4: The Relevance of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy in Present-Day Africa

### UNIT 1: PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN DIPLOMACY: THE KANEM-BORNU EXAMPLE

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- 1.8 Answers to SAEs



#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this first unit of the concluding module, we will discuss pre-colonial African diplomacy in the state of Kanem-Bornu during the reign of Mai Idris Aloma. We will see how Aloomā combined his military, administrative and personal talents to further the cause of diplomacy. We will also see how he harmonised his legal *cum* religious prowess and trade contact to bear on the practice of pre-colonial African diplomacy citing Kanem-

Bornu as an illustration. We will also determine whether Aloomaa's example could readily be related to diplomacy elsewhere.



## **1.2 INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES**

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- examine the military quality of Mai Idris Aloomaa vis-à-vis pre-colonial African diplomacy;
- discuss Aloomaa's administrative prowess and how it impacted on his diplomatic relations;
- analyse and appraise Aloomaa's religious and legal qualities in relation to his diplomatic relations
- describe Aloomaa's trade relations vis-à-vis his diplomatic relations
- evaluate Aloomaa's personal traits and how they portrayed him as a diplomatic practitioner.



## **1.3 MAIN SECTION**

### **1.3.1 Diplomacy in Selected Pre-Colonial African States: The Kanem-Bornu Example**

For sound analysis and appraisal of the practice of diplomacy during the pre-colonial period, we shall see how the two states of Kanem-Bornu and Dahomey maintained diplomatic relations with other states. The Kanuri Empire of Kanem-Bornu spans a period of about one thousand years in three phases. We will however concern ourselves with the second phase during the reign of Idris Aloomaa. This is because during this period, trade flourished and foreign investment and contact was attracted more than any other time in the history of the Empire. The period was actually called "the golden age" of the Empire. Then the Empire secured its greatest territorial expansion and highest prestige.

### **1.3.2 Qualities that Enhanced Aloomaa's Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy**

Mai Idris Aloomaa possessed rare qualities that made him stand out as a successful diplomat and practitioner of pre-colonial African Diplomacy. According to Barth, a reliable historian and Ahmad Ibn Fatuusa, the chronicler during the reign of Aloomaa, these qualities helped a lot in shaping the political, economic and religious cum legal nature of pre-colonial African diplomacy between Kanem-Bornu and its neighbours.

Alooma was reputed to be a great soldier. He maintained a strong, disciplined, virile, dynamic and well-organised army. He revolutionised warfare by using his diplomatic connections to obtain firearms from Tripoli and North Africa. Through diplomatic ties, he also imported horses from the Middle East for his cavalry. In a bilateral military pact, he let in veteran Turks to come and train his army in efficiency and military tactics. His military victories enabled him to have a large Empire spreading from Damask, Tuareg and Kano in the North, and to Tebu, Bilma, and Dafor in the East and to Biu in the South.

Alooma being an intelligent and shrewd tactician did not use naked force to propagate his military conquest all the time. He used the tactic of “war by proxy”. This means that he would give military support to a friendly state against a hostile state. For example, he gave military support to the Kotoko, the neighbours of Tetala to harass Tetala by continuous incursions with their boats until the Tetala retreated into the swamps of the Lake Chad. He also gave tacit support to Kelwati to invade the territory of the Tuareg continually until the Tuareg were forced to make peace. Such was the tactic of Alooma in soldering that made him, a very successful administrator and state builder; a recipe for an actor or practitioner of international diplomacy.

- **Analysis and Appraisal of Alooma’s Military Feat in Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy**

From the foregoing, you can deduce that Alooma was a sound actor or practitioner of pre-colonial African diplomacy. Recall that in our previous discussion, it was stated that even though war was antagonistic to diplomacy, military might regulated it. A militarily-weak state is vulnerable to incessant raid by predating states. On the other hand, a militarily-strong state checks invasions and keep ambitious predators at bay. Alooma was successful in maintaining a military power that checked attacks against Kanem-Bornu Empire and thus the Empire had peace to maintain diplomatic relations.

Secondly, Alooma was a veteran of bilateral military pact. You can see for yourselves that what we now call military pacts between countries in modern day was long ago practised by Alooma during the pre-colonial African period. After all, there were recent talks of military pact between Nigeria and the U.S.A, Nigeria and Israel, Cameroon and France, e.t.c. Most of these pacts could not work in modern-day because of mistrust and disharmony in what can be called our National Interest. Muslims are suspicious of a military pact with Israel or U.S.A. while Christians are suspicious of economic or religious ties with the Arabs. So, it is in Nigeria today and National Interest cannot really be harmonized. We shall come to this later in our subsequent discussion. This was not however so during the time of Alooma of Bornu. The states interest was clearly defined and the people worked harmoniously for the success of the pact.

Furthermore, Mai Idris Alooma employed the tactic of “war by proxy” successfully to drive away troublesome rivals and forced peace from the Tuaregs. It means here that the wars by proxy fought by the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. until the recent time had been

employed long ago in pre- colonial Africa. However, while Aloomaa succeeded in attaining peace and hitch-free diplomatic relations with his neighbours, the same could not be said of U.S.A and U.S.S.R who created tension all over the world until the end of the cold war.

Finally, you can easily ascribe Aloomaa's military successes to his tactical exploitation of diplomatic ties. He knew what he needed and he benefited immensely from his good relations with Tripoli, Tunis and North Africa where he imported firearms to revolutionize his army. He also extended this exploitation of diplomatic relations to the Middle East where he obtained horses to strengthen his cavalry. This exactly is the benefit of diplomatic relations. Getting what you want or need most for the benefit of your state. Mai Idris Aloomaa used this to further his expansionist policy and kept his state safe from attacks. The best thing one could do with Aloomaa if you want anything from Borno during that time was to negotiate peacefully with him. The idea of going to war to forcefully get anything from him did not arise.

#### • **Political and Administrative Qualities**

Mai Idris Aloomaa was reputed to be a very good administrator. Actually, before his emergence, Borno was reputed to be well and effectively governed with good political and administrative structures put in place. It was only left for the ruler to utilize these structures to benefit Borno and this Aloomaa did to the maximum.

Aloomaa established a good government that contributed much to the fame of Kanem-Borno abroad. Muslim scholars and other Empires were attracted. There was a keen competition to be identified with Borno from within and without pre-colonial Africa. Inevitably, he had to develop diplomatic relations with these interested states and this Aloomaa did. He maintained diplomatic relations most especially with the states of North Africa and the Middle East. He particularly made use of women in his administration. Unlike the "Mais" (rulers) before him who appointed governors from members of the royal family he appointed his own governors from among the members of the humble families loyal to him. Women played important administrative roles. The queen mother (Magira), the king's official elder sister (Magara) and the first wife of the king (Gumsu) all performed special duties ranging from state's administration to reception of emissaries and official visitors. It is on record that one Magira (queen mother) imprisoned a Mai (a ruler, not Aloomaa) for failure to enforce Islamic laws. Such was the power of the women administrators.

Borno's government was centralised and you should know this would make policy (including foreign policy) formulation and execution easier and quicker.

## • Appraisal of Aloomo's Political and Administrative Qualities

Aloomo's administrative qualities did portray him as having a penchant for good grasp of both domestic and international affairs. First, he used the good political and administrative structures already established in Borno to further the beneficial interest of the people. This is exactly what is done in the United States and some other serious countries of the world today – using well established structures to administrative advantage.

Aloomo attracted political allies and romanced with foreign states who were his admirers. He maintained diplomatic relations with them and got what he wanted for his state. He made sure the Muslim teachers he attracted were exempted from paying tax because of the services they rendered. Of course, this is the axiom of states in international politics – getting all benefits for your state through diplomatic means from other states you come in contact with.

Furthermore, Aloomo like his predecessors in Borno made extensive use of women services in domestic and international affairs. He never relegated them to the background. He gave equal opportunities to both men and women in his administration. This was rare then in pre-colonial Africa and most especially an Islamic state where women were not accorded much respect. You should however, note that many serious countries use both men and women in administration nowadays.

Finally, in a unique way, Aloomo appointed provincial governors on a basis of merit and loyalty from the humble class. He did away with the old way of appointing them from the royal family. Of course, although this was an appointment and not election, this promoted equality, fairness, justice and a semblance of democratisation. It enhanced loyalty to the central authority and by extension the support for domestic and foreign policies ardently pursued by Mai Idris Aloomo.

### 1.3.3 Economic Qualities

In the area of trade, Aloomo did very well for Kanem-Bornu. Trade was well organised. The centre of the Empire was at the terminus of the trans-Saharan trade route from Tripoli. This brought the trade contact between Kanem-Borno and the Berber merchants from North Africa. Grain was sent to Bilma in the desert to exchange for salt. Nitrate, obtained from the Lake Chad was carried to Kano and other parts of Africa.

Copper trade was carried on by Kanem-Borno middle-men between Dafur in the East and the Nupe area in the South West. Trade with the South was channeled through Kano but trade in kolanut with the south was sometimes done directly.

The economy of the Empire during the reign of Aloomaa suggests that the period was a “golden age”. Aloomaa promoted the growth of trade which was the basis of the prosperity and wealth of the Empire. Aloomaa enhanced the economic status by subjugating Tebu and occupying Bilma, its principal town. Bilma was a great strategic and economic importance because of its position on the caravan route. Bilma was also an important salt producing area. Aloomaa also seized the advantage created by the fall of Shongai because this caused a shift eastward in the great use of the caravan routes.

From the foregoing, you can see that Aloomaa attracted foreign trade and investment. He engaged in trade by barter and exchanged what he had with what he wanted from elsewhere. This would definitely lead to bi-lateral and multi-lateral trade pact between Kanem-Borno and other states it traded with during the pre-colonial period. This particular Borno example is sufficient evidence to prove that pre-colonial Africa engaged in bi-lateral and multi-lateral trade pact and they formed trade cartels to regulate prices of their commodities and to dissuade the abuse in the production and export of such commodities.

Moreover, they engaged in negotiation and bargaining before trade agreement could be reached. And remember, in bargaining or negotiation, you most of the time compromise to allow for a mutual agreement of conflicting and competing interests.

### **1.3.4 Religious and Legal Qualities**

I intend to treat the religious and legal qualities of Mai Idris Aloomaa together because Islamic religion influenced the laws and administration of Kanem-Bornu during the period of Aloomaa. In short, Borno during this period was an Islamic state.

Aloomaa was a devout Muslim and he encouraged the spread of Islam in his Empire. He made Islam the state religion and he fought Jihads to promote the spread of Islam in a pure way. He encouraged and went on pilgrimage to Mecca. At Cairo, he built a hostel for Borno pilgrims. He built beautiful brick mosques and substituted certain customary laws with Muslim laws in his territory.

#### **• Appraisal of Aloomaa’s Religious Qualities**

You can easily deduce from the foregoing that Aloomaa’s qualities in the diligent pursuit of Islam and its subsequent entrenchment as a state religion endeared him greatly to the Islamic states in the pre-colonial African region and abroad. He became very friendly with the Arabs and the Middle East that were endeared to him. They enthusiastically had diplomatic relations with him. He was able to maintain military, trade and religious pact with them and they in turn willingly assisted him to further his state’s interest. He became a member of what could be termed the Islamic or the Arab league. This is undoubtedly part of diplomacy of the highest order in practice during the pre-colonial African period.

Secondly, the Jihads fought by Aloomo encouraged the spread of Islam and more pre-colonial African states became Islamised with Islamic laws as their guiding principles both in domestic and inter-state affairs. This made easy the practice of pre-colonial African diplomacy as similar features characterised pre-colonial African states.

Furthermore, the adoption of Muslim laws to replace customary laws made diplomatic practice easier and less cumbersome between states. The written nature of the laws and its observance made it easy for adoption as international laws among pre-colonial African Islamic states.

Aloomo's pilgrimage to Mecca and his subsequent encouragement of such pilgrimages opened Kanem-Bornu to the outside world. Kanem- Bornu became popular and more people, especially foreigners, Muslim clerics and scholars, were attracted to the state of Bornu.

You should bear it in mind that he started and employed the method of building residences for his people abroad. This may be likened to the building of resident embassies in friendly states abroad. Although these buildings were for Borno pilgrims, we might not really be mistaking to relate them to foreign embassies because Borno emissaries and envoys to the Arab states of Egypt, Tunis and Mecca also resided in these hostels when they were on state's official assignments. Of course, Aloomo used to send emissaries abroad for trade negotiation, arms procurement, and manpower transfer by engaging Islamic scholars and Arab soldiers to teach and train his people and soldiers respectively, and for other matters for the interest of the Borno state.

Lastly, Aloomo engaged in what could be called technology transfer by engaging architects and builders from outside to build beautiful palaces and brick mosques in Borno. This is practiced all over the international community today where friendly states transferred technological advancement to one another. Yes, of course, the international community is rife with this lofty diplomatic practice that Mai Idris Aloomo was not stranger to during the pre-colonial African era several centuries ago. Or don't you think so?



## **1.5 SUMMARY**

In this unit, we discover that certain qualities in Mai Idris Aloomo of pre-colonial Borno Empire made him an outstanding and an exceptional diplomat. He portrayed these qualities in his military, administrative, trade, religious, legal and other personal attributes to enhance and entrench sound diplomatic tenets which advanced Kanem Bornu of his time tremendously. He harmonised these qualities with the interests of his state, and he got what he wanted for the benefit of Kanem-Bornu. Furthermore, the

example of Kanem-Bornu proves to us that diplomacy really thrived in pre-colonial Africa.

#### 1.4 SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISES (SAEs) 1

1. The Kanuri Empire of Kanem-Bornu spans a period of about 1000 years in three phases. Idris Alooma reigned in the \_\_\_\_\_ phase. (a) first (b) second (c) third.
2. Alooma was reputed to be a great \_\_\_\_\_. (a) soldier (b) diplomat (c) trader.
3. Alooma was reputed to use the tactic of “\_\_\_\_\_ by proxy”. (a) diplomat (b) trade (c) war.
4. Alooma knew what he needed and he benefited immensely from his good relations with Tripoli, Tunis and North Africa where he imported \_\_\_\_\_ to revolutionise his \_\_\_\_\_. (a) firearms, army (b) army, foreign policy (c) goods, economy.
5. Before the emergence of Alooma, Borno was reputed to be well and effectively governed with good political and administrative structures put in place. True or false?
6. Unlike the “Mais” (rulers) before him who appointed governors among the members of the humble families loyal to them, Alooma appointed his own governors from members of the royal family. True or false?
7. Alooma gave \_\_\_\_\_ opportunities to both men and women in his administration. (a) due (b) undue (c) equal (d) unequal.
8. The economy of the Empire during the reign of Alooma suggests that the period was a “\_\_\_\_\_”. (a) age of prosperity (b) golden age (c) golden moment.
9. Alooma’s adoption of Muslim laws to replace customary laws made diplomatic practice easier and less cumbersome between states. True or false?

#### 1.6 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Mention and discuss five ways in which Alooma’s religious traits reflected diplomacy during the pre-colonial African era.
2. Examine Alooma’s personal attributes and how they reflected pre- colonial African diplomacy.



#### 1.7 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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### **1.8 ANSWERS TO SAES**

1. B 2. A 3. C 4. A 5. True 6. False 7. C 8. B. 9. True.

## UNIT 2: PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN DIPLOMACY: THE DAHOMEY EXAMPLE

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall continue with our discussion on the illustration of pre-colonial African diplomacy in practice. We will hereby cite the example of Dahomey which had diplomatic contact with both fellow pre-colonial African states and Europeans. We shall particularly beam our searchlight on Agaja, one of the outstanding kings of Dahomey and see how his charismatic qualities stood him out as a good administrator and diplomat. The unique innovations he brought to bear on Dahomey and its diplomatic fortunes among peers will also be discussed. We shall attempt to analyse and appraise these qualities and see how they reflect pre-colonial African diplomacy. Through the various unique institution and structures put in place, we will be able to see how pre-colonial Dahomey excelled diplomatically. We will also discuss the misfortune that later befell Agaja because of his wrong move.



### 2.2 INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- describe the pre-colonial state of Dahomey;
- identify the practice of pre-colonial Africa diplomacy in Dahomey;
- examine the qualities of Agaja vis-à-vis the practice of pre-colonial African diplomacy;

- analyze Agaja's qualities and mistake and how it affected Dahomey's fortunes; and
- evaluate the treaty of peace between Dahomey, Oyo and the Europeans and how it reflects pre-colonial African Diplomacy.



## **2.3 MAIN SECTION**

### **2.3.1 The Pre-Colonial State of Dahomey**

Having cited Kanem-Bornu during the reign of Mai Idris Alooma as an illustration of diplomacy in action in an Islamised pre-colonial African state, I intend to use Dahomey which had contact with European coastal trade as another illustration. While I concentrated more on the reign of Alooma in Bornu, I intend to concentrate more on the reign of Agaja in Dahomey. This will be so because Agaja like Alooma was one of the most outstanding kings of Dahomey who brought about many innovations to Dahomey's development during the pre-colonial African period.

During this period in discussion, Dahomey had a strong bureaucratic centralisation. The reason for this political structure and form of administration was that it was a conquest state. Unlike the Asante Union which was achieved by a general desire of various Akan tribes to unite for a common purpose, the various Fon and Aja states were welded together into Dahomey by military force. Thus, Dahomey did not have to pacify any state or principality. The king of Dahomey appointed conquered chiefs to collect taxes and he could dismiss them at his whims and caprices. They were civil servants of the state government. Offices were not hereditary and could be filled by commoners. Unlike what happened elsewhere in pre-colonial Africa, members of the royal family were not entrusted with any offices of state although they enjoyed certain privileges.

The army played a major role in stabilising Dahomey. The leading generals were also the leading officials of the state. The Migan (a retired army officer) was the doyen of the administration under Agaja and he was the one who co-ordinated the activities of other officials. The Mehu was in charge of the exchequer and to assist him was the Yovogan who resided at Whydah to represent Dahomey's interests in the coastal trade. The involvement of the army in administration of course augured well for both domestic and international administration of the Dahomey. This I will discuss in more details when we come to the appraisal of the state of Dahomey vis-à-vis pre-colonial African diplomacy.

In the pre-colonial African state of Dahomey, citizenship was emphasized to the detriment of kingship. It was in Dahomey that the concept of citizenship evolved in pre-colonial Africa. A citizen was anyone who was willing to serve and be loyal to the king and the state irrespective of his state. Anyone could thus become a citizen. It was no

surprise that in the 18th century, some Europeans not only became Dahomey citizens but also Dahomey chiefs.

Apart from centralisation and citizenship, Dahomey had a catalogue of various innovations. It was in Dahomey that espionage activities were raised to a high pedestal and it assumed a great importance. These spies move about as traders and they learnt many languages to lighten the burden of their duty. They studied places to be attacked. Most important of all, they kept the king informed of the activities of his official, particularly the Yovogan who was heavily spied upon because of the importance of his office.

Suffice to also note that the active participation of women in government was rare not only in pre-colonial Africa but also other parts of the world then, but Dahomey made use of women and cherished their roles in state building. Royal women were chiefly employed as spies to keep an eye on state functions. What is more? Women were drafted into the army of Dahomey. The women soldiers referred to as the Amazons emerged to check the excesses of the harassment of Oyo Empire between 1730 and 1747. Women also received important emissaries and envoys into the king's presence. Intelligent women were also used as advisers and emissaries to the state of Dahomey.

Another innovation I want you to note was that population census was practised in Dahomey during the 18th century. All male adults were eligible to serve in the national army and to be able to estimate the strength of the armed forces; it became necessary to have an idea of the size of the country's population, particularly the age distribution. The census was not to facilitate and formulate economic planning as in our modern day but directed to serve military purposes. We will however see how most of these innovations augured well for diplomacy later on in our subsequent discussion.

### **2.3.2 An Appraisal of Dahomey and the Practice of Pre- Colonial African Diplomacy**

The foregoing innovations brought about in Dahomey in no small measure contributed to the practice and success of pre-colonial African diplomacy within and without pre-colonial Africa.

The centralized bureaucracy in pre-colonial Dahomey enabled a concerted policy thrust, and enhanced diplomatic relations with the kingdoms of Asante, Oyo, Benin, Fante and other surrounding neighbouring states, and most especially with the Dutch and English traders participating in the coastal trade.

The use of the military in domestic and international affairs ensured loyalty from the military class. This brought about peace to Dahomey and efforts were concerted to protect the state against external forces. The peace augured well for stability conducive for diplomatic relations. The Yorogun, a military officer was a senior official who

governed Whydah and controlled all dealings with Europeans. He was the head of the secret service which kept a vigilant watch on all state officials, envoys, visitors and rulers of vassal states. He was entrusted with activities conducive for a hitch-free diplomatic relations with other states and European traders.

The concept of citizenship attracted foreigners to Dahomey where many became Dahomean citizens. Even Europeans became citizens and chiefs in Dahomey. This bred loyalty and commitment to the cause of Dahomey in all spheres of domestic and international affairs. This brought peace and stability conducive for diplomacy. It brought attraction for Dahomey and states willingly maintained diplomatic relations with it.

Dahomey and its system of espionage used a fine method of diplomacy. Of course, you should know by now that a state maintaining diplomatic relations with another should spy the strength and weakness of the other state. Emissaries are ears for their home states and Dahomean traders acting like emissaries acted in this regard. In modern day diplomacy, diplomats should be careful so as not to be branded as spies when reporting back information about other states to their home states. Also, Dahomean traders concealed their activities and with this, Dahomey was able to succeed in what it needed for its state interest.

Note that those spies learned many languages to ease their duties. Of course, being a multi-linguist is a characteristic of a good diplomat for ease of communication and interaction in trade, politics and social activities.

The use of women as administrators, soldiers, spies, emissaries, advisers and intelligence officials went a long way in portraying the pre-colonial state of Dahomey as gender democratic and this also fostered unity and loyalty to the state. This is another recipe for pre-colonial African diplomacy. You should note that one of the burning issues in international relations now is gender issues – that is the fair representation of women in governance all over the world.

Lastly, even though, the population census of Dahomey was geared towards military reasons, it served as a catalogue for the determination of the size of a population for policy matters. Since only expansionist policy was at the front-burner of various pre-colonial African states then, Dahomey did extraordinarily well by the innovation of a policy that was later on transferred to the international community even in the modern day.

### **2.3.3 Agaja's Qualities and its Effect on Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy**

As earlier mentioned in this discussion, Agaja was one of the greatest kings pre-colonial Dahomey ever had. His attributes were courage, great intelligence, diplomacy and a magnetic personality. He was reputed to impress all those who came in contact with him. He was patriotic and a good statesman. The interest of Dahomey was paramount in his

mind. His main ambition was to create and leave behind a Dahomey that would not be a vassal to any other state, and which would be free from political and economic control of the coastal rulers and the European slave dealers.

On assumption of office, Agaja did two important things that shot Dahomey up the ladder of progress. First he established an organisation called Agbadji-gbeto. This institution combined military intelligence service and information office. It provided intelligence reports on conditions and events in the surrounding states. It could spy any town to be attacked and find a pretext for the attack. Its other function was to spread propaganda in Dahomey's interest according to laid-down plans by Agaja.

The second important thing done by Agaja was that he initiated military training for the youth. With the help of foreign trainers, they were drilled in battle-field manoeuvres and the use of guns. The boys were trained to endure hardships, admire courage and obey orders. He made use of this well-trained disciplined army for the expansion of Dahomey to the coast where it took over the control of coastal trade.

Agaja loved change and innovations. He learnt the system of fortification from the Europeans. He also introduced the use of guards of honour for diplomatic courtesy. He mounted these guards of honour for visiting emissaries and Europeans. He made attempt to be literate in English and Portuguese languages and he encouraged his subjects to do the same for easy interaction and communication. In a bi-lateral trade agreement, he implored the Europeans to establish plantation in Dahomey to replace the slave trade.

#### • **Agaja's Diplomatic Mistake**

Agaja's tactical blunder in international parlance, however, caused a diplomatic setback for him and put Dahomey in jeopardy. Agaja found an excuse to attack and conquer Allada, a sister state. By doing this he violated a treaty of peace and pact of fraternity existing among the Aja states. He therefore committed a crime of political patricide.

The reaction of other sister states was swift; Agaja's action was seen as a bad precedence that must be curtailed before it sent wrong signals to other ambitious states. Oyo under Alaafin Ojigi attacked and destroyed Dahomey. With the coalition of other forces, Agaja was forced to flee. Recall that this was almost what happened when other nations joined forces to check Hitler during the Second World War to dissuade him from further violation of international convention. It was also similar to what the combined forces of the United Nations led by the United States did to Iraq in "Operation Desert Storm" to check Iraq's violation of international convention by annexing Kuwait, a sovereign state. (In the 21st Century, the world has however not seen similar consistency with the Russian invasion of Ukraine.)

Consequent to the combined attacks on Agaja, he made a peace treaty with Oyo. The peace settlement signified that Agaja should not re-establish his capital at Dahomey and

that he should accept Oyo's lordship. It was further stated in the treaty that all the vassal states under Dahomey should now be independent and all the Aja states unsettled by his attack on Allada be re-settled in Port Novo independent of Dahomey Epe and Badagry were to be free from attacks from Dahomey soldiers. These ports were to be Oyo's avenue to European coastal trade. Agaja was allowed to maintain a standing army but he had to swear to an oath of allegiance not to use the soldiers against Oyo's interests. To ensure Agaja's observance of the treaty, his son who was to succeed him was to be brought up in the court of Oyo to be trained in his future duties as a vassal to Oyo. Furthermore, to cement cordial relations between Alaafin Ojigi of Oyo and Agaja of Dahomey, each married a princess from the other's court.

Next, Agaja made an agreement with representatives of European merchants. He was given a monopoly of the purchase of fire arms and in return, he would do nothing to obstruct slave trade. Dahomey eventually became the major slave trade kingdom in the Guinea coast. Agaja was so overwhelmed by external forces beyond his control that he had to agree with what he was vehemently opposed to initially. Of course, he might have died a disappointed man two years after the peace treaty.

#### **2.3.4 Appraisal of Agaja's Qualities and Diplomatic Blunders**

You ought to be aware that Agaja's fine qualities augured well for diplomatic practice between Dahomey and its neighbours in pre-colonial Africa, and with the Europeans. Being courageous, very intelligent, and diplomatic and an attractive personality made him a good diplomat.

Recall too that Agaja was a patriot who was deeply interested in the well-being of Dahomey. His love for Dahomey was genuine and thus he had co-ordinated policy thrust to achieve the best for the interest of the state. The institutions established by Agaja when he assumed office were effectively used to pursue Dahomey's interest in diplomatic ties and international affairs. His spies, information and propaganda machines and military intelligence units did very well in facilitating Dahomey's external relations.

Like Aloomaa, who had military pact with the Arabs, Agaja employed Europeans to train his army in military duties and maneuvers, and the use of firearms. This military pact helped Dahomey's expansionist policy. The military pact also made him have knowledge about the system of fortification against enemy forces. Of course he also learnt military parade and the mounting of guards of honour to receive important emissaries and European visitors. This was a purely diplomatic courtesy, a method that augured well for the flourish of diplomacy. You should take note that Agaja indulged in bi-lateral trade agreement with the Europeans and tried to learn the European languages, encouraging his subjects to do the same. Of course, you already know by now that understanding languages makes diplomacy flourish unhindered.

On the other hand, Agaja's diplomatic blunder only portrayed that a tactless move, inordinate ambition and an inclination to warfare by whatever pretext always bring unfavourable repercussions in international relations. Agaja learnt the bitter lesson too late. His mistake cost him the state of Dahomey which he laboured profusely to uphold.

You can appraise Agaja's weakness in this regard yourselves. Violation of collective convention always meets with reprisals. At the end of all hostilities against Agaja, the states resorted to negotiation to sign peace treaty with Dahomey giving him stringent unfavourable conditions. Of course he was a weak helpless party in the negotiation bid but he was still accorded a sovereign status. Though he was forced or rather tricked into observing the treaty by intermarriage and taking his heir into the custody of Oyo, these were methods used in pre-colonial Africa to ensure the observance of pacts, treaties and conventions in diplomatic relations.

## 2.4 SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISES (SAEs) 2

1. List and discuss the various innovations of the pre-colonial state of Dahomey.
2. Assess Agaja's qualities and effects on Dahomey's diplomacy.



## 2.5 SUMMARY

In this unit, we read that the pre-colonial state of Dahomey had centralised, stable, virile and dynamic administration that augured well for diplomatic practice. The various unique innovations in Dahomey especially brought about by its charismatic king, Agaja in no small measure enhanced pre-colonial African diplomacy in the pre-colonial state of Dahomey. Agaja's qualities helped governance and diplomacy to thrive in Dahomey and his subsequent false move preferring war to diplomacy made him fall and he died a disappointed man after grave consequences.

## 2.6 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Mention and discuss the consequences of Agaja's ill-fated war with Allada.
2. Compare briefly the fate of Agaja and two other violators of international conventions.



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## 2.8 ANSWERS TO SAEs 2

1. Way back in the 18th Century, Dahomey was already a well centralized state, with a catalogue of innovations in the area of security intelligence, women participation in governance, citizenship and population census.

Indeed, it was in Dahomey that espionage activities were raised to a high pedestal and it assumed a great importance. These spies move about as traders and they learnt many languages to lighten the burden of their duty. They studied places to be attacked. Most important of all, they kept the king informed of the activities of his official, particularly the Yovogan who was heavily spied upon because of the importance of his office.

Second, the active participation of women in government was rare not only in pre-colonial Africa but also other parts of the world then, but Dahomey made use of women and cherished their roles in state building. Royal women were chiefly employed as spies to keep an eye on state functions. Notably, women were drafted into the army of Dahomey. The women soldiers referred to as the Amazons emerged to check the excesses of the harassment of Oyo Empire between 1730 and 1747. Women also received important emissaries and envoys into the king's presence. Intelligent women were also used as advisers and emissaries to the state of Dahomey.

Another innovation I want you to note was that population census was practised in Dahomey during the 18th century. All male adults were eligible to serve in the national army and to be able to estimate the strength of the armed forces; it became necessary to have an idea of the size of the country's population, particularly the age distribution. The census was not to facilitate and formulate economic planning as in our modern day but directed to serve military purposes.

2. Although he was ruined by his inordinate ambition to attack a sister state, Agaja's fine qualities align well for diplomatic practice between Dahomey and its neighbours in pre-colonial Africa, and with the Europeans. Agaja was a good diplomat being a courageous, very intelligent, diplomatic and an attractive personality. Agaja was a patriot who was deeply interested in the well-being of Dahomey. His love for Dahomey was genuine and thus he had co-ordinated policy thrust to achieve the best for the interest of the state.

The institutions established by Agaja when he assumed office were effectively used to pursue Dahomey's interest in diplomatic ties and international affairs. His spies, information and propaganda machines and military intelligence units did very well in facilitating Dahomey's external relations.

## UNIT 3: EUROPEAN DIPLOMACY DURING THE PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN PERIOD

### CONTENTS

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)
- 3.3 Main Content
  - 3.3.1 European Diplomacy
  - 3.3.2 French Diplomacy under Napoleon
  - 3.3.3 Means and Methods of European Diplomacy
- 3.4 Self-Assessment Exercises (SAEs) 3
- 3.5 Summary
- 3.6 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 3.7 References/Further Reading
- 3.8 Answers to SAEs



### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, discussion shifts gear to the means and methods by which diplomatic practice was carried out elsewhere during the pre-colonial African period. We will determine whether this practice, especially in Europe, could be compared to each other and discover the similarities and differences. This will enable us to strike a balance between pre-colonial African diplomacy and European diplomacy.

Furthermore, we hope to compare charismatic rulers in both pre-colonial Africa and Europe of the time, and see how Agaja, Aloma and Napoleon portrayed the same qualities in administration and diplomatic relations. We shall also determine the success and failure of Napoleon and reconcile them with that of rulers in pre-colonial Africa previously discussed in earlier units of this course.



### 3.2 INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- trace European diplomatic history;
- explain Napoleon's contribution to the administration and diplomacy of Europe;
- determine the success and failure of Napoleon's administrative and foreign policies;
- list and discuss the means and methods of European diplomacy, and
- compare European diplomacy and pre-colonial African diplomacy.



## 3.3 MAIN SECTION

### 3.3.1 European Diplomacy

Recall that during the Pre-colonial African period, diplomatic practice was also going on in Europe and other places. You would call to mind that at the beginning of this course that diplomacy started with the advent of man on planet earth. The Biblical men of God Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and other patriarchs had to bargain and negotiate for land boundaries to avoid dispute and conflict. Wherever there are conflicting and competing interests in the inter-state affairs, which of course is inevitable, anything short of diplomatic resolution might end in war. Europe was no exception. Europeans carried on diplomatic relations with one another and the outside world to foster peace and unity. European history was replete with warfare and disorderliness to the extent that the medieval European period was referred to as the “Dark Ages”. According to Geoffrey Stern in his book, *The Structure of International Society*, “this medieval European system was characterised by series of internecine ethnic, religious, political and ideological wars.”

By the late fifteenth century the Italian city-state system had developed under secular rulers. Religion was separated from politics. Statehood was emphasized. Wars fought for the interest of the state replaced those fought for religious justification. Dogmatism was eradicated and the leaders of the Italian City states gave room to compromise. Actually, it can reasonably be argued that the origin of good diplomatic practice started with the Italian city states.

The Italian city states established permanent diplomatic missions (i.e. embassies) abroad. They introduced the appointment and recall of career diplomats and complete privileges and immunities that go with it. This of course was a far cry from what obtained among the Greeks, Egyptians, Assyrians and Romans who like pre-colonial Africa only established ad-hoc envoys. The Italian city-states diplomats were career officers and they were on permanent basis to carry out the same duties in the interests of their states every time the need arose.

Irrespective of the Italian city states good diplomatic practice, diplomacy failed in Europe and war broke out. You should however note that these wars were not even fought between individual citizens but between mercenaries that were paid, a practice now known as professional soldiering. It was however ironical that diplomacy was employed tactically in the wars as the wars were not fought to destroy the opponent (so as not to stimulate unfavourable reaction or coalition) but to strike a desirable balance in order to cause stability in the state system. You would easily deduce that this practice negated the action of Agaja of Dahomey who tactlessly fought a total war of destruction against a

sister state in the fraternity and who in turn got destroyed by the coalition effected by his action against him. It is even in view of this that some scholars argued that the Italian city state practice is the bridge between the medieval and the modern international society and state system.

The treaty of Westphalia which ended the 30-year old war that engulfed Europe gave impetus to modern diplomacy. The Westphalia treaty signed in 1648 gave credence to the concepts of sovereign statehood, international law, diplomacy and balance of power. These concepts among others started and sustained a new form of diplomatic relations which we will discuss in full details later on in this unit. The concepts enhanced and facilitated the means and methods by which diplomacy was carried out in Europe about the same time as Pre-colonial Africa.

The concert system was another epoch-making event in European periodic summit or conference system meant to discuss or settle matters bothering on common interest. The concert system started in 1815 when the Napoleonic wars nearly rent the whole of Europe. The French Napoleon example of diplomacy will later on be appraised here in comparison to pre-colonial African diplomacy. The concert system helped considerably in forestalling wars. The man who played a very important role during this conference in Vienna to settle the affairs of the European continent in June 1815 was foreign minister Prinvon Klemens Metternich.

Metternich was an able diplomat and an efficient administrator. He endeared himself to the other members of the conference by his charm, his eloquence and his ability to socialise. Metternich was the chairman of the conference who brought his personality to bear on the proceedings and who influenced the outcome of their deliberations considerably. At Vienna, there was an assembly of statesmen, soldiers, diplomats, adventurers, monarchs and plenipotentiaries representing virtually all sovereign states in Europe. In this congress, those who fought by the victors were rewarded and those who fought for the conquered were punished. Other important matters to forestall a re-occurrence of war and to check Napoleonic tendencies were discussed, and some countries like Belgium and Holland were fortified. The congress worked to maintain peace in Europe for some considerable time.

By the foregoing, you should realise that European diplomacy at the time of pre-colonial Africa thrived amidst European wars and, diplomacy, more than any other thing was employed to maintain a truce or peace amidst war situations.

### **3.3.2 French Diplomacy under Napoleon**

Napoleon is a good illustration of European diplomatic soldiering during European warfare, which coincided with the pre-colonial African period. Just like we appraised Bornu and Dahomey under Aloomo and Agaja respectively to illustrate pre-colonial

African diplomacy, so also Napoleon, a brilliant, intelligent and diplomatic soldier who ruled France during the early nineteenth century, will be appraised to illustrate European diplomacy.

Napoleon possessed qualities that facilitate French diplomacy and expansionist policies. First he was a courageous and disciplined soldier. He was reputed not to be in sympathy with indiscipline and disorder. He quickly rose in rank in the French army and he was entrusted with the command of the army of the interior. He learnt how to judge and handle men. He was a psychologist of some kind and this helped him in foreign policies regarding the states surrounding him.

He also learnt the new theories of manoeuvre, strategy and drill. Napoleon distinguished himself in battles by his superior strategy and discipline. He did not use cumbersome equipment that would slow down movement in battles. He organized swift campaigns and specialized in surprise attacks. He had many other military strategies that worked in his favour.

He was talented in controlling the minds of his men and people he came in contact with. He was eloquent and an orator. Through very carefully chosen words and phrases, he was able to dominate the will of his soldiers. He promised them wealth, honour and glory and thereby motivated them into battles. This of course augured well for French diplomatic relations.

Napoleon was a relentless campaigner and after conquering many European nations and compelling them to sign treaties of subservience to him, he set against England, his most powerful enemy. By the time he conquered Egypt and established an administration there, his fleet had been defeated by the English at Aboukir Bay in August 1798. He used bribes, threat and force to make himself elected French leader.

As the French leader, Napoleon was thirty years when he took over the control and administration of France. He addressed the issue of finance be-deviling France and established the Bank of France. He addressed the issue of religion diplomatically by reconciling the state with the embittered members of the clergy. He established the Legion of Honour to reward those who distinguished themselves in the services of the French state. Napoleon brought massive reforms in education, administration, foreign affairs and diplomatic relations. He has been described as the architect of Modern France.

In due course, Napoleon became despotic. He committed the same tactical blunder like Agaja of Dahomey. His quest for wars of expansion was insatiable and other European powers became disenchanted with him. Under Napoleon, France continued with its territorial expansion and the projection of revolutionary ideas to other European countries. England wanted the aggression of France to be checked, and Austria and Prussia were not pleased with the harsh conditions offered by the treaty signed in France.

They all, with other coalition, worked to destroy Napoleon. Napoleon's military expedition against Russia failed and on his return, he faced many enemies fighting him. Eventually, the fall of Napoleon was imminent. He was defeated at the battle of Waterloo by the English forces in coalition with others under Duke Wellington. Napoleon's fall was brought about by his inordinate ambition to rule all Europe and he attacked sister states indiscriminately without resort to diplomatic tenet. You should recall that this was what happened to Agaja of Dahomey of the pre-colonial African period. Agaja like Napoleon necessitated a coalition of states against him and he fell. Here Aloomo of Bornu stood out. Mai Idris Aloomo would fight only when necessary for expansionist purposes but most of the time he diplomatically used the system of "war by proxy" to check hostile states. He would only give tactical support to friendly states against hostile states but he would not fight himself. This made him more successful and lasting than both Napoleon of France and Agaja of Dahomey.

### **3.3.3 Means and Methods of European Diplomacy**

Suffice to note that there were particular methods and means by which Europe carried out their diplomatic relations with one another about the same time as the pre-colonial Africa period. These methods which will be discussed below are almost, if not entirely the same as that which obtained in pre-colonial Africa.

#### **Establishment of Embassies**

This facilitated diplomacy as embassies were sent to states abroad. The Italian city states established permanent embassies but the Romans, French and some others maintained ad-hoc embassies. Emissaries and envoys were sent to maintain truce and peace among warring states. They were also sent abroad to attend peace conferences where issues bothering on common interests were amicably resolved.

Tact, negotiation, bargaining, compromise and even threat were used to reach agreement. The kind of conference or concert always called for the appropriate method to be employed. Napoleon of France for instance most of the time employed threat because France was then the most powerful European power and most foreign policies were determined by reason of military might. Treaties were always signed and agreed upon to favour the conqueror. After the fall of Napoleon however, at the conference of Vienna which heralded the concert of Europe in 1815, bargaining and compromise were employed by the various European powers to reach agreement. Even France was not punished for its role in the war for it was believed that Napoleon and not France erred.

Ambassadors were chosen from experienced, learned and educated men. In Italy, very important people could be ambassadors. Just like pre-colonial Africa made use of scholars as ministers, scribes, envoys and peace makers, so also Europe made use of intelligent, sociable, charming, eloquent and tactful personalities as ambassadors. An example of such foreign affairs minister was Prinvon Klemens Metternich. I hope you remember him and the role he played in European diplomacy.

Rules, immunities and privileges were also made in favour of ambassadors, emissaries or envoys. For instance an envoy of peace during a war situation should not be harmed by any of the warring parties. He should be given a safe passage once he was identified to be a peacemaker. Also, ambassadors should be honoured since he was the representative of his ruler. Embassies were sacrosanct and they could not be invaded by warring parties. All these among others were part of the immunities accorded ambassadors and embassies in foreign states in European diplomatic practice.

### **Sovereign Statehood**

During the medieval period in Europe, the papacy (religion) was supreme over the states and the Pope enjoyed a great deal of supremacy. The treaty of Westphalia which ended the 30-year old European war however signaled the emergence of sovereign states. Emphasis was laid on the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. This bred the means and methods whereby states became independent actors in international affairs and diplomacy.

### **International Law**

The treaty of Westphalia also gave impetus to International Law as a body of rules and regulations guiding foreign affairs policies. Sovereign rulers consented to these rules and they were binding on all those within the purview of the rules. Sanctions were provided for the observance of these rules and collective punitive action could be meted out to violators of international convention through coalitions. I am sure you have witnessed such examples in this course.

### **Balance of Power**

This method ensured relative equality in the political, economic and military power of states. It made all states in the international system, no matter how small or weak equal and of importance. Britain always acted as a balancer to maintain this equality and to check abuse of power or inordinate ambition by a power-drunk ruler like Napoleon. This method ensured stability, peace and orderliness conducive for European diplomacy.



### **3.5 SUMMARY**

So far in this unit, we have seen that European diplomacy during the time of pre-colonial Africa employed almost the same means and methods to facilitate good diplomatic practice. We discover that Napoleon of France could be likened to Agaja of Dahomey and that European diplomacy could be likened to pre-colonial African diplomacy. The functions and qualities of diplomats, ambassadors, envoys and emissaries are the same, and geared towards the maintenance of good diplomatic relations. The foreign policies of both pre-colonial Africa and the Europe of that time were geared towards the realisation of their respective states' interests which was to better the lot of their states and peoples.

### 3.4 SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISES (SAEs) 3

1. Europeans carried on \_\_\_\_\_ relations with one another and the outside world to foster peace and unity. (a) political (b) trade (c) diplomatic (d) military
2. European history was replete with warfare and disorderliness to the extent that the medieval European period was referred to as the “\_\_\_\_\_”. (a) Dark Ages (b) War Ages (c) War of all against All (d) Conflict Ages.
3. Actually, it can reasonably be argued that the origin of good diplomatic practice started with the \_\_\_\_\_ city states. (a) Greek (b) English (c) Italian (d) Portuguese.
4. Unlike the case of \_\_\_\_\_ in pre-colonial African state, diplomacy in Europe was employed tactically in the wars, as the wars were not fought to destroy the opponent but to strike a desirable balance in order to cause stability in the state system. (a) Aloomaa (b) Agaja (c) Askia (d) Mansa Musa.
5. The treaty of \_\_\_\_\_ which ended the 30-year old war that engulfed Europe gave impetus to modern diplomacy. (a) Amsterdam (b) Lisbon (c) Paris (d) Westphalia.
6. Which of these is a contemporary of Aloomaa and Agaja? (a) Alexander (b) Napoleon (c) Hitler (d) Bismarck.
7. Which method ensured relative equality in the political, economic and military power of states? (a) separation of power (b) sovereign statehood (c) balance of power (d) establishment of embassies.

### 3.6 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Trace and discuss the history of European diplomacy.
2. State and explain the functions and qualities of diplomats in European diplomacy.



### 3.7 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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### **3.8 ANSWERS TO SAES 3**

1. C; 2. A; 3. C; 4. B; 5. D; 6. B; 7. C.

## UNIT 4: THE RELEVANCE OF PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN DIPLOMACY TO CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

### CONTENTS

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)
- 4.3 Main Content
  - 4.3.1 Justification of the Study of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy
  - 4.3.2 Appraisal of the Merits of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy
  - 4.3.3 Appraisal of the Failure of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy
- 4.4 Self-Assessment Exercises (SAEs) 4
- 4.5 Summary
- 4.6 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 4.7 References/Further Reading
- 4.8 Answers to SAEs 4



#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this concluding unit, we will examine the relevance of pre-colonial African diplomacy to the Contemporary African period. We will seek to justify the study and the necessity of the historical experience in modern time. We shall also analyse and appraise the merits and failures of pre-colonial African diplomacy and use this premise to suggest a way for the development of contemporary Africa. Since it is our task as historians of diplomacy to be able to merge the past with the present to fashion out a workable future, we shall use the diplomatic history to remedy the flaws of contemporary African diplomacy in relation to the international community.



#### 4.2 INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- determine the relevance of pre-colonial African diplomacy in modern time;
- justify the study of the course;
- list and explain the merits of pre-colonial African diplomacy;
- analyze and appraise the merits of pre-colonial African diplomacy;
- discuss the failure of pre-colonial African diplomacy;
- evaluate the failure of pre-colonial African Diplomacy, and
- suggest a solution for the development of contemporary African Diplomacy.



## 4.3 MAIN SECTION

### 4.3.1 Justification of the Study of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy

German historian, Friedrich Schiller, believed that history should pay attention to what is considered relevant by the society. He opined that the historian should be able to: “*Select from the stream of event those that exercise an essential unmistakable and easily comprehensible influence on the present shape of the world and the situation of the contemporary situation* (Schiller, 1983: 3).”

On this premise, it suffices to state that if any historical discourse should be relevant, we must learn to relate the past to the present, we should be able to employ the knowledge of the past to enlighten the serious consideration of the great issue of our time. You should be reminded that it is no longer fashionable to hold tenaciously to the ‘antiquarian fallacy’ of history which consigns the role of history only to the elucidation of the ancient past. Historians are now emphasizing the unity of the past and the present.

Therefore, note that this is the only way we can be relevant, for instance, diplomat and the busy bureaucrat whose interest is to confront diplomatic issues in their bid to promote and protect what they perceive as national interest. You should of course note that the scope of diplomatic history to which pre-colonial African diplomacy belongs is much wider today than it used to be. The task of the diplomatic historian according to Paul Gordon Lauren is:

*To construct a clear and accurate record of the formal relations and interactions among sovereign states, analyzing and interpreting the ways in which they formulate their policies, the foreign and domestic factors with which they must contend, the techniques and modalities they employ, and the results they achieve in attempting to realize their objectives* (Lauren, 1979: 13).

The point is that the historical dimension is virtually important to our unraveling the paradoxes of our time, to understanding our contemporary predicament (Ibid). Decisions of men and women determine what policies the states make. This is why an understanding of the human actors is very crucial to the proper appreciation of the whole concept of diplomacy, defined as the “process of dialogue and negotiation by which states in the international system conduct their relations and pursue their purposes by means short of war”.

The central thrust of our discussion here is that the attempt we have made so far in the discussion, analysis and appraisal of pre-colonial African diplomacy and foreign policy can hardly be meaningfully appreciated outside its history. The pre-colonial influences,

economic interdependence, trade contact, internal political structures and institutions as well as forces from the external environment, have impinged upon its diplomatic behaviour and response. It is discovered that only the force of dedicated and dynamic leadership can affect a departure from the historical pattern and development.

In dealing with this course, we realise that even though it belongs to the realm of history, much could be learnt through the successes and failures of the past to fashion out a working present and future. Thus, the study of pre-colonial African diplomacy is justified by its capacity to address a very salient issue bedeviling the African continent in the areas of development through sound diplomatic practice. The question that needs be asked is whether Africa really knows what it wants or rather does Africa have a clearly defined interest it is pursuing in the international scene? Of course, it has. There is no state without clearly defined objectives. The only problem is getting things done by efficient people.

Thus, we shall see how the successes recorded during the pre-colonial African period can be improved upon and how the failures can be remedied to launch Africa into the much-desired developmental stage of the modern world, through diplomatic relations devoid of war.

#### **4.3.2 Appraisal of the Merits of Pre-Colonial African Diplomacy**

##### **Political Merit**

The emergence of Pre-colonial African diplomacy helped to foster stable governments and organised states. The political interaction called for a united ground for states to be welded together. This made possible strong Empires, kingdoms and states. The size of a state is an asset if it can effectively be exploited and the emergence of large Empires, states and kingdoms in pre-colonial Africa enhanced expansionist policies and political influence of such states over a wide area. The kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, Shongai, Bornu, Kwazili, Buganda, Tanzania and many others sprawled along a large area and their political impact were felt all over the pre-colonial African region.

Note that if this can be reproduced in contemporary times, African unity would have been an asset for the region's development to be at par with the developed nations of today. There were talks recently of an African Government being propagated by the Libyan leader, late Muammar Ghaddafi but the deep-seated mistrust between different African leaders made it unrealisable. Africans fail to speak and act with one voice and this continues to hinder development and the disunity only brings backwardness to Africa. The disunity is further exploited by the outside powers to polarise Africa in order to be able to foster their neo-colonial tendencies on Africa. The diplomacy practiced in Africa is bastardised by the influence of the outside forces because Africans always look outward instead of inward for political solutions to their problems. It continues to be a pawn in the hands of the outside forces. Instead of seeking relevance with one another,

Africa opts to be identified with the outside forces. Charismatic and patriotic leaders like Mai Idris Aloomo, Agaja of Dahomey, Mansa Musa, Askia the great, Osei Tutu, Shaka the Zulu and many others are lacking. Instead, there are breeds of corrupt, greedy leaders who loot their countries' treasuries and vandalise legacies. We should be able to rediscover our political legacies of old and copy from dedicated and patriotic statesmen who were ready to lay down their lives for the progress of their respective states.

### **Economic Merit**

The systematic management of trade contact and economic interaction facilitated by pre-colonial African diplomacy among the states was a huge success. It helped the emergence of economically buoyant states and Empires. Trans-Saharan and trans-Atlantic trades increased the prosperity of states. European and Arab trade made new states known and diplomatic relations flourished and increased. System of taxation was co-ordinated to improve the lot of the pre-colonial African states. Trade cartels were formed to regulate trade and check the abuse of the production and export of commodities. Pre-colonial African states like Shongai controlled the export of gold dust and Benin and other Niger Delta states formed cartels to protect and preserve the quality of exported palm oil. This made the traders from outside accord honour and respect to African commodities which they greatly needed. Pre-colonial African states producing the same commodities ensured that they never acted in isolation of others when dealing with European and Arab merchants.

Of course, if contemporary Africa could dictate the price of its natural resources and form a cartel to protect such, it would have been in a position to develop economically and be so prosperous as to hold its head high in the community of nations. Endemic corruption, disunity and lack of implementation of economic policies only impoverished contemporary Africa the more. The interests of states are never realised as most African states fail to better the lot of their citizens. Instead there are civil unrest, social upheavals and resultant economic underdevelopment in the midst of abundant natural resources. The study of pre-colonial African diplomacy is sending out a signal, yes, and a message that there can still be a remedy if only contemporary Africa would harness all its resources for meaningful development. This would however need the intervention of good, committed, visionary and patriotic leadership. Instead of over-dependence on oil and other mineral resources, the system of taxation can be used as a great economic booster like in the pre-colonial Africa era; after all, serious Western countries are using taxes to boost their economies.

### **Diplomatic Merit**

The means and methods employed by the actors of pre-colonial African diplomacy is worthy of emulation. For the practitioners to be able to carry out their functions of negotiation, bargaining, dialogue, compromise or threat, they possessed enviable qualities and employed suitable methods. This facilitated pre-colonial African diplomacy and enhanced the practice in such warring and expansionist age. Yes, you should note that the

atmosphere in which pre-colonial Africa diplomacy or even medieval European diplomacy both operated and thrived were not so favourable. Wars of expansion were rampant and at the slightest excuse, states preyed on one another. If diplomacy could thrive in such a condition, then modern Africa which is relatively calm had no excuse for the failure of its state of affairs. The condition on ground now in the international community is such that no state can just use any pretext to invade another sovereign nation.

Pre-colonial Africa effectively used tact, commonsense, eloquence, psychology, intelligence, sociability, dialogue, bargaining, compromise and even threat to achieve goodies for the interests of their states. When the need arose, they exchanged gifts and sent embassies and relied on good emissaries to facilitate diplomatic ties, sign treaties of peace and carried at agreement over thorny, conflicting and competing interests. This was indeed a superb diplomatic feat. You should also remember that pre-colonial African states were blessed with charismatic and diplomatic rulers who brought their influence to bear on good diplomatic practice among pre-colonial African states as well as outsiders. In this regard, we urge contemporary Africa to be more dedicated and focused in matters concerning foreign policies and diplomatic relations and use appropriate methods to achieve their states' interests.

### **Legal Merit**

You should recall that pre-colonial African states operated with rules, laws and regulations that were best described as international laws and which were binding and acceptable in wide area. The peculiarity of such binding laws was such that even swearing to an oath before a deity was one. You should remember that Agaja was asked to swear not to fight against Oyo. The pre-colonial African laws were held in high esteem and very sacrosanct. They were only violated to the peril of the violator because spiritual forces were invoked. A sense of betrayal was frowned upon and highly repressed. A traitor of international convention was ultimately killed or disgraced beyond redemption.

You will agree with me that things are so rotten in contemporary Africa that borrowed laws are rubbished and abused. Legal laws are full of technicalities which violator's abuse and get away with without any repercussion whatsoever. The European standard of international law is ambiguous, technical, complex and rife with double standard. Buchan puts it clearly that: "a nation's judgment on the threat to its values or survival is basically a subjective one, and the objective standards of law are not easily applied to politics, especially international politics which are clouded with ambiguity egoistic". Of course, Buchen stresses what is happening in the international scene as arm-twisting and using the law to favour the cause of strong powers to the detriment of the weaker ones when it comes to collective decisions on international issues.

The bottom line in this regard is for Africa to research into the past and fashion out a legal framework that would make things work in Africa. It may be funny and archaic but

even our learned Professor Wole Soyinka once advocated for active oath-taking, which entails that Africans should swear with their indigenous gods before being entrusted with public office. Of course, we know, unless we are deceiving ourselves, that even brave but corrupt politicians swear to oaths secretly before shrines before they could agree to work with one another and share the booties of offices. It is only on assuming office that they swear by the technical oaths that they do not hold sacrosanct. Of course, they fear the reprisal of the shrines but they never care a hoot for the technical oaths.

### **4.3.3 Appraisal of the Failure of Pre-colonial African Diplomacy**

**Inordinate ambition of rulers:** Recall that pre-colonial African rulers were ambitious and egoistic. Their lust for expansion of state frontiers and trade control was insatiable. At the slightest excuse, pre-colonial African states rulers' launched wars on their sister states to corner their resources. This caused instability and the resultant wars made peace unattainable for good diplomatic practice. Rulers also destroyed themselves by their ambitions and most of the time, only few stable Empires existed at the same time. Other states only emerged after the fall of an already existing one. It thus happened that most of the time only one great Empire existed without others having diplomatic relations with it in pre-colonial Africa. Such Empires would have to look outwards to North Africa, Arab or Europe to have diplomatic ties. The expansionist interests of such states were to procure firearms from these outside forces to launch more mayhem on their neighbours in the name of territorial expansion.

In contemporary Africa and the world all over, wars for territorial expansion are no longer fashionable and the ambition of leaders is curtailed in this regard. However, the ambition of leaders to control others should also be checked. Other leaders in Africa mistrusted Muammar Ghaddafi because they suspected him of being ambitious to rule the whole of Africa and that was why they never agreed with him on an African government. This does not however mean that African leaders should not fashion out a sure way for African unity.

#### **Greed**

Pre-colonial African rulers were greedy for economic gains and they liaised with foreigners to unleash terror on their fellow neighbouring states. To make the most of the gain from the illicit slave trade, African rulers stooped so low to assist in enslaving their fellows and thereby causing the destruction of many of their own. This caused disruption of governments through wars. Most wars were perpetrated to procure slaves.

This element of greed is still endemic in contemporary Africa. Unpatriotic rulers ruin their states' economies and act as cronies and stooges of the outside forces to destabilise their own states. A call for patriotic leadership is suitable in this regard and a far cry from greed should be embraced.

## **Military Weakness**

As we have earlier discussed in this course, military strength helps to stabilise diplomacy even though war-or rather frequent wars is a pointer to diplomatic failure. However, states have to exist before diplomacy can be practiced and the military weakness of pre-colonial Africa hastened its dissolution as a conglomeration of free, sovereign states. The military incapacity allows the Muslims to overthrow governments there and the Europeans to colonise and partition the region hence, the end of pre-colonial African diplomacy. The partition of Africa signaled the end of pre-colonial African states.

It is no gain saying that modern Africa needs to upgrade its military strength to be relevant as a force to be reckoned with in international decisions and agreement. Economic, political and military power is all pointers to a stable notion that would thrive in diplomatic relations to be able to realise domestic national interests when it comes to collective bargaining.

### **4.4 SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISES (SAEs) 4**

Justify the study of pre-colonial African diplomacy in contemporary period.



### **4.5 SUMMARY**

At the end of this unit which is the final one of this course, we realise that the study of pre-colonial African diplomacy is necessitated by the fact that it should act as a catalyst for the development of contemporary Africa. We analyse the merits and failures of the pre-colonial African diplomacy and use these to measure the capacity of contemporary Africa in governance and diplomatic relations. Thus, we arrive at the conclusion that contemporary Africa should modify its merits and correct its failure of the past to fashion out a highly developed united African region.

### **4.6 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Critically discuss the merits and failures of pre-colonial Africa diplomacy.
2. Explain the relevance of the course, pre-colonial Africa diplomacy.



#### 4.7 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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#### 4.8 ANSWERS TO SAEs 4

Indeed, gone are the days when history is regimented to narratives about the antiquated past. Today, the popular consensus is that of history as a functional and relevant discourse that relates the past to the present; employing knowledge of the past to enlighten the serious consideration of the great issue of our time. It is not any different for the study of pre-colonial African diplomacy and its history. The historical dimension is virtually important to our unraveling the paradoxes of our time, to understanding our contemporary predicament. Though the discourse belongs to the realm of history, much could be learnt through the successes and failures of the past to fashion out a working present and future. Thus, the study of pre-colonial African diplomacy is justified by its capacity to address a very salient issue bedeviling the African continent in the areas of development through sound diplomatic practice.