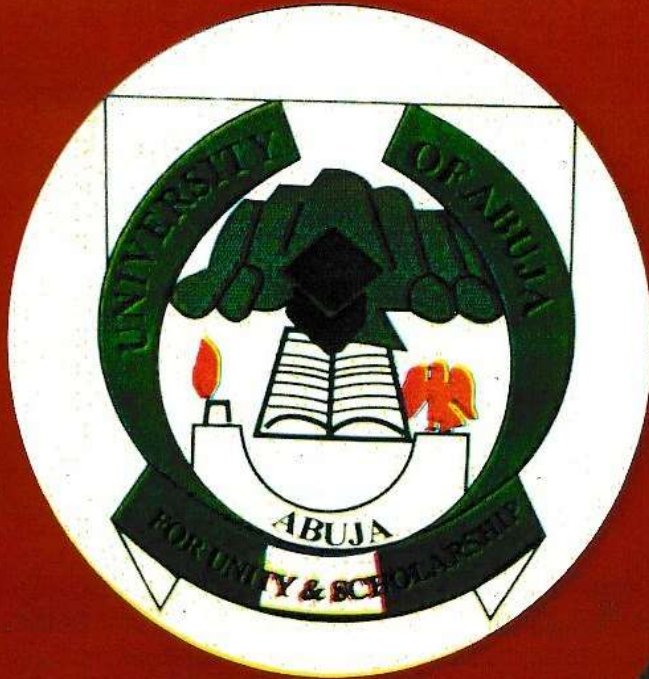


AFRICAN DIPLOMACY:

FROM EARLIEST TIMES TO 2010



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PRE-COLONIAL DIPLOMACY IN IBIBIO LAND
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ABSTRACT

Ibibioland unarguably is occupied by the fourth largest Nationality group in Nigeria. It is specifically located in South-Southern geo-political zone of Nigeria. Diplomatic relations with the outside World in Ibibioland dates back to the very earliest times, long before the advent of imperialism and colonialism. As from the 15th century when Ibibioland was a part of Old Calabar, the earliest European explorers, traders, missionaries, colonial administrators, European settlers, European entrepreneurs and tourists have had, dynamic diplomatic relations with the potentates of Old Calabar, as sovereign lords and equals. This paper is an attempt to situate these diplomatic interactions and practices in historical perspective, to show when this interaction begun which have lasted to this day. The paper examines the means and mechanisms whereby these interactions have taken place and the consequences of these interactions between the Europeans and Ibibioland.

Introduction

Considered the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria, the Ibibio people occupy the territory that stretches from Ikot Abasi River (then known as Opobo River) with a common boundary with today's Rivers State in the west, to the Atlantic Ocean in the south. To the north, it is bounded by present-day Imo State and to the east, it stretches beyond Cross River State, touching the international boundary separating Nigeria from Cameroun. (Udoma, 1987:2)

The Ibibioland is populated by several language groups aside from the main Ibibio group. They include the Annang, Efik, Oron, Eket, Andoni, Ibeno, Itu Mbonuso, Efiat, Mbo, and so on, though few of them claim separate identities. (Noah, 1980). Today, both for economic development and political convenience, these people are found in Akwa Ibom, Cross River and Rivers States.

Patterns of Migration

Accounts on the origin, migration and settlement of the Ibibio people appear to be limited and in most cases, speculative. Three views have been given wide acknowledgement though. One tradition claims autochthony, which, in other words, means that the Ibibio people actually originated from their present location. (Latham, 1973:2). Another view offers that the Ibibio people are indeed one of the lost tribes of Israel or the Black Essene Jews, who had to migrate from the Sinai Peninsular to their present abode in Nigeria because they were "despised, persecuted, rejected and hated" (Akpan, 2004:6).

The last of the three traditions, which is almost generally acceptable, claims that the Ibibio migrated from Usak Edet in Southern Cameroun. (Uya, 1992:15). From there, they moved to Ibom near Arochukwu in present-day Abia State. Because of hostile neighbours, they were made to move further southward until they settled in Ikono Ibom (also known as Ntippe Ibibio). Though the exact date of origin, migration and settlement of the Ibibio people is not known, Talbot and Monday Noah offer 9000BC and 8000BC respectively, as the period of settlement of the Ibibio people. (Uya, 1992:7). It is said that from this point further dispersal to other parts of the Ibibioland occurred, though other groups like the Oron are reputedly said to have arrived through water routes in later years. (Ukpong, 2001)

It is to be noted that as these peoples dispersed and settled down in their respective homes, they went in contact with other ethnic groups around them. These included the Ogoni, Ijaw, Ekoi and the Igbo people as well. These contacts paved the way for a number of things including trade between

the Ibibio and their neighbors. In other words, pre-colonial diplomacy in Ibibioland began with the groups that were coterminous to the Ibibio before it was extended to include the Europeans.

Reasons for this kind of "close-neighbour" interaction, as Abasiattai (1991:425) pointed out, were difficult medium of transportation (which at the time was by foot), insecurity along trade routes especially when those routes were disturbed by intra or inter-ethnic conflicts, the role of the middlemen in most trades in the area and the item(s) of the trade. As time passed and as the level of interactions increased significantly, so were these challenges surmounted. A number of factors supported these developments. These could be found in the political, socio-cultural, and most importantly, economic aspects of their lives. We shall discuss these in turn.

Political Administration in Pre-Colonial Ibibioland

Pre-colonial Ibibioland did not exist under a centrally managed political administration as was the case with some ethnic groups in the larger pre-colonial Nigeria. Yet there existed enormous but flexible control of the polity. Put differently, unlike the Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani and so on in other locations within the pre-colonial Nigerian environment, there was no hierarchical political framework, at the head of which one single being sat in Ibibioland. Indeed, every village and clan, like in the Igbo country from where the Ibibio people are believed to have migrated, exercised political powers accordingly.

Each village was governed by an entity called the council of Elders or *Esop Idung*, over which a village head presided. At the clan level, there was the clan council known in Ibibio as the *Esop Oduk* or *Esop Ikpa Isong*. In most cases, this was the highest administrative body in the land. Village heads reported to the clan heads but the latter were usually supreme. Yet, there were many clans in the pre-colonial Ibibioland.

This arrangement brought a significant impact on the pattern of diplomatic relations between the Ibibio people and their neighbours. As we shall see later, this was the near complete freedom it afforded individuals and villages, sometimes as single entities or clans depending on the reasons for communication, to conduct business with neighbouring villages of other ethnic groups. Thus providing them the avenue for acquiring wealth and influence and the chance to put in more hard work so as to meet development challenges of the time. Moreover, this structural distribution of political power among villages also meant that under the conditions of war, a concept which is always lurking around in inter-group or international relations, a village or a collection of villages, because of shared affinity or simply because of geographical closeness, were the ones which usually engaged in such war, instead of the whole Ibibioland as had been the case with places practising centralized administration. Again, because of this lack of central political cohesion, when the British and other Europeans finally made their ways inward as consuls, they had to negotiate with every single village and clan in Ibibioland before they could gain access through the land or to acquire landing rights on the shores or establish trading posts, thus, winning for those villages and clans individual trading rights with less European interference for a period.

To check excesses however and to keep the machinery of diplomacy well-oiled, certain institutions were erected. The duties of these institutions transcended political and socio-economic life of the people. These institutions included the *Ekpo*, *Idiong*, *Ekpe*, *Ebre*, *Ataat* societies and age grade among others. Through these groups laws made by the council of Elders were interpreted and enforced. Though established with designated functions, these institutions played significant parts in regulating and maintaining the media of pre-colonial diplomacy in Ibibioland. For instance, *Ekpe* society was used for collecting and managing debts owed the European and other traders by the locals. Again, issues concerning land and palm brushes were under the supervision of the *Ekpo* society. (Udoma, 1987:6)

Social Influences on Pre-Colonial Development in Ibibioland

Close contiguity enhanced cultural exchanges between the Ibibio and their neighbours. For instance, *Ekpe* society, an important part of the socio-cultural life of the main Ibibio and Efik groups

was adopted by the Igbo in Afikpo, Ohafia and Azumini areas. (Abasiattai,1991:442). Similar exchanges, which are still noticeable today, occurred in the languages they spoke. We should not fail to note that special trade benefits accumulated for the relating groups when aspects of their social and cultural existence were mutually assimilated.

This need for mutual cultural exchange could be seen in, among other things, intermarriages and the sharing of social beliefs, cosmology, worldview, religious instruments and centers of worship among the groups. Religion was very important in shaping diplomatic relations in pre-colonial Ibibioland. Though controlled principally by the Igbo, the Long Juju of Arochukwu was considered the source of divine powers for the Ibibio, Efik, Igbo and Ekoi people.(Abasiattai,1991:443) As we shall see later however, the Aro was also utilized, subtly though, to enhance the trade in slaves. These mutual acculturation would not have been possible or mutually beneficial to both the Ibibio and their neighbours, if the institutions of social and cultural integration were not properly developed to either align with or enhance those of their neighbours.

As mentioned earlier, the urge for economic development provided the main thrust behind the diplomatic relations between pre-colonial Ibibio and their contiguous neighbours and the European traders how this urge was managed can be seen in the occupation, technological appreciation and trading patterns of the Ibibio people.

a. Occupation

Farming, palm production, fishing, hunting, wood-carving, weaving and even communal labour were the primary occupation of the Ibibio. However, farming and fishing were prominent both in the hinterland and along river routes and coastal lines. Geography determined occupation, while geography was popular among sections of the main Ibibio, the riverine people, like Oron, Efik, Uruan etc, took to fishing. With these occupations making the expected returns, there was enough for subsistence and trade and exchange.

b. Technology

For each of these occupations, there existed designated technologies and mechanism. For instance, the riverine people were known for inventing such tools as iyire (net), uwaam (hook) and so on. The same went for those in agricultural cultivation as suitable tools were developed though most times in crude forms. However, as time passed and their level of interaction with other people increasing, so was their technological know-how improving. It should be noted that with these tools, they did not only make their lives meaningful but they also used them and their neighbours. They were used as materials for exchange, trade and gifts.

c. Trading Patterns

Indeed, trade was the major driving force behind the numerous interactions that existed between the Ibibio people in pre-colonial times and their neighbours on the hand and the whites, who were making their way inward especially in the 17th century, on the other. During this time, two main areas of trade existed in the Ibibioland – slave trade and trade in palm produce though the former enjoyed more inter-ethnic group and international importance.

i. Slave Trade

Trade in slaves effectively paved the way for the major encounters between people of pre-colonial Ibibioland and the Europeans. The Old Calabar area became one of the earliest centres for this trade.(Udoka,2005:31) Though generally agreed details of the number of slaves traded when it gained economic prominence in Ibibioland in the 16th and 19th centuries are more or less lacking, the area participated greatly in the trade.(Curtain,1969:116)

During this period, a well-defined trading organization made possible by commercial division of labour, where slaves were traded in return for manufactured and semi-manufactured goods from the Europeans at the coast and/or the middlemen in the hinterland, was developed.

Intricate patterns of slave trading routes made possible by the four major rivers that drained the area, namely, Cross River, Imo, Kwa Iboe and Calabar and their tributaries and inland roads gave the participants the natural entry and exist points through which the trade was conducted effectively. The major market however was Itu while the Igbo people formed the majority of slaves sold.(Lantham,1973:28)

Aro, Efik and Opobo people were the major players in the trade around the Igbo-Ibibio areas though the Aro were the dominant group.(Uya,1992:24) Through warfare, kidnapping, raids and general incitement of fear in the psyche of other groups especially through the Aro oracle or Chukwu, these Aro traders acquired and sold slaves in large numbers to the Efik at the coast, while King Jaja and his men in Opobo dominated the aspect of the trade in the area now known today as Ikot Abasi.(Noah,1980:74)

However, as this trade impacted on the pre-colonial Ibibioland, negatively or otherwise, is beyond the scope of the present study though it is acknowledged that many slaves were lost to the trade while some sections of the population in Ibibioland benefited from it. But what is to be noted however, is that this trade, after the industrial boom in Europe and the attendant hunger for raw materials and open markets, starting from the later part of the 18th century, was substituted for what was called legitimate trade.(Uya,2007:5). In other words, attention was shifted from the trade in humans to other commodities like palm produce. Aside from the slave trade, trade in farm produce and sea food had gained prominence amongst the Igbo people in the North, Ibibio and Efik in the South and European traders at the coast. Though given somewhat complete attention by the Europeans in the 19th century following the abolition of slave trade, the trade had existed side by side with slave trade and had contributed greatly to the development and sustenance of economic diplomatic relations in the area.

Waterways and canoes for transportation were of significant implication. Through these waterways, yam from the Igbo country was sent to Ibibioland in exchange for oil, while oil was moved further down river to the Efik in return for fish, salt and shrimps and to the Europeans traders at the coast.(Lanthan,1973:28)

Indeed, economic diplomacy as exemplified by the trade the Ibibio people engaged themselves in brought a number of impacts on Ibibioland of the pre-colonial era in particular and the Old Calabar region in general. Through the 17th and probably into the 18th century, Ibibio traders were prominent both as middlemen and coastal traders. Prosperous traders in the region were known for exporting their wares directly to Europe.(Udoma,1987:233) Again, prosperity level o the people and places involved in it rose significantly, thus creating powerful people and city states in the region. No wonder therefore that the Ibibio people were known, especially by the Europeans as the "Agbisherea".(Noah,1980:5)

Trade was important to these people and with the positive returns it was making, they hoped to sustain it. And one of the ways of keeping the tempo was to strengthen the relations that existed already with the Europeans, which explains why some chiefs had to invite the Europeans to their domain. Such meetings gave opportunities through which laws to regulate the trade and activities of the traders were agreed upon.(Lanthan,1973:65)

Christian Missions in Ibibio 1841-1900

After the abolition of slave trade in 1807, some Europeans began to agitate for the complete abolition of slavery. They argued that for slavery and slavery trade to witness a complete abolition, there would be need to engage the missions who would venture into the interior to speak against and convince slave trading communities on the ills of slave trade and also Christianize those communities.

Thomas Buxton, a British parliamentarian became a leading light, after the William Wilberforce, in the slave emancipation movement. In 1839, he urged the British government to make treaties with African leaders to abolish slave trade. In his book, *The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy*, Buxton proposed further, the "doctrine of the Bible and the plough".(Buxton,44) suggesting

that freed African slaves in America be engaged in the Christianizing mission to Africa so as to spread the gospel of abolition through Christian principles in one hand and they having witnessed the manner of development in Europe will invent same in Africa, on the other hand. Buxton's strong arguments on African slave trade, not only left no doubts in the minds of some individuals like David Livingstone whose exploits in African slave emancipation were monumental, but also the British government acquiesced to his arguments. Thus, in 1841 British government backed the Niger Expedition put together by missionary organizations.

Although the Niger Expedition (fell flat and was inconclusive due to issues of death and cases of ill health, the effort was renewed in 1846. The Presbyterian Mission led by Hope Marsteron Waddel stormed Calabar to continue the Christianizing mission. According to Abasiattai, (1991:449-445). Hope Waddel's observation of the Calabar region aid the Efik Chief having spent a few years was thus:

King Eyo Honesty II of Creek town had many thousands of slave and four hundred canoes, with a captain crew for everyone. Besides this, extensive trade, which amounted to several thousand of puncheon (of palm oil annually, he employed his slaves reclaiming waste lands, founding town and planting from in well selected positions, which gave him command of rivers and channel of trade.

Waddel's observation simply corroborated the missions of the Niger Expedition in 1841 sanctioned by the British parliament. It explained the fact that the region was a beehive of both legitimates and illegitimate trade activities strongly controlled by the region potentates.

Although the Europeans and the African potentates had reached an agreement of reversing slave trade and advancing legitimate trade in 1843 for onward development, the development the locals sought for did not actually manifest in support of their tradition and government. While the initial arrival of the Europeans heralded hope events gradually played up to turn the Efiks against the missionaries. For example, the message of one God totally defied the worship of other gods in Efik. Again, the message of equality of man inspired slaves to abscond from their master's custody in favour of the mission's outpost. These amongst others drew resentment from the locals who wanted the expulsion of the missionaries but for the timely intervention of the British government. (Abasiattai, 1991:445-449)

Generally, resentment meant that missionaries exerted much effort to gain the people's acceptance and in spite of the early lack of dramatic achievement, the Presbyterian Missions yet made incursions into the hinterland through the effort of Mary Slessor at Itu in 1903. (Abasiatta, 1991:445-455)

The second attempt by missionaries to break into the hinterland of Ibibio was undertaken by the Anglican Missionary of the Niger Delta who explored the southwestern part of Ibibio country reaching Opobo and Bonny in 1892. (Udo, 1983:303) To a large extent, and most effectively, it was the Qua Iboe Missions under Samuel Bill that had the biggest bite of the Ibibioland following his arrival in Southeastern Nigeria in 1887. The coming of Qua Iboe Mission in Ibibio was a result of the call by the Ibeno chiefs for protection against King Jaja of Opobo who at this time raided, plundered and terrorized the region for slaves. (Abasiattai, 1991:445-455) In another account, the call was made following the exemplary activities of the Presbyterian Mission at Calabar. (Udo, 1983:303). Whatever was the case, the hinterland of Ibibio remained largely untouched until when Samuel Bill laid claims to the Qua Iboe river and its basin for his mission. In the successive years, the Qua Iboe having taken off from Ibeno, spread further inland to establish centres at Ndiya in 1889; Ukat in 1892, Etinan in 1898, Ikot Ubo in 1898, Okorotip and Mkpanak in 1899. (Eka, 2008)

Other pioneer missions that penetrated the Ibibioland were the Methodist, Roman Catholic and the Lutheran Missions. These three like the Presbyterian and Qua Iboe carried out evangelical, educational, humanitarian and medical services, receiving support from the British government. They also faced the same challenges of winning the locals to their sides. The long term effect meant

that these clusters of missions within and around Ibibio, became involved in long standing contentions that bordered on space, differences in doctrine and quest for converts.

On the whole, Christianizing mission seemed to register strongly on the people as it created the leeway that enabled the eventual colonization and ended some outrageous customs but not without some measures of resistance from the indigenes. One significant impact jointly exerted by the missions in Ibibioland was their effort in curbing the practices of twin killing. For example, in Ibeno where the Qua Iboe Mission had a stronghold, M'keown(1912:65) observed that in the 1910's, twins were murdered close to the mission house but the intervention of the missions ensured that a law was made to end the wicked act. In Ibesikpo, where the Lutheran Mission held sway, Henry Nay(1946:63) also noted that as part of measures to curb the killing of twins, two little houses filled with twins and their mothers, were established for their care and maintenance. The Presbyterian through the expatriate Mary Slessor recorded enviable feats in this direction establishing mission stations that served as a refuge for rescued twins and their mother at Ikot Obong, Use Ikot, Oku and Ikpe all in Itu.(Talbot,1959)

British Military Conquest and Administration in Ibibio 1849-1900

Military presence in Ibibioland in the colonial era became necessary on the following grounds:

- i) Complaints made by British merchants over the obstruction of trade by the locals.
- ii) Resentment towards the missionaries in Ibibio
- iii) Activities of slave dealers which made for unsettlement and terror.
- iv) Diplomatic initiatives and interest by the Spanish, German, French imperialists in the region.

In view of the challenges, the British government appointed John Beecroft as the first British Consul for the Niger Coast in 1849.

Beecroft was mandated to oversee trade relations between the British and African traders' protect British nationals and their properties and also put an end to slave trade¹⁵. He effectuated the command when he deposed King Kosoko and replaced him with Akitoye in 1851 and also took a military action against Ibibio for closing the trade route on the Cross River.(Udo,1983) This initial military actions did not suggest any serious attempt by the British to establish consular administration in Ibibio hinterland. But in 1885, when Britain finally proclaimed protectorates over the entire Ibibio and environs, the proclamation was followed by the appointment of Claude Macdonald in 1891 as the consul general of the Protectorate of the Old River.

In 1897, cases of attempts by the inland people to further obstruct free trade and carryout human sacrifices prompted finally a military incursion in Ibibio hinterland. It was also reported that the people of Eket refused to appear before the proconsul when they were summoned (Essiet,2010). Matters of recalcitrance and open violation of orders by Ibibios came to a head when in 1896, Consul Bedwell, who was on a visit to Okat Eket to stamp out heathenish practices, came under a serious attack by the indigenes of Mkpok Eket.(Eka,2008) This action which was considered an assault on the British crown, marked the beginning of military expedition into Ibibio territories. Responding to the earlier attack, the British under the command of Major Leonard, mustered 180 troops and 400 carrier, marched through Ibibio territory to Eket. After over the two hours of battle, Mkpok and their ruler, Chief Ofon were captured. The later was tried and sentenced to 7 years imprisonment.(Eka,2008)

From thence, other insubordinate villages and communities fell one after the other i.e. Arochukwu in 1902, Eket 1901, Ikot Ekpene 1903; and Akat Offot in 1905. The conquest continued till 1911, when Ibibio territory came under effective control.²⁰ Colonial conquest came with the imposition of colonial rule in the conquered areas. The imposition was in line with the introduction of the warrant chief system by indirect rule by the British authorities in 1891. Again, indirect rule like most of the colonial policies did not go the way of Ibibio indigenes. The process of selecting warrant chiefs did not follow any traditional procedure rather selection was based on certain emergency development that took place especially during the military expedition. It was reported that extreme brutalities meted out to the insubordinate communities and leaders during the expedition made some

traditional chiefs to abscond and wrongly project some social misfits to negotiate on behalf of the chiefs with the troops. The so-called misfits in most cases got appointed as warrant chiefs. Also, appointment could be based on services rendered as a guide by anyone to the troops when they penetrated the area. (Eka,2008) This act of arbitrariness by the British troop could aptly be described as “colonial coup d’etat” in which the office of traditional titled chiefs were usurped and replaced with the warrant chiefs.

The native court, the official designate of the newly appointed Ibibio warrant chiefs, had competence over all civil and criminal cases within their areas of jurisdiction. They could prevailed over personal, witchcraft, land and marital cases. The mandate of the warrant chiefs also included the warrant to arrest, try criminals, make native laws, regulate and promote trade.(Udida,2005:114) These enormous powers bestowed on the warrant chiefs ensured they continued to rule the people at the dictate of the colonialists and fan the ambers of the political and economic targets of the system. By 1910, the native court system (NCS) became established in Uyo, Ikot Ekpene, Ikpa Otu, Opobo and Ikot Ubo.(Eka,2008) The warrant chiefs system continued until 1920 when the women riot of that same year led to its abrogation.

The Era of Legitimate Trade in Colonial Ibibio 1885-1960

So far, we have examined the mechanisms of Christianizing mission and colonial conquest as avenues that fostered diplomatic relations between Ibibio and the Europeans. It is necessary therefore to look at another mechanism which facilitated the gradual settlement and effective occupation in Ibibio.

By introducing legitimate trade which was more or less the reasons behind the coming of the Europeans, it was certain they would never leave in a hurry. To actualize their economic dreams, the British government ruled out policies that would ensure the new trade worked in their interest. As noted by Nwabughoghu(2009:2), these economic policies were not documents prepared in the Whitehall to govern economic behaviours in their respective British colonies, but were merely pieces of statements made by individual colonial officials at different times. Nwabughoghu(2009:3) observes that in one of such economic policies expounded by Joseph Chamberlain, the British Secretary of the State in 1895 stated:

British colonial territories were imperial estates to be developed for the benefits of their own population and for the development of the greater population which is outside.

In sum, British economic policies according to Lord Lugard was a “dual mandate” that sought not only to exploit African resources for Britain's benefits, but also to develop the native peoples in their progress to a higher plane.(Nwabughoghu,2009;3) Thus, the policies did not reflect in practice, the expectations of the dual mandate as Ibibioland was quite neglected in the scheme of British colonial development compared with other region. The indigenes of Ibibio as noted by Abasiattai(1991,445-455), having suffered undue neglect and exploitation rose in accord during the Ibibio Union of 1941 to voice their concern:

You cannot give us electric light paved roads, pumps for water supply, etc which are amenities enjoyed in towns outside Ibibio territory and towards which we contribute substantially. This is a clear case of robbing Peter to pay Paul.

The enormous role played by the Ibibio during the legitimate trade relations with the Europeans and other parts of the colony was that of supplying the bulk of palm oil that was needed to consolidate industrial and also sustain the economy of the North. The abundant palm oil in the region rightly informed the name Oil River Protectorate as was use during the legitimate trade.

Ibibio in the 21st Century: Beyond Ethnic Limitations

The foundation of the 21st century Ibibio as a socio political entity was laid in the late 1920's

following the promulgation of the 1922 Clifford Constitution which gave locals the opportunity for the first time to actively participate in the colonial government. A lot of efforts were made from every nooks and crannies of the country to participate and promote the interests of their respective ethnic affiliations. But the foremost from the Ibibios, culminated in the formation of Ibibio State Union in 1928 at Ikot Ekpene. (Akpan,2004:3)

The Ibibio State Union was established to harmonize and protect the interest of Ibibio people and was used throughout the colonial period as a platform for interaction between the Ibibios and the colonialists. After the Union's proscription in 1966 following the demise of the first Republic, there were consistent efforts to recreate or re-establish a Pan-Ibibio group that would continue to pull their resources together. These include the Akwa Esop Imaisong Ibibio in 1981, Mboho Mkpawara Ibibio (MMI) in 1987 and recently in 2010, Ibibio People's Union (IPN).

Beyond the colonial era, it would appear, as Akpan(2004:3) noted, that

the concept of Ibibio underwent changes beginning from the second half of the 20th century ... having shrunk originally from a component of 6 districts to 4.... The general notion of Ibibio given the state of changes in the 21st century was a redefinition to mean anybody who willingly accepts and affirms that he is an Ibibio man."

For through politics, the consciousness and perception of the peoples were coloured as they began to create separate identities within the group. Today, Akwa Ibom State which was recognized as a geopolitical entity in 1987, cannot be said to be entirely Ibibio as there are strings of factions divided along ethnic lines like the Annangs and Oro. In spite of the present ethnic divisions, Akwa Ibom remains unarguably to be seen as an enclave of the Ibibio.

Away from the shenanigans of internal politics and economy, Ibibio is fast becoming the "Kabinda" of the Nigerian State. This is due to the large oil reserve, dotted with internationally accessible seaports. The implication therefore is that the region will continue to maintain existing, and create more international relations in a matter of no distant time.

Conclusion

Ibibio and her people have a long history of diplomatic relations dating back to pre-colonial times. In this study, we have established that pre-colonial diplomacy thrived on the basis of the people's rich cultural heritage, human and economic resources. These endowments, to a large extent, determined the length and periods of diplomatic engagements especially with the British colonialists. Within the Ibibio neighbourhood, for example, communities that shared migrating patterns or historical past were easy to deal with either by means of coercion through slave raiding or cooperation through slave trading. Again, we have also established that western diplomatic relations with Ibibio began with exploratory activities in the coastal regions and culminated in the slave trade period. For over 500 years, the Ibibio and the West engaged in a diplomatic intercourse that involved the use of mechanisms such as slave trade, legitimate trade, military expedition, missionary engagements and internal colonization. Our conclusion therefore is that having undergone a lengthy period of diplomatic interactions with first, their neighbours and then with the West, the Ibibio people have been shaped and poised for a great future in the 21st century. **REFERENCES**

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