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## **The Succession Dispute to the Throne of Lagos and the British Conquest and Occupation of Lagos**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examined the role and intervention of the British in the internal family dispute relating to the succession to the throne of Lagos that began in the early nineteenth century. That the usuper to the throne of Lagos, Kosoko who was branded a notorious slave trader was abdicated from the throne on the account of his notoriety as a slave trade dealer by the British and his uncle Akintoye, who was also a known slave dealer was re-installed as the ruler of Lagos on the agreement that the British missionaries and traders were given free course unhindered in their operations, lives much to be wondered about. The paper argued that beyond the moves to discontinue the trade in slaves and Christianize the area, there was much more the motivation for entrenching the British economic foothold beginning with Lagos which offered a leeway into the interior and coastal areas and the eventual colonization of Nigeria.

**Key Words:** Succession Disputes, Church Missionary Society, Foreign Office

## Introduction

Lagos was a particularly attractive area for the British who had pinned great hopes on the city as the main gateway to the vast, unexplored opportunities of the Yoruba interior (Falola et al, 1991, p. 190) Lagos occupied a position of supreme importance. The island of Lagos guided the only natural break in the coastal sandpits between Dahomey and the Oil Rivers and through the Lagos lagoon; it is possible to travel by water to Southern Dahomey in the west and the Oil Rivers in the east. Lagos also offered an outlet into Yoruba land most especially Abeokuta where the first Christian missionaries had begun to establish mission stations as early as 1844. (Afolalu, 1969, p. 143) Once the missionaries had established themselves in Abeokuta, a town quite close to Lagos, they claimed that Lagos stood in their way to developing trade in cotton and other products (Falola et al, 1991) In that light, Kosoko the usurper to the Lagos throne, branded a notorious slave trader was seen as an opponent to legitimate trade and an obstacle to the general advancement of civilization (Falola et al, 1991). The missionaries saw this as a reason to represent him as an enemy to the British mission in Nigeria. The situation was helped by the internal family dispute in the royal family in Lagos from 1811, which culminated in the British bombardment of Lagos in 1851 and subsequent occupation in 1861.

## Background to the Disputation of the Lagos Monarchy before 1811

Among the earliest of the documented disputes from at least the mid eighteenth century was the disagreement between Oba Gaboro and his brother Akinsemoyin, which culminated in the latter's banishment and subsequent contact with European slave traders at Apa or Badagry. Oral traditions portray the conflicts that divided Lagos as a product of recurring disagreements between Obas and chiefs over the division of power and authority; repeated rivalries between members of the royal dynasty over succession to the crown; and a bitter personal feuds between a powerful prince and an influential chief which itself triggered succession disputes. (Mann, 2007: 44) When Akinsemoyin died at about 1775, he was succeeded by Gaboro's son Eletu Kekere who ruled only a short time. Around 1780, Ologun Kutere became king.

The new Oba was the son of Erelu Kutu, Gaboro and Akinsemoyin's sister, by Alagba, Akinsemoyin's *babalawo* or medical herbalist and diviner. Records hold that Akinsemoyin had dressed the infant Ologun Kutere in 'royal robes, adorned him with all the paraphernalia of an Oba' and pronounced that he should reign after him in gratitude to Alagba for helping him to deal with resistance from 'chiefs' probably of the *idejo* grade, and to his sister Erelu Kutu for marrying Alagba and keeping him at the palace. (Mann, 2007, pp. 44-45) It was during the reign of Ologun Kutere, from the 1790s onwards, that Lagos first developed as a major centre of the Atlantic slave trade,

rivalling and then supplanting the ports of Porto Novo and Badagry to the west. (Law, 1978, p. 37) This increased commercial importance was reflected in a substantial rise in the population of Lagos, from an estimated 5,000 in the 1780s and 1790s to about 20,000 in the 1810s. This increased population derived mainly from the importation of slaves, many of whom came from areas remote in the interior. In the early nineteenth century, the chiefs and traders of Lagos were recorded to possess many slaves of the Mahi nation, from north of Dahomey, while Ologun Kutere himself owned many slaves of Hausa origin, who were Muslims, and who served as his soldiers. (Law)

Ologun Kutere also built up Lagos as a considerable military power, its strength was based upon a large fleet of war canoes. Best documented of his imperialistic ventures are his relations with Badagry, to the west of Lagos. In 1784, Ologun Kutere sent his fleet to assist in an attack on Badagry by Dahomey, Oyo, and Porto Novo. (Law) Subsequently, he sought to gain control of Badagry for himself. In 1788, forces from Lagos attacked Badagry in an unsuccessful attempt to make it tributary. In about 1790, however, when Badagry was again attacked by the Dahomians, Ologun Kutere intervened to protect the town, apparently by making lavish gifts to induce the Dahomians to withdraw: but this assistance in turn was made the basis for a claim to tribute from Badagry. (Law) In 1793 a Lagos force, apparently with assistance from Porto Novo, attacked and destroyed Badagry in an attempt to enforce payment of this tribute. In the end, Ologun Kutere seems to have succeeded in exacting his tribute: at any rate, Badagry is said to have been tributary to Lagos prior to the 1820s. (Law) Ologun Kutere's naval power was also felt along the lagoon to the east, where a Lagos fleet made an unsuccessful attack on Itsekiri country, in the lower Benin River, in about 1789. Although Lagos remained nominally subject to Benin, by the end of Ologun Kutere's reign it had become an important power in its own right (Law, 1978).

Upon the death of Ologun Kutere after the turn of the nineteenth century, a protracted dispute broke out between two of his sons, Osinlokun and Adele. Ologun Kutere had three recorded sons, there being in addition to Adele an elder brother called Osinlokun and a younger brother called Akitoye. These sons were born to different wives of Ologun Kutere, Adele being the son of a woman of Badagry, while Osinlokun's mother was from Ebute Iga in Ijebu, and Akitoye's mother was a woman of Owu. (Law) Local and foreign accounts hold that Osinlokun the elder was the rightful heir but Adele was crowned. Some sources explained it owing to Ologun Kutere's likeness for Adele for serving him faithfully, (although not the eldest son, Adele was Ologun Kutere's favorite, partly because of his skill in carpentry and other crafts. It appears that towards the end of Ologun Kutere's reign, Adele regularly served as his father's spokesman in dealing with visitors to the Lagos court), while it was also believed that

he gained popular support by the elders (Mann, 2007, p. 46). In the explanation of Law (1978)

Succession to the throne of Lagos as to that of Benin during this period, normally went by primogeniture, the king being succeeded by his eldest son, and Adele's elder brother Osinlokun was therefore the legitimate successor to the Lagos throne. The sources offer various explanations of why it was Adele who succeeded, which may perhaps be regarded as complementary rather than contradictory. It is stated, first, that Ologun Kutere had nominated Adele as his successor. It is also said that Adele was enthroned because he was extremely popular, or more prosaically because he had 'the support of a powerful party. It appears, in particular, that he had inherited the allegiance of Ologun Kutere's many slaves. It is asserted, finally, that Osinlokun voluntarily stood aside in favour of Adele in view of Osinlokun's later behaviour, this is likely to have been because he had no effective choice (pp. 39-40).

In the submission of Robert Smith on succession by primogeniture, he differed in his stance from Robin Law. He stated thus: "Adele a younger son of Oba Olgun Kutere was preferred to his elder brother Oshinlokun. Although there seems to have been no irregularity about this since all sons born to a reigning Oba were competent to succeed him if chosen by the Kingmakers and the Ifa oracle" (Smith, 1979, p. 14) Although Adele was able to secure the succession in preference to Osinlokun, his position at Lagos evidently remained uncertain for some time. There is no evidence suggesting that any of the Lagos chiefs had championed Osinlokun's claim to the throne, but there remained the threat that in any conflict between Adele and his chiefs the legitimacy of his succession might be called into question. Tradition recalls that in the early years of his reign Adele won popularity by making lavish gifts to his chiefs. This royal largesse, which was no doubt made possible by the boom in the slave trade at Lagos in the early nineteenth century, was probably a deliberate attempt by Adele to secure the allegiance of his chiefs in a situation of potential difficulty (Law, 1978)

Adele seems also to have been anxious to strengthen his own claim to the throne by obtaining confirmation by the suzerain of Lagos, the King of Benin. Custom required that the bodies of deceased kings of Lagos (lacking the head, which was kept for burial locally) should be taken to be buried at Benin. The Portuguese account of 1807 indicates that Adele was at that time not yet considered legally installed as king of Lagos, because he had not sent his father's body for burial at Benin and thus obtained the sanction of the King of Benin for his succession (Law 1978). Lagos tradition records that Adele did in the end undertake an expedition to convey his father's body to Benin, but that his party was ambushed on the lagoon between Lagos and Benin and prevented from reaching its destination (Law 1978, p. 41) According to Smith (1979),

“at some point, Adele was forcibly prevented by recalcitrants from taking his father’s remains to Benin for burial” (pp.14-15). It was alleged that Adele's brother Osinlokun had instigated the ambush, presumably in order to deprive him of the legitimacy that success in the expedition would have brought. It appears, however, that Adele was ultimately able to secure his father's burial at Benin: at any rate, his father's body was buried at Benin (Law, 1978).

In another development, it was rendered that Osinlokun placed Adele on the throne as he did not wish to be troubled with the affairs of government further than in giving advice to his brother. At the beginning however, Osinlokun appears initially not to have opposed Adele’s succession, he later changed his mind and sought to depose Adele and claim the crown. This situation arose following Adele’s show of independence and a capacity for both trade and government that were incompatible with Osinlokun’s interest. Local traditions have it that around this time Adele changed his mode of government and the chief’s grew tired. Moreover, that his children introduced the *egungun* masquerade, an Oyo ancestral cult that spread among western Yoruba speakers at the time of Oyo colonization in the eighteenth century and was regarded in Lagos as ‘unbecoming to the dignity of a king’. (Mann:46) Adele is also believed to have allowed Islam to spread unchecked, a development rendered more threatening perhaps by the 1817 slave revolt in Oyo. Within a few years of Osinlokun’s expulsion, however, Adele himself was overthrown. This apparently occurred as a result of a serious deterioration of his position inside Lagos. It is impossible to trace the growth of opposition to Adele's rule in Lagos, but Osinlokun’s ability to raise an armed insurrection against him suggests that there was already considerable disaffection by around 1816.

The decline of Adele's popularity is explained in the traditions as a consequence of his policies of religious toleration and innovation: he is said to have allowed or encouraged the introduction of the *Egungun* masquerade, and also to have permitted the practice of the Islamic religion. The reference to Islam seems plausible enough, since it is known that among Adele's slaves, whom he had inherited from his father Ologun Kutere, were many Hausa who were Muslims. It seems possible that the *Egungun* masquerade which is a cult of Oyo origin was also associated with Adele's non-indigenous slave followers. And beyond these religious issues, it may be speculated; there perhaps lay resentment at the increase in effective royal power which the creation of a large royal household of slaves represented. (Law:40) The conflict between Osinlokun and Adele began between 1811 and 1820, one source gives it that Osinlokun’s change of heart about the Oba-ship may have followed from the decline in the trade in slaves which would have made commerce a less attractive calling and perhaps increased the appeal of serving as a monarch. These conditions would have

informed his call back from exile home to become king. In the fighting that ensued, Adele was deserted and he and his immediate entourage fled to Badagry, where the local inhabitants made him the king they had never had. Between 1821 and 1835, while based at Badagry, Adele attacked Lagos intermittently in an effort to regain possession of the kingdom, but his troops ultimately suffered brutal defeat (Mann 2007, p. 47)

Aderibigbe (1975) corroborated this assertion, he stated that Adele sought refuge in Badagry and with his royal bearing and force of character, he had no difficulty in getting himself accepted as the paramount ruler of Badagry whence he repulsed several attacks made by Oshinlokun to dislodge him (p. 16) At last in 1829 Oshinlokun died, Adele thinking that his opportunity had come, once more attempted to seize the throne of Lagos by force but failed most dismally as his army was completely routed with its general Bambani, captured and subjected to the most humiliating torture which put an end to his life (Aderibigbe, 1975).

#### **Succession Tussle between Oba Akintoye and Prince Kosoko**

After Oshinlokun died in 1829, his son Idewu Ojulari became king. (Aderibigbe) Idewu was said to have been unpopular because of his extreme avarice towards his leaders and followers. (Law 1978, p. 55) The chiefs were said to have communicated their displeasure to the Oba of Benin, who sent him a skull, a sword, and a message that ‘the people of Lagos would no longer recognize him as king’ this led him to take his life. According to Aderibigbe, “this luckless king died without an heir in 1834, having been forced to commit suicide because of his unpopularity”. (Aderibigbe:16) Idewu died childless, but he had an ambitious brother Kosoko who might have succeeded him but for the grievances a powerful chief Eletu Odibo had against him. It was said that Eletu Odibo had deliberately manipulated the most important part of the king-making machinery, the Ifa Oracle against Kosoko in Adele’s favour. The Eletu Odibo may be seen as exploiting his high office to pursue a personal vendetta as the situation was favourable to him. It was said that as a dashing prince, Kosoko had won the favour of a beautiful lady betrothed to the Eletu, Kosoko’s sister, Opolu, was successfully but maliciously accused of witchcraft by the Eletu and he succeeded in bringing shame to Kosoko’s family, and in a same fit of hatred, the same chief had ordered the remains of Kosoko’s mother to be exhumed and thrown into the lagoon (Aderibigbe, 1975, p. 17) These were the personal attacks on Kosoko by the Eletu, on the other hand however, the other kingmakers regarded Kosoko as a dangerous choice because he was bold, restless and extremely tenacious in fighting for his rights and they thought he might wreck vengeance on them after he had been denied the throne on two occasions (Aderibigbe 1975). With Kosoko unacceptable, the chiefs invited Adele home from Badagry to rule a second time. Adele reigned but for two years and then died and he was succeeded at some time in the 1830’s by his son Oluwole. Oluwole’s

accession passed over Kosoko who as the younger son of Oshinlokun claimed to be a senior member of the royal house. He put himself at the head of a faction which attempted to depose Oluwole, however, the failure of armed rising known as the *Ogun Ewe Koko* (leaves of the coco-yam war) from a rebel song forced Kosoko and his followers to flee from Lagos (Smith 1979, p. 16)

Kosoko himself went down the western lagoon to Porto Novo and later to Whydah and in both places he came to know well the Portuguese and Brazilian slave traders who were settled on that part of the coast and he adopted their trade. When Oluwole in 1841 died in an explosion of gunpowder, it was said that the chiefs would have nominated Kosoko had they known his where about. In the event however, they chose Akintoye, a younger brother to both Oshinlokun and Adele and thus uncle to the last two Obas and to Kosoko. The new king overruled his chiefs' advice especially that of Eletu Odibo, the senior chief and Kosoko's implacable enemy, in attempting a reconciliation with his nephew, thus, Kosoko was recalled to Lagos with his followers and installed as chief of Ereko, a part of Lagos island where he was allowed to form his own court (Smith 1979).

Upon his return, he set about rebuilding his position in the town and finding support among the war chiefs and apparently among the small Muslim community in the town. At the turn of this development, the Eletu Odibo left to Badagry and in an attempt to recall him by Akintoye, there was an uprising by Kosoko and his party. This rising called the *Ogun Olomiro* or 'salt water war' from the brackish water in the wells where the people of Lagos were forced to drink during the siege, is said to have lasted about three weeks. (Smith) Finally, Akintoye accepted defeat and managed to reach Abeokuta where he was granted temporary asylum. Akintoye in the words of Ajayi Crowder made an alliance with Abeokuta in an effort to re-establish himself and was financed by a well-known slave trader Domingo Jose, in any case, that somewhat destroyed the picture that Akintoye was an anti-slavery, for if he had been king at Lagos at the time when the missionaries and the British traders were trying to promote trade between Abeokuta and the coast, he would just as likely as Kosoko have been an instigator of the slave trade. (Crowder, 1962:125)

Conditions in Dahomey were already causing anxiety to the British Government. Several fruitless efforts were made during the 1840s to persuade the king to enter into an anti-slavery agreement. At the beginning of 1850, Palmerston the Foreign Secretary and a strong opponent of the slave trade was visited at the Foreign Office by a deputation from the C.M.S, and at about the same time, he received a letter from the merchant Thomas Hutton and both stressed the need to keep open Abeokuta's communications with the coast and to end the slave trade at Lagos, described as the 'natural port' of Abeokuta. Palmerston passed on these views to Beecroft his new

consul and also mentioned reports that numerous liberated slaves had been kidnapped after reaching Abeokuta and sold in the Lagos market. Thus, the consul was to investigate these matters and to remonstrate with the Lagos authorities. (Smith:20) In a corroborating evidence of this instruction served to consul Beecroft as recorded in a draft to consul Beecroft from the Foreign Office dated February 25, 1850, it stated thus:

Sir, I now proceed to give you instructions for your mission to Abeokuta to which I alluded in the concluding part of my preceding dispatch. A short time since a deputation from the Church Missionary Society waited upon me and represented amongst other things that the establishment of commercial relations with the interior of Africa through the Yoruba tribe would materially contribute to the effectual suppression of the slave trade and that if free trade navigation on the Niger could be attained, most of the advantages which were proposed by the expedition of the Niger in 1842 would be attained; that traders from the banks of the Niger visit the principal markets of Abeokuta and that there is a little doubt that the road to Egba and Rabbah, the former of which towns was the highest point reached by the Niger expedition might be opened for trade through the Ogun river. (National Archives Surrey UK, F.O.84/816: 33-34

From the foregoing, it is suggestive that the intention of the missionaries was the facilitation of trade in the interior, though the initial expedition was seen to have failed, it appeared clearly that the establishment of mission stations in Abeokuta was to consolidate the initial explorative movements and also create an enamoured environment friendly to British commerce by the traders and merchants. In a related development, the draft from the Foreign Office also contained the following information:

Abeokuta as I have mentioned is the chief town of the Yoruba kingdoms and containing above fifty thousand inhabitants. It is situated along the east bank of the Ogun and that river is navigable for courses to wither a mile of Abeokuta and linkages itself into the sea at the island of Lagos. Lagos is therefore said to be the natural port of Abeokuta but the slave trade having carried on at Lagos being established there with great activity, the Yoruba people have been obliged to use the port of Badagry through which and only communications are carried on Abeokuta by a different road by land. But besides the impediments which the slave dealers throw in the way of the legitimate commerce of the Yoruba people and the hindrance to their prosperity and a constant cause of alarm from the hostility of the king of Dahomey who then by an annual slave hunt and who is said to have threatened the destruction of the town of Abeokuta. His enmity is said to be especially excited by the fact that

the Yorubas are becoming prosperous and are gaining wealth by their commerce with the English (National Archives Surrey, UK).

### **British Intervention in the Internal Politics of Lagos: the 1851 Bombardment and Subsequent Occupation in 1861**

In January 2, 1851 Consul Beecroft paid a visit to Badagry, where he was a guest of the agent Reverend C. A. Gollmer. While in Badagry, he reflected on the mounting tension there which came from dissatisfaction and resentment over the competition from immigrants. Above all, for four years, the people of Badagry had incurred the enmity of Lagos for harbouring Akintoye and a large number of his supporters. Therefore, Beecroft asked Akintoye to prepare for him a petition of all his grievances against Kosoko and a declaration of his readiness to accept a slave trade treaty (Ajayi, 1965, p. 68).

From Badagry, Beecroft went inland to Abeokuta and was a guest at Townsend's for twelve days. Townsend later reported how he had prepared the way for the consul, trying to impress him on the great possibilities at Abeokuta for Britain. He was shown round all the mission stations and the chiefs agreed to sign the proposed treaty whenever the British were ready. The chiefs were also visited individually and one Ogunbonna, whom the missionaries found most eager to adopt European ideas had ready for Beecroft a load of cotton, a bag of ginger and a bag of pepper as specimens of the product of Abeokuta (Ajayi, 1965).

Beecroft was impressed by what he saw at Abeokuta and by the time he returned to Badagry, he had decided that Britain must intervene in the Lagos dispute on the side of Akintoye. He received the petition he wanted which was duly prepared for Akintoye by Gollmer and it stated thus; "...my humble prayer to you is that you would take Lagos under your protection, that you would plant the English flag there and that you would re-establish me on my rightful throne at Lagos and protect me under my flag; and with your help I promise to enter into a treaty with England to abolish the slave trade at Lagos and to establish and carry on lawful trade, especially with the English merchants" (Ajayi, 1965).

To commit the British government to intervening in the Lagos dispute, and to ensure that the dispute was not settled before the government could be persuaded to act, Beecroft decided to take Akintoye with him to Fernando Po. His argument was that Akintoye's life was in danger in Badagry and even though Akintoye pleaded that his departure would only aggravate the situation, Beecroft compelled him to leave all the same. (Ajayi, 1965, p. 70) Palmerston, however, found it difficult to persuade the cautious Lords of the Admiralty to authorize naval action of doubtful legality in Lagos, in any case, no British subject or property was endangered or detained in Lagos. In the

circumstance therefore, all he could do was to ask Beecroft himself to go to Kosoko and urge on him a treaty with a mixture of blandishment and threats. In the description of the Robert Smith, “the consul was to tell Kosoko that Great Britain is a strong power both by sea and by land, that her friendship is worth having and that her displeasure it is well to avoid. If the Oba showed a disposition to refuse this advice, he was to be reminded that Lagos is near the sea and that on the sea are the ship and cannon of England and also that he does not hold his authority without a competitor” (Smith, 1979, p. 22).

Kosoko was called to a meeting on the southern tip of the Lagos island, however, he rejected the offer of friendship by the British and declined to sign the treaty using the ingenious argument that Lagos was under Benin and the Oba of Benin should be persuaded to sign the treaty on his behalf. To this Becroft responded, “it was decided to collect such a show of force as the moment could supply, with the firm belief that such force, judging from the character of African chiefs would have the effect by simple demonstration of our power to cause him to accede to our terms” (Ajayi, 1965, pp. 75-76). In 1851, on Beecroft’s return Kosoko’s gun fired on a ship flying a flag of truce, and in retaliation Beecroft attempted to sieze Lagos with a small naval force, but Kosoko was well defended and compelled him to retreat. This premature invasion infuriated the British government, particularly Palmerston, the Foreign Secretary who had already said, “if Lagos instead of being a nest for slave traders were to become a port for lawful trade, it would be an important outlet for the commerce of a large range of country in the interior, and instead of being a den of barbarism, would be a diffusing centre of civilization”(Crowder: p. 126) Instructions had already gone out to the Commodore of the West African Squadron to effect the capture of Lagos, and to have Beecroft instigate a miniature invasion was humiliating to Palmerston, who was already under fire from Parliament over his West African policy. Nevertheless, the situation was remedied for Palmerston by a naval squadron. According to J. D. Fage, in 1851, at a second attempt, a British naval force captured Lagos (Fage 1969, p. 141).

Consequently, on the eve of Christmas 1851, a British naval force entered the Lagos harbor and two days later an attack on the city began in earnest. The British strike force was made up of a detachment of the West African Squadron whose superior fire power far outmatched the Oba’s relatively meagre defences. Kosoko fled the city accompanied by his chiefs and closest supporters. When the conquerors finally moved into the city they installed Akintoye as the new Oba (Falola et al:191). As corroborated by Ajayi (1965),

Commander Bruce arrived off Lagos on Christmas Eve and attacked on Boxing Day. On the second day of the battle, rockets from one of the boats succeeded

in blowing up the royal arsenal, causing great havoc, and with his leading supporters, Kosoko fled to Epe. (pp. 76-77)

Akintoye was restored as the king of Lagos through the assistance of British Naval Forces on December 29, 1851 when he landed with two British officers and took possession of Lagos. on December 31, 1851 Akintoye hoisted his flag (white with a Red Cross diagonally) on the mast in front of Iga Idunganran as King of Lagos independent of the King of Benin. (NAI, CSO 26: 14962, 4) On January 1, 1852, Akintoye signed a slave-trade treaty renouncing the slave trade and an identical treaty was signed by the chiefs of Abeokuta on January 5, 1852 (Ajayi, 1965, pp.76-77).

Kosoko and his Caboceers were attacked on the island of Lagos by the British Naval Force on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of December 1851, and before daylight on Sunday the 28<sup>th</sup> of December 1851, Kosoko and his men had vacated Lagos and escaped, first to Badore and later they settled permanently at Epe, 50miles east of Lagos. On Monday the 29<sup>th</sup> of December, 1851, Captain Lewis T. Jones of the H. M. S. 'Sampson', John Beecroft, Esquire, Her Majesty's consul in the Bight of Benin and Biafra, and King Akintoye, left the H. M.S. 'Bloodhound; in the gig of 'Sampson' escorted by two cutters and proceeded to the King's house, Iga Idunganran, they landed and took possession. On Thursday the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, 1852, King Akintoye and Chief Ashogbon, accompanied by John Beecroft went on Board the H. M. S. 'Penelope' the flagship which was then lying outside the Lagos bar. A salute was fired from her Majesty's Brig 'Waterwitch' as soon as Commodore H. W. Bruce received on board the flagship King Akintoye and his two chiefs... here a treaty for the abolition of the Traffic in Slaves was signed between Her Majesty the Queen of England and the King and Chiefs of Lagos, Commodore Henry William Bruce and John Beecroft (NAI, CSO 26: 14962, 1).

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her Majesty's Brig 'Waterwitch' as soon as Commodore H. W. Bruce received on board the flagship King Akintoye and his two chiefs.... here a treaty for the abolition of the Traffic in Slaves was signed between Her Majesty the Queen of England and the King and Chiefs of Lagos, Commodore Henry William Bruce and John Beecroft. (NAI, CSO 26: 14962, 1).

After signing the treaty, Akintoye also pledged to guarantee that missionaries would have complete access to Lagos and its environs to preach their faith. More importantly for the British, Great Britain was accorded the status of most favoured nation, to the relative exclusion of other foreign powers with respect to commerce and trade in the general Lagos area. The powers granted to the new Oba were greatly reduced, usurped as they were by the authority which the consul exercised over the Lagos consulate. The consul assumed new powers in the area of trade and administration of justice, regulating internal and external trade and settling disputes between and among traders in his own court. The consul wielded great powers in other areas as well, making him much more than a consular representative of the British government. As for Akintoye, he merely accepted whatever actions the consul took since it was to the consul he owed his office and from the same consul that he received a guarantee of continued power, reduced though it might be (Falola et al: 1991, pp. 191-192). In 1853, a full time consul was appointed to Lagos to represent the British interests (Fage, 1969, p. 141). Benjamin Campbell was more than a consular representative as he had a large say in local affairs and Akintoye owed him that authority. Campbell decided that the best way to defend Lagos against Kosoko was attack and he sent an expedition to seek out Kosoko in his retreat in Epe. A further indication of Campbell's influence was the fact that in 1853 when Akintoye died, he arranged the installation of Dosumu who owed his position to British intervention and he failed to command the obedience of those of his subjects who wished to continue trading in slaves. Therefore, these people continued to regard Kosoko as their rightful ruler and to trade in slaves (Fage, 1969).

Although trade with the interior prospered, Kosoko proved a major problem through his constant interference with trading canoes plying between Lagos and Abeokuta. Against severe opposition from the missionaries at Abeokuta, Campbell completed a treaty with Kosoko giving him the port of Palma and a subsidy of 1,000 dollars on condition that he gave up his slaving activities. He also installed two pro-Kosoko chiefs at Badagry by force despite the bitter opposition of the Egba who used the port as an outlet for their own trade (Crowder, 1962, pp. 133-134). As was documented, "before daylight on Sunday September 28, 1851, Kosoko with about two thousand followers had left Lagos in about fifty or sixty canoes to Badone, a village on the eastern lagoon about twenty miles from Lagos; and afterwards to Epe permanently

with the permission of Awujale of Ijebu Ode, whose territory Epe formed part of. At Epe, on the said date, an agreement was entered into and executed between Kosoko, his caboceers and chiefs, on the one part and Benjamin Campbell, Esq., Her Britannic Majesty's Consul for the Bight of Benin, and Thomas Miller, Esq., Commander of Her Majesty's Sloop 'Crane', Senior Officer in the Bights of Benin and Biafra on the other part." (NAI, CSO 26: 14962, 5) The terms of reference contained seven articles which are here represented.

Article 1: Kosoko, his caboceers and chiefs, solemnly pledge themselves to make no attempt to regain possession of Lagos either by threats, hostilities or stratagem.

Article 2: Kosoko, his caboceers and chiefs, claim Palma as their port of trade, and Benjamin Campbell, Esq., Her Britannic Majesty's Consul and Thomas Miller Esq., Commander and Senior Naval Officer in the Bights, engage to recognize Palma as the port of Kosoko, his caboceers and chiefs, for all purposes of legitimate trade.

Article 3: Kosoko, his caboceers and chiefs do most solemnly pledge themselves to abandon the slave trade, that is the export of slaves from Africa; also not to allow any slave trader to reside at their port, or at any place within their jurisdiction and influence.

Article 4: Kosoko, his caboceers and chiefs, solemnly bind themselves to give every protection and assistance to such merchants and traders as may wish to reside among them for the purpose of carrying on legitimate trade, also to assist Her Britannic Majesty's Consul re-open the markets on the Jaboo shore-viz., Aginee, Ecorodom and Abayee, and in maintaining order and security at those markets.

Article 5: There shall be levied at the port of Palma an export duty of one head of cowries of every puncheon of palm oil, of the average size of one hundred and twenty gallons, and two strings of cowries per pound on all ivory exported from the above port for the benefit of Kosoko.

Article 6: B. Campbell, Esq., Her Britannic Majesty's Consul engages on behalf of her Majesty's government, that for the faithful performance of this engagement on the part of Kosoko, his caboceers and Chiefs, here shall be paid to Kosoko by Her Majesty's government an annual allowance for his life of two thousand heads of cowries, or one thousand dollars, at his option.

Article 7: This engagement to have full force and effect from this day, and until annulled by Her Britannic Majesty's Government. (NAI, CSO 26: 14962, 1)

Not minding the treaty signed, Kosoko was said to have naturally taken advantage of the wars still brewing in Yoruba land to cash in on the slave trade but was kept under control by the presence of gunboat. Trade was said to dwindle contrary to the boom in cotton and palm oil in the middle 1850's. To that end, Consul Brand who succeeded Campbell on his death in 1860 suggested to the Foreign Office that Britain should take over Lagos as a protectorate. The Foreign Office was well enamored to this suggestion, in any case, they feared that the French who had sent a delegation to Dosunmu might try to take over Lagos for themselves (Crowder, 1962, pp. 133-134). Brand was in Lagos for only a year and his successor, Foote went further to suggest that the only ultimate solution to peace would be the introduction of troops and the stationing of consuls at strategic towns in the interior. This was opposed by the Foreign Office as they did not want to undertake such large commitments; nevertheless, vice-consuls were stationed at Lagos and Badagry. (Crowder, 1962).

Nevertheless, when Porto Novo placed an embargo on trade in oil, Foote promptly ordered its bombardment, thereby gaining a treaty guaranteeing freedom of trade for Britain. Shortly afterwards, the Foreign Office sent the consul instructions to annex Lagos and to secure forever the free population of Lagos from slave traders, to protect and develop its important trade of which their town is the seat and to exercise an influence on the surrounding tribes. Thus on July 30, 1861, Dosunmu ceded Lagos to Acting Consul Mckoskry in return for a pension of £1,030 a year. As documented, Foreign Office September 19, 1861 Treaty between Norman B. Bedingfold, Commander, the Majesty's Sloop Prometheus and Senior Officer of the Bights Division and William Mckoskry, Esquire, Her Britannic Majesty's Acting Consul, on the part of her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Dosunmu King of Lagos, on the part of himself and chiefs. (National Archives Surrey, UK. F.O.84/1141, 373) The order of the treaty are referenced in the following articles:

Article 1: In order that the Queen of England may be the better enabled to assist, defend and protect the inhabitants of Lagos, and to put an end to the slave trade in this and the neighbouring countries, and to prevent the destructive wars so frequently undertaken by Dahomey and others for the capture of slaves, I Dosunmu do with the consent and advice of my Council, give transfer and by theses presents grant and confirm, unto the Queen of Great Britain, Her Heirs and Successors, forever, the Port and island of Lagos, with all the rights, profits, territories and appurtenances what-soever thereunto belonging, and as well the profits and revenue, as the direct, full and absolute dominion and sovereignty of the said Port, Island and Premises, with all the royalties thereof, freely, fully, entirely and absolutely. I do also covenant and grant that the quiet and peaceable possession thereof shall, with all possible speed be freely and

effectually delivered to the Queen of Great Britain, or such person as Her Majesty shall thereunto appoint, for Her use in the performance of this grant; the inhabitants of the said island and territories, as the Queen's subjects and under Her sovereignty, crown, jurisdiction and government, being still suffered to live there.

Article 2: Dosunmu will be allowed the use of the title of King, in its usual African signification, and will be permitted to decide disputes between natives of Lagos, with their consent, subject to appeal of British laws.

Article 3: In the transfer of lands the stamp of Dosunmu affixed to the document will be proof that there are no other native claims upon it; and for this purpose, he will be permitted to use it as hitherto. In consideration of the cession, as before mentioned, of the port and island and territories of Lagos, the representatives of the Queen of Great Britain do promise, subject to the approval of Her Majesty, that Dosunmu shall receive an annual pension from the Queen of Great Britain equal to the net revenue hitherto annually received by him; such pension to be paid at such periods and in such mode as may hereafter be determined. (National Archives Surrey, UK. F.O.84/1141, 373)

A Governor of the colony of Lagos was appointed and there began a new era in the history of British relations with that part of the coast, an era which inaugurated the new territory of Nigeria. As recorded in a personal draft by Acting Consul Mckoskry to Lord Earl Russel, Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, it states thus, "in order to avoid any misunderstanding with foreigners or others with regards to the change of sovereignty of the island, I have assumed for the present the title of Acting Governor instead of Acting Consul which would now and in future be an anomaly. I have done this only with the advice of the Senior Officers and not without being convinced of the propriety of it. I hope your Lordship will approve this step." (National Archives Surrey, UK. F.O.84/1141, 373) Thus British interests were firmly established in the town and by 1862, there were sixteen British merchants to one French, two Italian, three Germans and five Brazilian traders. Half in the guise of humanitarian motives, Britain had gained her first foothold on the Nigerian coast primarily to secure her trade (Crowder, 1962, p. 156). Falola et al (1991) hold this view on British occupation of Lagos:

The British decision to occupy Lagos formally was taken in view of increasing British activity on the Niger as from about 1854. From that time on there was the hope that there could be developed an overland route from Lagos to the Niger through the Yoruba country. If this route was developed, Lagos would be the centre from which goods would be exported, hence Lagos was important

and had to be under British control. This was the only way to ensure British control. This was the only way to ensure that British trade would be paramount in Lagos. It must be pointed out that when Lagos was captured it was as a result of the fear of being attacked by the British that the Oba signed the treaty of annexation. Clearly, the British were promoting their interests in compelling Oba Dosunmu to sign the treaty even though in so doing he was no doubt aware that this act would also serve his own interests. Aware that gun boats filled with British troops were already stationed in strategic positions around Lagos, Dosunmu signed the treaty knowing full well that if he failed to do the British bidding, he faced the real possibility of attack and certain defeat (Falola et al 1991, p. 192).

### **Consequences and Implications of British Occupation of Lagos**

Looking at Britain's imperial adventures, it should be noted that 1851, the year which ended the exercise in gunboat diplomacy in Lagos was also the year of the Great Exhibition, a seminal moment of Victorian self-confidence putting on display all the wonders of the Industrial Revolution and new inventions such as railways, gas lighting and sanitation (including the newly popularized water-closet, a major feature at the Great Exhibition), all there to be exported to a waiting world. The power of trade in the Victorian psyche is a more convincing historical explanation of the events of 1851, however much it was dressed up in the moral fervour of eliminating the slave trade. Little wonder Ade Ajayi commented as such, "the anxiety of Britain to intervene in Lagos was not just the philanthropic desire to destroy the slave trading of the Portuguese and Brazilians there, but also the economic desire to control the trade of Lagos from which they had hitherto been excluded and from where they hoped to exploit the resources of the vast country stretching to and beyond the Niger" (Whitemann, 2012).

In its intervention, Britain cracked the power of Kosoko, a much more authoritative ruler than either Akintoye or his son Dosunmu who succeeded on Akintoye's death in 1853; "upon Akintoye's death, the throne went to his son, Dosunmu, a weakling who was so fearful of his cousin Kosoko" (Ajayi and Espie, 1965, p. 371). This simply meant storing up trouble unless they moved in more effectively. The two-stage British annexation of 1851-1861 was a great climacteric moment of confusion and turbulence in the history of the city. What was happening in slow motion was a piece of colonial appropriation even if the highest motives were claimed and believed. Akintoye had in fact been a slaver too, but for the British, it was enough that he was ready to renounce slavery in order to get his job back. In the words of Robert Smith "it was under the rule of Oba Akintoye that Domingo Martinez 'the most notorious Brazillian in the Bight of Benin' was said to have made a fortune from

slaving of from one to two million dollars. When Martinez returned to the Bight of Benin in 1846, after a two year visit to Brazil, he found that Akintoye, the previous Oba of Lagos had been replaced by Kosoko, who patronized a different set of slave dealers, and it was probably for this reason that he re-established himself at Porto Novo rather than Lagos” (Smith, 1979, p. 11) In 1850, there was a further expansion of British influence in the Gold Coast when Britain bought the Danish forts on the coast. The British here shunned direct colonial rule as they appointed John Beecroft consul, who soon began to interfere in the politics of Lagos, and also Bonny and Calabar in the interest of British palm oil traders.

As rendered by Afolalu (1969, 142-143) “by 1849, the British government had found it necessary to appoint a consul to look after British trading interest in the Bights of Benin and Biafra.” In 1849, John Beecroft was appointed consul for the area. Beecroft had wide experience in West Africa. He first came to Fernando Po in 1829 as a naval officer in the British Anti-Slave Trade Naval Squadron patrolling West African waters. In 1845, he travelled up the Niger as far as Rabah. As consul, he was to exert British trading influence in the wide area between Dahomey and the Cameroons. he was to protect British merchants and missionaries and assist them as much as he could to check the slave trade” In the 1840s and 1850s, the French were similarly extending their influence in a more spectacular fashion. Between 1837 and 1842, the French naval officer Bouet-Willaumez made a series of voyages along the coast, calling at places where French traders had established themselves. At several of these trading posts he signed treaties with local African rulers. Just as the British had begun to look on the Niger as a highway to the Sudan, so the French began to form the plan of penetrating to the Muslim states of the western Sudan along the Senegal river, and from there, building a system of trading routes across the upper Niger, and with the appointment of Governor Faidherbe of Senegal from 1854 to 1861 and again from 1863 to 1865, whose intention was to achieve complete French domination of the Senegal river and make Senegal an artery for the commerce of the Western Sudan, it seemed almost by the 1860s that the scramble for West Africa was beginning (Ajayi & Espie 1965).

Faidherbe’s campaign led to increased activity by the French in what became the French Guinea which alarmed the British in Sierra Leone and similarly, the French became worried for their trading interests by British moves in Lagos and the Niger. (Ajayi and Espie) Events in Lagos however did more to alarm the French. The British intervention in 1852, deposing Kosoko, had led only to intrigue and instability in Lagos, whilst the British nominee rulers became more and more their puppets. Pressure from missionaries, traders and Sierra Leoneans together with the ambitions of local officials led to the open annexation of Lagos as a new British colony in 1861. The French worried that with real justification that British officials would expand along the

lagoons to impose customs duties on French traders to support Lagos revenues. In retaliation and to prevent this, the French declared a protectorate over Porto Novo in 1863 and Cotonou in 1868 thus establishing claims to the coast of what became their colony of Dahomey. (Ajayi and Espie:374) From the 1870s however, the British ceased to have things so conveniently free from foreign Europeans as by 1879 the French became more active in West Africa. These moves by the French especially events on the lower Niger dismayed the British.

The conquest of Dahomey immediately alarmed the British in Lagos that the French might move east into Yoruba land where hitherto the Colonial Office had tended to resist the efforts of British governors to intervene in the Yoruba wars after the Dahomey invasion. A seemingly political factor was the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, the area which prior to this time had been occupied by the French. It had the effect of provoking France into trying to retaliate against Britain in Egypt by linking up her colonies of Senegal, Somaliland, Algeria and Tunisia. By this the French hoped they would take control of the Upper Nile to the detriment of Britain in Egypt's lower Nile, the consequence of which was the speedy occupation of Sudan and Central Africa by the French during the period. Therefore, the aftermath of the Niger crises of 1897 to 1898 was the culminating point of the scramble for West Africa. In the longer view however, much of the French challenge and eventual success against the British became illusory as the French who followed a geographical strategy were swallowed up by the British who had followed a commercial strategy, supporting, protecting and outstripping areas of British trading predominance which eventually helped them secure the most populous and economically productive areas, thus finally securing an imperial colonial foothold on Nigeria which only began as an initial intervention in the internal political dynamics in the ruling house in Lagos in the early nineteenth century.

### **Conclusion**

The reduction of Lagos was the culmination of separate but interfacing causal sequences. The first arising from the indigenous politics of the island kingdom and the other two arising from the humanitarian drive to abolish the slave trade and also the desire to extend political, commercial and religious interests by the British. Although the internal conditions have been mostly downplayed by both 'colonial and anti-colonial' historians in various parlances and circumstances, in one instance, the official contemporary explanation accepted by the colonial school ascribed intervention to Britain's humanitarian concern to eradicate the obstinately lingering slave trade. Since abolition had called for a tremendous effort by those who supported the movement and long after the trade had ended, it continued to exact sacrifices from the British nation and to generate its own arguments for political and other forms of action. Closely following the abolition of the slave trade was the substitution of legitimate commerce,

an assertion remarked by most writers about the partition of the continent towards the end of the century as only a necessary part in the eradication of the slave trade.

To that end, commerce and the stimulation of commerce was only a natural responsibility of the British government to ensure not only that other countries should not obstruct the campaign against the trade, but also that they should not take commercial advantage of Britain's self-abnegation. High sounding as this appears, this assertion has not gone without criticism, as some challenging opinions advance that the leading fighters in favour of the abolition of the slave trade in the later stages did not confine themselves to the humanitarian group, thus Palmerston, a leading figure in the intervention and subsequent annexation of Lagos, devoted much of his energies to the prosecution of the war against the slave trade. In the words of Robert Smith, "closely aligned to the negative aim of abolition was the positive aim of its substitution by legitimate trade...however, once it had been accepted in London that these aims required action at Lagos, it became the role of those on the coast to translate the general permission.... the Royal Navy, often reluctant to extend its operations especially on land, had first to be assured of the need for intervention and of official sanction and encouragement. Meanwhile the consul was supported and sometimes hurried forward by the missionaries, zealous for the extension of their spiritual ecclesiastical kingdoms and by the traders, eager to build up their trade and to outflank competitors, legitimate or illegitimate" (Smith 1979, p. 11).

Though the economic interpretation put forward by most African scholars has also received a hard knock by critics plying the route as an approach which obscures the variety of causes that underlay this complex historical movement, the pro-economic interpreters see a strong commercial interest in Britain's struggle against the slave trade, seeing the suppression of the slave trade as a means to an end and the end indicating the expansion of British commerce with Africa. In any case, the internal slave trade continued to exist and even to grow partly as a result of measures taken to replace the external trade. In essence therefore, multi-causal conditions precipitating the British violent irruption into the affairs of Lagos at the end of 1851 must not remain a simple narrative telling about the struggle of the British against the slave trade, pursued with much greater vigour and persistence than by any other nation, but must take cognizance of the motive of those concerned with such actions. Therefore, in providing an analysis of the actions of the British Government, their officials, the Anglican missionaries and the traders, although these forces interplayed at the point of intersection of separate causal forces, with either of these forces at a point predominating over the others, it remains in the interest of the researcher to state here that concerning the bombardment and occupation of Lagos, it can at least be said that motives of those concerned with such action, and competent to authorize and carry it

out was sufficiently played out and upon the dynastic struggles that barraged the ruling house of Lagos.

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