An Appraisal of the Diplomatic Role of Benin Kingdom in Pre-Colonial Era

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Abstract

This paper presents an appraisal of the role of Benin Kingdom in Pre-Colonial Era to emergence of public administration in Nigeria. Nigeria nation, more than anything else, the greatest obstacle to the nascent democracy and survival of public administration is the pervasive insecurity of lives and property, as evidenced by the spate of armed robbery attacks, political assassinations, power distribution coupled with the seeming helplessness of security agencies to handle criminal acts. The situation is worsened by the increasing number of unemployed Nigerians some of whom are ready recruits for criminal activities. The above statement from an editorial comment by a national daily in Nigeria indeed, epitomises the central focus of this paper; the aim of which is to appraise the nexus between new public administration in Nigeria and nascent democratic nurturing, sustenance and eventually consolidation vis-a-vis the battles with one of the major ills of Nigeria nation. This paper evaluate the role and landmarks made by Benin Kingdom in diplomatic relations with her immediate neighbours and other advanced nations like Portugal, France, Holland and Britain in pre-colonial period. The study also revealed that there were military, political, economic and other forms of alliances between Benin Kingdom and other Kingdoms in pre-colonial period. The investigation reveals that there were conflicts, wars, marriages, bilateral and multilateral relations between Benin and other Kingdoms in pre-colonial periods. The study revealed that Benin Kingdom in the reign of Oba Ewuare, Ozolua, Esigie, Orhogbua, Ehengbuda and Ovonramwen employed diplomatic methods in their interactions with sophisticated and advanced Kingdoms. In the course of this study, the Appraisal of the Role of Benin Kingdom in Pre-Colonial Era, with particular

reference to the towns and villages conquered in Nigeria were brought to the fore while the objectives of the study are well spelt out. Hypotheses were postulated and the Group Theory was used to explicate the works. Data were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. From the primary sources, the survey method, that is, the use of questionnaire designed and adopted. Data obtained from this method were analyzed with the aid of Simple Percentage. Thereafter, the five researchable hypotheses were tested and accepted while the null hypotheses were rejected. The implication is that there was relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Generally, the paper brought to focus that the Diplomatic Role in the Benin Kingdom in Nigeria is a collective effort in reaching a compromise in the Administration of Pre-colonial era and it has contributed immensely to the growth and development of Public Administration elsewhere. Finally, it suggests policy prescription and recommendation which are aimed at repositioning Public Administration in Benin Kingdom not only in Nigeria in particular, but also elsewhere in Nigeria in the globe.

Keywords: Kingdom, Diplomacy, Ancient, Public, Traditional, Administration

Introduction

Nigeria sovereign nation, more than anything else, the greatest obstacle to the nascent democracy is the non-recognition of traditional institution towards nation building, as evidenced by the spate of armed robbery attacks, political assassinations, religious conflicts and federalism coupled with the seeming helplessness of security agencies to handle criminal acts (Uhunmwuangho and Epelle, 2011). The situation is worsened by the increasing number of unemployed Nigerians some of whom are ready recruits for criminal activities (Nigerian Tribune, 2002). The above statement from an editorial comment by a national daily in Nigeria indeed epitomises the central focus of this paper, the aim of which is to analyze the importance of traditional institution to democratic sustainability in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general.

The belief among most Western scholars was that pre-colonial African Societies had no system of administration, that is, no law, no order, no government and no civilisation. This belief has long been seen as not only very erroneous, but also grossly subjective. It has since been known that traditional African societies, indeed, had well-organized and well-established systems of administration where public order was provided and maintained, where laws were made and implemented; where tasks were executed, roads built, communal wells constructed, shrines and palaces built, village or town halls built, tributes or taxes collected (Oviasuyi, 2010). One of the Traditional African Societies to reckon with is the Benin Empire. Several centuries ago, at the time when Benin was called Igodomingodo, the geographical area now known as Benin was the hob of a

conglomeration of little towns that developed or spread into most of the areas of modern Edo and Delta States (Akenzua, 1979).

African diplomatic relations have not received the much needed attention from scholars with western background. This perhaps is rooted in the notion that Africans lack the required expertise to effectively carry out diplomatic functions. Information elicited on diplomacy from western scholarships revealed that diplomacy is a western affair with little or no contribution from Africa historians and plenipotentiaries. This notion has long been contested by historians who are proficient in the study of African history and International Relations (Igbafe, 2004.). This study therefore attempt to investigate and interrogate the role of Benin Kingdom in diplomatic relations with other nations of the world in pre-colonial periods.

The importance of traditional institution to Nigeria Public Administration and democratic governance has become the object of debate in recent times. This is in relation to its very vital role and the relevance to nation building, national development and the possibility or otherwise of its integration into the modern political system in Nigeria. It is correct that all human institutions are dynamic, thus the expectation that all political and traditional institutions both the orthodox and traditional need to develop in line with the developmental stages of the society at each given point in time (Aidelokhai, 2002).

It is true that before the advent of colonial rule, traditional rulers were both the political, cultural, economic and social administrators and lords of their various domains. It is equally true that the status of traditional rulers changed downwards with the advent of colonial rule as their sovereign authority was usurped by the colonialist who imposed their hegemony on the traditional rulers. Thus, the traditional institution became stooges of the colonialist. The development was meant to enable the colonialist perfect their exploitation and political domination of the colonial territory of Nigeria (Uhunmwuangho and Urhoghide, 2013).

According to Ajayi (1970), the subject of pre-colonial International Relations in Africa, especially the coastal forest regions of West Africa has not received prominent attention from most historians. What seems to be dominant is the recourse to examining the economic profiles of the region. Diplomatic relations in pre-colonial Benin Kingdom according to Benin historian has been in existence prior to the arrival of the Portuguese to the African continent. Scholars of History and International Relations in their various correspondence on diplomatic relations have often cited the visitation of the Portuguese to Benin Kingdom in the 15th century as the commencement of diplomatic affairs in the

Africa continent (Eweka, 1992). Benin, in the era of the Ogiso (Sky gods) was noted to have practiced various forms of diplomatic relations with other tribes such as the Yorubas, Itsekiris, the Igbos, Urhobos etc. Diplomatic relations were based on trade relations and other social cultural activities such as marriages, festivals, burial ceremonies etc. Trade relations were primarily in the area of brass casting, slave trade, pepper, copper pots, bronze plaques and manila. Relations between Benin and other Kingdoms were noted to have given splendor and prosperity to the Benin Kingdom in the pre-colonial period.

According to renowned scholars of Benin history, the first European explorers to arrive Benin in pre-colonial period were the Portuguese in about 1485 (Eweka, 1992). The Portuguese on their arrival established a vibrant and dynamic commercial relationship with the traders of Benin who were under the jurisdiction of Oba Esigie. In the 1 6th century, the monarch of Benin Kingdom, Oba Esigie sent a high ranking ambassador to Lisborn on a diplomatic mission. In the same vein, the King of Portugal also delegated Christian missionaries to Benin Kingdom. The first English expedition according to a Benin historian commenced in 1533 (Adegbulu, 2011). An important business was established between Benin and the Europeans which formed the bedrock of their diplomatic relations in pre-colonial period.

In the words of Eweka (1992), Benin Kingdom, between the 15th and 19th century made an unprecedented milestone in diplomatic relations not only with Portugal, but also with other advanced Kingdoms such as Holland, Spain, France, Brazil and Britain until Benin was politically annexed by Britain in 1897. One of the giant strides made by Benin in diplomatic interactions had to do with the expedition of missionaries to Benin Kingdom in the reign of Oba Esigie,

Accordingly, Oba Esigie was the first Oba of Benin to speak a foreign language. This was a major landmark because prior to this time no indigene of Benin or monarch was able to speak a foreign language and also, the King's foreign alliances attracted several benefits to the Kingdom, especially in the area of commerce, several churches and schools were built by the missionaries.

Furthermore, according to Edun Akenzua, Benin adopted the monarchical system of government about 2000 year ago. In that early period, Benin was ruled by monarchs who were known by the title *OGISO.* The institution was reformed and the thorny problem of succession was settled by the introduction of the formula of primogeniture. With the system reformed, monarchy took its place and continued its role as a motivator and

catalyst (Akenzua, 1979). The post-Ogiso era has been referred to as the Second Dynasty began circa 1170 with the advent of Comorian.

Problem

The arguments provided by western scholars over time on the pressing issues are misleading, incomprehensible, and not a fact in Africa history. These arguments are inconsistent with African position on diplomacy in pre-colonial period and also fail to provide a detailed meaning of what diplomacy actually denote especially when we consider how diplomacy was being conducted by Africans in pre-colonial periods. These descriptions fail to adequately explain diplomatic methods of Africans in pre-colonial epochs (Ajayi, 1976). Diplomacy can be describe as a cultural activity which has existed with various societies over time. It is not just a concept that evolved with the Greeks, the Roman or the Italian as presented by Western scholars. Benin Kingdom in pre-colonial era had an organized political structure under several monarchs between 15th and 19th century who were noted to have practiced all forms of diplomacy in their interactions with other Kingdoms.

The existing scholarships on diplomatic relations by western scholars especially in the pre-colonial period has consciously omitted the contributions and feats of African plenipotentiaries in the conduct and practice of diplomacy. The constant reference to European societies such as the Republic of Venice, the Roman Empire, the Greek City State and other numerous European societies as harbinger of Diplomatic Relations is worrisome because African scholars in various accounts on diplomatic relations have noted various feats accomplished by them. The first story building in Nigeria was built at Ughoton by the Dutch in the year 1718 and it was called "The Factory". The said building was destroyed by the British during the war against the Benins in 1897. The site of the building is still intact. The oldest known letter written in Nigeria was by Duarte Pires instructed by Oba Esigie which was addressed to King John II, on the 20th October, 1516Ad. The second oldest letter was written by Anthonio Domingo (Great-grand Son of Oba Olua) to the Pope to seek for missionary assistance in order to spread Christianity in Benin Empire in 1652AD (Aisien, 2012). Onitsha town was founded by Benin Royal House who migrated during Oba Esigie reign. The first ever recorded bank (Owigho) in present day West Africa was built in Benin Kingdom by Oba Eresoyen, which construction started in the year 1740AD and completed in 1743AD (Aisien, 2012). Isi Aghadahomen, corrupted as Dahomey was a name of Esan General who led Benin warriors to conquer present day Republic of Benin. The country was named in 1975 after their former Colonial Master, Great Benin Kingdom. Oba Esigie created the School of Astrology (Iwoki) and was the first man to speak a foreign language (Portuguese) in Nigeria in the year 1518AD. Oba Ewuare I conquered more than

201 towns and villages during his reign. This remarkable feat earned him the title "Ewuare Ogidigan" (Ewuare the Great) (Aisien, 2012). The word Benin was corrupted from Ubini by the Portuguese explorer meaning "a place of heavenly pageantry and prosperity". The Ohen Okun, Olokun Priest of Ughoton is the first known Diplomat of Nigeria origin to Europe, who was sent as a Benin Ambassador by Oba Esigie in the year 1526AD, hence the first man to be exposed to Western Education. The Great Wall of Benin extended for some 16,000km in all, in a mosaic of more than 500 interconnected settlement boundaries. They covered 6,500 square kilometers and were all dug by Edo people (Crowder, 1980).

Objectives

The specific objectives are:

(a) To determine whether Benin Kingdom has been a viable tool for addressing injustice in the Diplomatic Relations.
(b) To determine whether Benin is the only place where Streets are named after strangers.
(c) To ascertain the extent to which Benin External Relations was an enviable one.
(d) To examine the extent to which contemporary diplomatic functionaries build up capacity for more effective diplomatic relations.
(e) To find out whether there is any reform in the foreseeable future to build on the Benin legacies.

Hypotheses

In order to achieve these objectives, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

1. There is no significant relationship between Benin Kingdom being viable one and addressing injustice in Diplomatic Relation.
2. There is no significant relationship between Benin as the only place and the possibility of streets being named after strangers.
3. There is no significant relationship between Benin External Relation and the being an enviable one.
4. There is no significant relationship between any reform in the foreseeable future and building up legacies in Benin Kingdom.
5. There is no significant relationship between the contemporary diplomatic functionaries and capacity for more effective diplomatic relations.

Theoretical Exposition

The particular theory that can sufficiently act as guide for the analysis of issues in this paper is National Interest Model. This model is perhaps the most ambitious methodology in the study of social sciences. Ajayi (1976) succinctly defined "Interest as a value,

advantage, benefit or privilege which has to be protected and promoted at all cost, for the survival and wellbeing of society. National interest was pivotal for all the Monarchs who ruled the Benin Kingdom between the 15th and the 19t Century. The Monarchs of Benin in the periods under investigation fought gallantly to protect the Kingdom from invaders, the military capability was used to subdue all the surrounding villages and tributes were paid to the King of Benin. The monarchs vigorously pursued the national interest of the Kingdom. This national interest was centered around politics, commerce, security, military strength, culture and diplomacy.

In a nutshell, this framework is associated with this work because of the characteristic nature of the groups that make up the polity under study. For example, the nature of perpetual struggle for power and admonition over each other by major social groups.

Methodology

This paper adopted a descriptive survey method. The survey was based on selected Local Government in Nigeria, Edo State as a focal point. The scope of the study is therefore restricted to years 2008 to 2018. The population of the study consist of 250 base on two categories (Senior and Junior) staff of Local Government in Edo State (see table one). Out of this number, one hundred and seventy of them met our criteria and therefore form our sample size as can be seen in table one below:

Table 1: Population of Study

S/No	Local Government Areas	Category of Respondents	No. of Returned Questionnaires	No. of Not Returned/Invalid Questionnaires	Total No. of Sampled Respondents
1.	Uhunmwonde	Senior Staff	16	6	
		Junior Staff	5	4	31
2.	Orhionmwon	Senior Staff	17	8	
		Junior Staff	4	2	31
3.	Egor	Senior Staff	18	7	
		Junior Staff	4	3	32
4.	Ikpoba-Okha	Senior Staff	15	7	
		Junior Staff	6	3	31
5.	Oredo	Senior Staff	17	6	
		Junior Staff	5	4	32
6.	Ovia South West	Senior Staff	17	8	
		Junior Staff	4	2	31
7.		Senior Staff	18	7	

	Ovia North East	Junior Staff	4	3	31
8.	Esan Central	Senior Staff	16	6	
		Junior Staff	5	4	31
TOTAL			**170**	**80**	**250**

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Both primary and secondary sources of data were explored in trying to generate data for this study The specific information required for the study was an Appraisal of the Diplomatic Role of Benin Kingdom in Pre-Colonial Era, Selected Local Government in Nigeria, Edo State as a focal point, leakages in the administrative mechanism put in place, among others. The questionnaire formed the main instrument used in generating primary data while documented information on prints that were relevant to this study constituted the secondary source of generating data. To complement the information received through the questionnaire, respondents were also interviewed. As the research was based on attitude and opinions, the statistical tools employed in analyzing responses included tables and simple percentages. All the one hundred and seventy copies of the questionnaire distributed to the respondents studied were duly completed and returned in a useable form. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for the data analysis.

Demographic Data

Out of all the one hundred and seventy respondents, eighty (47%) of them were married; fifty (29%) were single while twenty one (13%) were divorced. The remaining nineteen (11%) were either widows or widowers. Thirty (18%) of them were within the age bracket of 18 – 25, Fifty (29%) were between the age bracket of 26-35 years, while eighty (47%) were within the age bracket of 36-45 years. The remaining forty six years and above were ten (6%).

TABLE 2: Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between Benin Kingdom being viable one and addressing injustice in Diplomatic Relation.

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	110	65
No	60	35
Total	170	100

Source: Statistical Analysis

Table 2 showed that 110 (65%) of the total respondents agreed that S Benin Kingdom was not viable enough to address injustice in Diplomatic Relations in Nigeria. Thereby impacted negatively on people enjoying the diplomatic relations in the State in particular and Nigeria in general.

Therefore, hypothesis one which states that there is no significant relationship between Benin Kingdom being viable one and addressing injustice in Diplomatic Relations in Nigeria is accepted.

TABLE 3: Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between Benin as the only place and the possibility of streets being named after strangers.

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	105	62
No	65	38
Total	170	100

Source: Statistical Analysis

Table 3 showed that 105 (62%) of the respondents agreed that there was correlation between Benin as the only place and the possibility of Streets being named after strangers while 65 (38%) were not satisfied or disagreed.

TABLE 4: Hypothesis 3

There is no significant relationship between Benin External Relations and being an enviable one.

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	120	71
No	50	29
Total	170	100

Source: Statistical Analysis

Table 4 showed that 120 (71%) of the respondents agreed that Benin External Relations and being an enviable one which substantially led to economy growth in the Kingdom and Local Communities output and dividends of democracy in local governments while 50 (29%) disagreed with the opinion.

Therefore, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between the Benin External Relations and being an enviable one was accepted.

Findings Based on Hypotheses

Based on the analysis of the hypotheses, all the research hypotheses were positive which implied that

(**H_r) 1-3** were accepted.

More so, the study revealed that the effective diplomatic relations in Benin Kingdoms in Nigeria and neighbouring nations which impacted positive on the developmental stride on the Kingdom and smooth administration in Nigeria.

1. Furthermore, this paper highlighted several challenges and solutions as per the findings in the hypotheses carried out in the research. However, it was found that the application of necessary mechanisms in checkmating the excess of the usage of effective Role of Benin Diplomatic Relations in the Kingdom and/or local government administration was not put in place.
2. According to longing (2002), institutional success at navigating the current Postures of Kingdoms and local government is dependent on the effective system in place.

There is also the need for researchers to investigate more on how best to create more effective diplomatic relations amongst kingdoms and nations of the world to meet their desired goals without distrust. See figure 1 below for more details of the Nigerian Political map.

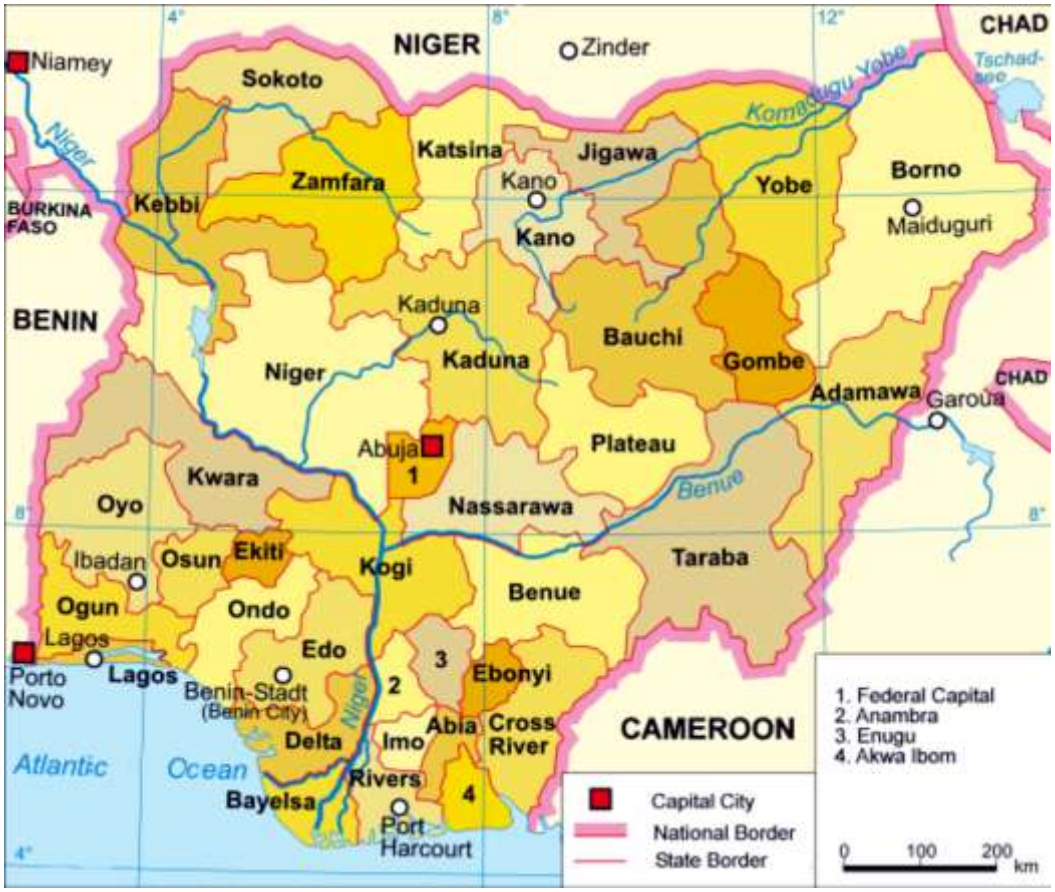


Figure 1: Political map of Nigeria
Source: Wilkipedia catched 20 July, 2021.

Conclusion and Recommendations

For the high point of this study, data covering the period 2008 to 2018 were collected from the eight Local Government Areas in Edo State. This study investigated effective Diplomatic Role in Benin Kingdom in Pre-Colonial Era in Nigeria, Edo State as a focal point.

Data obtained from this method were analyzed with the aid of Simple Percentage. Thereafter, the five researchable hypotheses were tested and accepted while the null hypotheses were rejected. The implication is that there was relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Generally, the paper brought to focus that effective

Diplomatic Role in Benin Kingdom in Pre-Colonial Era is a collective effort in reaching a compromise in the administration of Nigeria political system and it has contributed immensely to the growth and development of Local Government Administration in Nigeria.

However, the challenges, impact and landmarks were meticulously examined to discover how Benin Kingdom practiced diplomacy in these periods.

The constant references to European societies and scholars of diplomacy as the originators of diplomatic process arose the curiosity to investigate the role and contributions of Benin in diplomatic relations with other tribes. After a careful analysis of the opinions of experts and scholars on this subject, it is evident that Benin Kingdom was involved in diplomatic relations. The study also revealed that even though Europeans practiced diplomatic relations, Benin Kingdom was not a greenhorns in affairs of diplomatic relations. Benin Kingdom under the administrations of various monarchs practiced diplomatic relations with one another in trade, politics, and other cultural activities. Some historians are of the view that the method adopted by Africans in the pursuit of diplomatic relations was more superior to the methods adopted by the Europeans. While the Europeans employed ferocious and undignified methods of diplomatic practices, African diplomats demonstrated a high sense of dignity and cordiality in their interactions with other nations of the world (Awolowo, 1970).

The study revealed that there were diplomatic consulates and embassies put in place by monarchs in Benin Kingdom for the smooth running of diplomatic activities. For example, the first storey building built at Gelegele was the trading port of the Europeans whenever they traveled to Africa for business activities.

Recommendations

Having examined diplomacy in pre-colonial Nigeria with focus on Benin Kingdom particularly local communities, it is important to provide some recommendations. The recommendations provided based on the findings of this research are as follows:

1. There is need to re-examine the concept of diplomacy because numerous emphases are placed on negotiation alone without references to other aspects of diplomacy.
2. The Nigerian Government should embark on more pro-active measures in the conduct of bilateral and multilateral relations.
3. European scholars should re-assess their works on diplomatic relation and give due recognition to African ambassadors on their role in diplomatic evolution.

4. African historians should carry out more research on diplomacy in pre-colonial Nigeria. This will help to build up more knowledge on African history.
5. Benin history should be incorporated into the curriculum of Nigerian Universities as an elective course for all students, so that students will be well-informed of Benin's role in diplomacy before the advent of the colonial masters
6. Contemporary diplomatic functionaries should build up capacity for more effective diplomatic relations with the developed nations of the world.
7. Britain should officially make an apology the Nigerian Government and the people of Benin for the demolition of Benin Kingdom and also return all the properties of Benin which were taken away during the invasion.

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