APPENDIX 4: ADAHOONZOU’S SPEECH, UPON HEARING WHAT HAS PASSED IN ENGLAND UPON THE SUBJECT OF THE SLAVE-TRADE

I admire the reasoning of the white man; but, with all their sense, it does not appear that they have thoroughly studied the nature of the blacks, whose disposition differs as much from that of the whites, as their colour. The same Great Being formed both; and since it hath seemed convenient for him to distinguish mankind by opposite complexions, it is a fair conclusion to presume, that there may be as great a disagreement in the qualities of their minds. There is likewise a remarkable difference in the countries we inhabit. You, English-men, for instance, as I have been informed, are surrounded by the ocean, and, by this situation, seem intended to hold communications with the whole world, which you do by means of your ships; whilst we Dahomeans, being placed on a large continent, and...hemmed in amidst a variety of other people, of the same complexion, but speaking different languages are obliged by the sharpness of our swords, to defend ourselves from their incursions, and punish the depredations they make on us. Such conduct in them is productive of incessant war. Your countrymen, therefore, who alledge [sic] that we go to war for the purpose of supplying your ships with slaves, are grossly mistaken.

You think you can work a reformation, as you call it, in the manners of the blacks, but you ought to consider the disproportion between the magnitudes of the two countries; and then you would soon be convinced of the difficulties that must be surmounted, to change the system of such a vast country as this. We know you are a brave people, and that you might bring over a great many of the blacks to your opinions, by the points of your bayonets; but to effect this a great many must be put to death, and numerous cruelties must be committed, which we do not find to have been the practice of the whites; besides, that this would militate against the very principle which is professed by those who wish to bring about a reformation.

In the name of my ancestors and myself I aver, that no Dahomean man ever embarked in war merely for the sake of procuring wherewithal to purchase your commodities. I, who have not long been master of this country, have, without thinking of the market, killed many thousands, and I shall kill many thousands more. When policy or justice requires that men be put to death, neither silk, nor coral, nor brandy, nor cowries, can be accepted as substitutes for the blood that ought to be spilt for example sake. Besides, if white men chuse [sic] to remain at home, and no longer visit this country for the same purpose that has usually brought them hither, will black men cease to make war? I answer, by no means. And if there be no ships for their captives, what will become of them? I answer for you, they will be put to death. Perhaps you may ask, how will the blacks be punished with guns and powder? I reply by another question; had we not clubs, and bows, and arrows, before we knew white men? Did you not see me make Custom for Weebaigah, the third King of Dahomey? And did you not observe, on the day such ceremony was performing, that I carried a bow in my hand, and a quiver filled with arrows on my back? These were the emblems of the times, when, with such weapons, that brave ancestor fought and conquered all his neighbours. God made war for all the world; and every kingdom, large or small, has practised it more or less, though perhaps in a manner unlike, and upon different principles. Did Weebaigah sell slaves? No, his prisoners were all killed to a man. What else could he have done with them? Was he to let them remain in his country, to cut the throat of his subjects? This would have been a wretched policy indeed, which, had it been adopted, the Dahomean name would have long ago been extinguished, instead of becoming, as it is at this day, the terror of the surrounding nations. What hurts me most is, that some of your people have maliciously represented us in books, which never die, alledging, that we sell our wives and children for the sake of procuring a few kegs of brandy. No, we are shamefully belied; and I hope you will contradict, from my mouth, the scandalous stories that have been propagated; and tell posterity that we have been abused. We do, indeed sell to the white men a part of our prisoners, and we have a right to do so. Are not all prisoners at the disposal of their captors? And are we to blame, if we send delinquents to a far country? I have been told, you do the same. If you want more slaves from us, why cannot you be ingenuous and tell the plain truth; saying, that they slaves you have already purchased