

Inter-Group Diplomacy Between Peoples in Akwa Ibom and Cross River States

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Abstract

This paper discusses the diplomatic relations between Akwa Ibom and some selected groups in present-day Cross River State. The groups include the Ejagham (including the Qua of Calabar), the Efut, Biase (Umon/Agwagune) Okoyong and Ododop. The areas under study is well watered by numerous waterways particularly the Cross River from which the modern "Cross River State" derives its name and which links the people of these areas together since the pre-colonial era. Over the centuries, the people have engaged in diverse socio-economic activities including long distance trade. Inter-marriages also took place and helped in cementing their relations. Also secret societies particularly ekpe, believed to have originated from the Efut before they dispersed from the Cameroon area was one principal medium of inter-group relations. The paper refutes the orientation of a prominent historian who described the old Cross River State as an "atomistic society perpetually at war with itself". It notes that even though some conflicts occasionally occurred among the people, particularly in the post-colonial Nigeria, such circumstances were not enough to disrupt the established relations. It concludes that the rich historical antecedent which is often ignored should serve as the guiding light as the people of the region still interact in contemporary period. It adopts a historical analytical methodology.

Keywords: Diplomatic relations, Akwa Ibom, Cross River State, socio-economic activities, long distance trade, inter-marriages

1. Introduction

One of the theories commonly adopted in the discourse of relations among Nigerian people is that of 'fundamental diversity' which posits that the peoples of present-day Nigeria in the pre-colonial period had little or nothing in common. It is also held that they spoke different languages, had cultural differences and no common ideological orientation and were not united by a common religion as they worshipped many gods. According to this theory, when they were brought together by the British at the dawn of the 20th century, they found themselves as "strange bed fellows". The theory also stresses that even during the colonial period, the peoples were not brought closely by the colonial administration based on the principle of indirect rule which emphasised local particularism. Hence, when Nigeria became independent, there was, and still is, the difficulty of forging a nation of peoples so different in backgrounds. Thus, every problem in the processes of nation building is fundamentally viewed from this prism (Ajayi, 2005).

However, there is an opposite theory known as the common bond theory. It states that the differences in culture, including language did not negate intercourse between the people. For instance, it is argued that most Nigerian languages originated from a common parentage. This theory maintains that given the proper orientation, the problem of national integration in Nigeria is less complex than it appears (Ajayi, 2005).

The 'common bond theory' is similar to the 'mutual aid theory'. It is obvious that in confronting the challenges of nature and environment, man cannot act alone, hence this sense of cooperation in order to survive, responds to the theory of mutual aid. The theory posits that "even in the all – important question of the struggle for the basic things of life, human beings cooperate not just for the sake of social community, but indeed out of necessity (Uji, 2015). This thesis acknowledges consensus and cooperation as being fundamental variables in all existing societies but also accepts the fact that conflicts and crisis are necessary consequence of complex nature of inter-group relations especially in the contest for scarce resources.

As noted by Afigbo (1990), in spite of whatever impressions contemporary ethnic chauvinists looking for secure political identity and autonomy of their ethnic homelands, the links which bind the peoples of each member state of the Nigerian federation to the peoples and the regions around them are ancient, deep, varied and therefore as important as the links internal to the state. Indeed, the above assertion applies vividly to the ethnic nationalities in present day Akwa Ibom and Cross River States and precedes the creation of the two states as distinct geo-political entities in the Nigerian state.

1.1. The People of Akwa Ibom State

Ibom State is located within the southeastern axis of Nigeria, wedged between Cross River, Abia and Rivers States on the sandy deltaic coastal plain of the Guinea coast. On the Southern margins of the state is the Atlantic Ocean which stretches from Ikot Abasi to Oron. In a strict trigonometrical sense, Akwa Ibom State lies between latitudes 4⁰32' and 5⁰53' North, and longitudes 7⁰25' and 8⁰25' East (Ekpoh, 1994).

The shape of Akwa Ibom State approximates that of a triangle with Ini Local Government Area serving as the apex, while Oron, Esit Eket, Ibeno, Eket, Onna and Ikot Abasi Local Government Areas constitute the base. The state covers a total land area of 8,412 km², encompassing the entire Qua Iboe River basin, the Western part of the Lower Cross River basin and the Eastern part of the Lower Imo River basin. Akwa Ibom State has an ocean front which spans a distance of about 129 kilometres from Ikot Abasi Local Government Area in the West to Oron Local Government Area in the East. Much of the ocean front, especially around the Esit Eket and Ibeno axis, has the potential of being developed into a beautiful beach resort area (Ekpo, 1994).

Akwa Ibom State is inhabited by the Ibibio and her related groups such as Annang, Oron, Eket, Ibeno, Eastern Obolo (Andoni). Though the Ibibio origin of the above mentioned

groups has been challenged by some scholars in recent times, all the groups mentioned trace their origin from the Cameroon area (Akpan, 2018).

1.2. The People of Cross River State

The Cross River State is one of the 36 states in Nigeria. As an integral part of the former South-Eastern State created in 1967 and re-christened Cross River State in 1976, it assumed its present geo-political configuration in 1987 when Akwa Ibom State was later carved out leaving Cross River State in the present form. Cross River State is bounded to the north, west, south and east by Benue State, Imo State, Abia and Enugu States; Akwa Ibom State and the Republic of Cameroon respectively. It comprises 14 Local Government Areas including Calabar, Akpabuyo, Odukpani, Akamkpa, Biase, Yakurr, Abi, Obubra and Ikom. Others are Boki, Ogoja, Yala, Obudu and Obanliku (Onor, 1994).

According to Onor (1994), Cross River State consists of groups such as Biase, Yakurr, Mbaembe, Boki, Yala and Ejagham. He adds that the factors which show immense relatedness of the peoples of Cross River State include shared historical experiences through common routes of migration and settlement points, all of which left in their wake, a number of common cultural institutions and belief systems. Furthermore, interaction over time through commercial relations, inter-marriages and warfare gave rise to mutual exchanges of socio-cultural values and institutions, thereby fostering and expanding the basis for common consciousness. Thus, such socio-cultural institutions as *mgbe* (ekpe) *nsibidi*, etc are commonly observable across the broad generality of the ethnic groups in the state. Linguistically, Efik, Bekwara and Ejagham languages are understood and spoken by a significant percentage of the peoples of the state.

Apart from the Efik (which an aspect of their tradition of origin, migration and settlement links them with Akwa Ibom people), all the groups in Cross Rive State like those in Akwa Ibom belonged originally to the same general homeland within the historic Nigerian/Cameroon border area. Having occupied the area from a very early date, it is difficult not to imagine that there developed over time, “an intricate network of common ethnic origins, cultural ties and relationships among the inhabitants of this region. The final effect of which was to transform these ties into a cultural watershed in the history of Africa (Onor, 1994).

Geographically, Cross River State may be divided into two sub-regions of upper and lower areas. The lower portion includes the area of modern Calabar Municipal Government, Odukpani and Akamkpa Local Government Areas. The upper portion comprises Ugep, Obubra, Ikom, Ogoja and Obudu administrative divisions. The above arrangements are purely administrative. Over the years, the entire area has come to be regarded as a single cultural entity and ultimately changed the people’s linguistic and ethnic domains (Cited Akpan, 2018).

2. Akwa Ibom's Diplomatic Relations with the Ejagham from Pre-colonial Times

The term, Ejagham, refers to the Qua of Calabar, Akpabuyo and Odukpani, the Ejagham of Akamkpa, the Etung, the Ofutop, Nde, Nselle, Abanyum, Nnam, Akparabong, Balep and Bendeghe Afi of Ikom, the Nkim, Nkum and Ekajuk of Ogoja in Cross River State and Ewe and Keaka of Mamfe in the Southern part of Cameroon. Perhaps, with the exception of Percy Talbot, earliest commentators referred to the Ejagham as “Ekoi”. In the present Cross River State, the aforementioned group collectively occupy contiguous expanse of territory stretching from most of Calabar Municipality, Akpabuyo and Odukpani Local Government Areas through Akamkpa and Ikom Local Government Areas and upwards to a sizeable portion of Ogoja Local Government Area. The Ejagham constitutes the most populous group in the present Cross River State (Tangban, 2008).

The meaning of the word “Ekoi” is not known, but several interpretations have been proffered in an attempt to explain the evolution of this terminology. The first opines that Ekoi is an Efik corruption of the Ejagham word “ekue”, a word that refers to camwood, a highly cherished fattening-room (monikim) cosmetic usually obtained from *ekue* – camwood tree (*Pterocarpus soyouxii*) and sold to early Efik traders. The second asserts that Ekoi is an Efik coinage used in reference to the Ejagham and derived from the Efik phrase, “kokoi mkpo” (meaning to fetch something), a phrase used by early Efik traders to explain the ease with which they obtained forest products from the Ejagham people for sale to the Europeans at relatively high prices (Onor, 1994, Tangban, 2008).

What seems clear from the foregoing explanations is that the word “Ekoi” came about in the course of commercial relations between the Ejagham and the Efik in the past and used in reference to the former. When this development occurred is, however, not known, but by the early 19th century, the term appeared to have become so common among the Efik as to find its way into accounts of some European visitors. However, the term “Ekoi” is unacceptable to the Ejagham (Onor, 1994).

Onor (1994) adds that another name “Atam” which the people of Northern Cross River State are associated with is a misnomer and evolved from “Ofunatam” which in itself, is an Anglicised version of a place name Ofun Ntam – a place located in present Nta clan in Ikom Local Government Area. It has been suggested that Ofun Ntam acquired the commercial importance during the era of the commodity trade to a point where the inhabitants of the upper reaches of the Cross River became known by their counterparts in the Lower Cross River basin as Atam, a word that was clearly derived from “Ofuntam”.

The Qua group of Ejagham of Calabar Municipality, who occupy a vast expanse of land that is geo-politically contiguous to Efik settlement(s) engaged in a long process of socio-economic relationship that was in the final analysis, beneficial to both groups. For example, the Qua widely acclaimed as culturally resilient are currently bilingual, speaking Qua as well as Efik as opposed to the Efut, their neighbours to the east, who have been

linguistically swallowed by the Efik. Qua language on its own part, is also upheld to have impacted on the Efik language as typically epitomised in some Efik cultural songs. A number of cultural items, such as what is today christened *ekombi* among others, were borrowed from the Qua by the Efik neighbours (Abasiattai, 1991).

Abasiattai (1991) records that the Qua call the Efik *Asun Anyong* (slaves of Abasi Enyong or Abasi Ibom, the Ibibio Supreme Being), while the Efik call the Qua *Abakpa* (Ikod Abakpa or people of Abakpa). The close contiguity and social relations of the Efik and Qua (Ejagham) increased in time as each group established new settlements or expanded old ones as new immigrants arrived respectively from Creek Town and other Efik settlements up the Cross and Calabar Rivers, and from Ekoi land. Close contiguity brought about mutual acculturation and symbolic economic relations between the Efik who were predominantly fishermen and traders, and the Qua who were mostly farmers and hunters. To their knowledge and practice of *ekpe* already acquired from the Efut, the Efik added other aspects of *ekpe* borrowed from the Qua like certain rituals recited in Qua Ejagham language. In the end, the Efik largely abandoned their own indigenous *nyana-nyaku* cult for *ekpe* which became the dominant Efik cult and secret society.

Other Qua cults and cult objects (together with the Qua names) which the Efik adopted included *nabi kim* effigies burnt during the end of the year, *utuak udok* ceremony of purging towns of evil spirits and protective “charms” or amulets called *okpata*, *nyom-itim* and *okpo-inon* used by the Efik to ward off evil spirit and witches. By far the greatest assimilation occurred of the Qua into Efik culture than the reverse. After initially dealing with the Qua on equal political footing, the Efik sooner or later gained considerable cultural influence over the Qua as they prospered in trade (Akpan, 2018).

Thus, the Qua, although retaining their own language, names and customs, which the perennial influx of new immigrants or slaves from Ekoi-land (sic.) kept alive, nevertheless largely adopted Efik, Efik names and several aspects of Efik customary law. A colonial source cited in Abasiattai (1991) observed in 1933, the Qua had “for many years used Efik as freely as their dialect and that in at least three Qua towns, Efik seemed to be more generally used than Qua”. Additionally, archaeological findings at the Qua site of the University of Calabar in 1977 indicated that the Qua once practiced Efik-Ibibio burial customs like erection of *nwomo* (memorial shrine). Deep socio-cultural diffusion occurred between the Ibibio and Ejagham (Abasiattai, 1991).

According to Abasiattai (1991), the pre-colonial relations between Akwa Ibom and their Upper Cross River neighbours were mostly commercial, social and cultural. Trade was conducted mostly through intermediaries; the experience has been of great antiquity. Several entrepots early developed along these trade zones notably Umon Island and Itu. The eventual boom in slave trade increased the volume of trade and expanded the trade routes. Numerous

Igbo, Ekoi, Biase and other slaves were thus brought down mainly through the Umon market to Itu where mostly Efik traders purchased them for sale to Europeans slavers at Calabar.

Other trade-goods from the Upper Cross region included yams, livestock, palm oil, ivory, wild rubber, canoe and pots which found their way mainly through the Umon market to major markets like Asang, Itu, Ikpa, Calabar, Ikot Offiong and Ifiayong. Particularly, Umon became famed as the emporium for trade in pots - *abang umon*, although the pots were made by the neighbouring Afikpo Igbo. Similarly, Ekoi yam brought down the Cross River to Ikot Offiong, and the giant Ekoi canoe known as *ubom atam* sold at Umon, Itu and Ikot Offiong, became famous throughout Ibibio land. Umon, an island settlement on the Cross River near Itu was considered a rich entrepot in respect of the Cross River trade during the 18th and 19th centuries. Its riverside market was said to be famous (Erim, 2005). Effa-Attoe citing Partridge captures a picture of the commercial setting of Umon thus:

Umon town had a large weekly market which was frequented by people from many places, both up and down river, so that approaching Umon by canoe on a market day, one finds the place engirdled with quite a fleet of canoes.... All tribes (sic) living in the Upper reaches of the Cross River, brought their merchandise to Umon and all the tribes, that lived south of Umon town brought their wares to Umon...people acted as middlemen and they allowed no trader to pass them (Cited Effa-Attoe, 1990: 75).

Latham (1990) confirms that, the Ibeno of Akwa Ibom State were long distance traders in fish and shrimps of the region, and in the 1870s, there was also long distance trade in yams which came down the river from Umon and beyond. He adds that Umon traders came as far South as Ikot Offiong. It is also recorded that:

The weavers of the region used unspun fibre from the palm wine tree to produce cloths five or six feet long, and two to two and a half foot wide. Although Manchester cloth had driven it out of the Calabar market by the middle of the century, it was still produced and worn in other parts of the country. It was made near Ikot Offiong in 1859 and in 1869, Robb described its manufacture there by the Ibibio, the material being striped and checked, as the fibre was previously dyed black, red, yellow or blue. This cloth was also worn in Arun beyond Atam (sic.) and in 1884, Peebles saw many of the people of Oban wearing grass cloth on a simple loom. Cotton cloth of a strong spun thread came from the Niger region, which was dyed with indigo, some of it being woven in broad pieces and others in narrow strips which were sewn together. In 1869, cotton was grown, spun and dyed in a distant part of Ibibio and at Ufun in Atam (sic.). In 1883 Beedie saw

women spinning cotton with a kind of distaff. A related skill was making twine, ropes and nets which was also done near Ikot Offiong and at Ebom beyond Emuramura. Wicherwork came from Akunakuna (sic.) (Latham, 1990: 82).

Commodities sent up the Cross River comprised of European manufactured goods traded in mainly by Efik middlemen. Nevertheless, particularly food was also sent up: in 1931 the Odod Eniong sold yam and cassava to Uwet and neighbouring Upper Cross River peoples. Indeed, many Uyanga, reputedly “experts” in traditional medicine, settled among the Iko to practice their art (Latham, 1990).

Even though there have been deep interactions between the people of Akwa Ibom and their Ejagham neighbours since the pre-colonial period, the relations blossomed during the colonial period. In this respect, Ukpong (1986) states that during the colonial period, the port of Itu in Akwa Ibom State became integrated with the world market. The produce sold at Itu during the period was drawn from a very wide and almost “unlimited” hinterland. It came from the Upper Cross River area as far afield as Ogoja, Obubra, Ikom, etc. by boat. In the 1940s, a large amount of the produce was carried on bicycle to Itu. Invariably, those going on foot slept on the way. But not all of them dared to make the journey all the way to Itu. There was still insecurity along the routes in the colonial days. The travelers were armed with machetes.

Since long-distance trade was full of dangers and travelers could be waylaid, killed or robbed of their possessions, only important people engaged in long-distance trade. In the Cross River, a canoe could be sunk by wild animals such as hippopotamuses and crocodiles. Long-distance traders were armed to the teeth. Some carried charms, which were said to be able to neutralise the attacks of wild animals. It is reported that one Inya Inyang, a prominent Agawagune trader took steps to ensure the safety of the Cross River route from Calabar to Mamfe. His body guards mounted canons and while sailing along the river, they beat gongs and fired canons to strike fear into the minds of riverine people and so rid the routes of pirates (Ukpong, 1986).

The produce from the hinterland around Itu Division was sold at Itu to some firms like United African Company (UAC), Paterson Zchonis (PZ), carried to Calabar by boat. During the colonial period, trade in Akwa Ibom was considerably enhanced as a result of improved transport and communications, greater security along the routes, the introduction of modern currency system, the introduction of the English language as a *lingua franca* in Nigeria, which provided a medium of communication among people of different ethnic groups and the import of a large variety of manufactured goods. The people of the Upper Cross River also bought fish, crayfish, shrimps, prawns, chewing stick as well as imported articles such as zinc,

cement and etc. Indeed, the market at Itu was the major outlet for the people of the Upper Cross River throughout the colonial period (Ukpong, 1986).

The indigenous boats continued to provide means of transportation along the Enyong Creek, the Ikpa Creek and the Cross River, alongside the Elder Dempster Lines and the Marine Department during the colonial period. By means of the Enyong Creek, the Ikpa Creek and the Cross River, the town of Itu was also linked by boat with Uruan, Oron, Calabar. Itu was linked by boat with the ports of Obubra, Apiapum, Adim, Asiga, Igbo, Ekuri, Ediba, Itigidi and Agwaguna and even parts of the Cameroon.

The Upper Cross River area was very poorly served with roads throughout the colonial period. The port of Itu was the major link with the outside world. In 1936, the Resident of Ogoja Province was said to have informed the Secretary, Southern Provinces that “there are no motor roads either in existence or under construction in Ikom Division, the only land communication being bicycle paths. Up till the early 1970s, there was no direct overland route linking Calabar with Ikom and the Upper Cross River area. The Cross River was the highway of trade between the Upper Cross River and Itu, the gateway to the north (Ukpong, 1986).

2.1. Akwa Ibom Diplomacy with the Efut

Having migrated originally from the Balondo, the Efut occupied the east and west of the Calabar River. Since tradition states that they precede the Efik (but not the Qua group of the Ejagham), their advent to the Calabar River probably occurred by 1500 A.D. Some Adadia Uruan people of present-day Akwa Ibom State also lived in the District. Thus, when the Efik arrived about the beginning of the 17th century from Uruan (in present-day Akwa Ibom State), it was the Efut who gave them land: first on the west bank where the Efik built Creek Town (near the Efut settlements of Ukem and Abua), and later on, on the east bank where they built Obutong (or Old Town). The neighbouring Efut settlements on the east bank included Ekondo, Ibundu, Mkpara and Ifoko. When, the Efik built other settlements on the east bank on neighbouring land obtained from the Qua, the Efut and Efik came to live in very close proximity, to inter-mingle and thereby mutually acculturate (Abasiattai, 1991).

Abasiatti (1991) opines that it was probably from the Efut that the Efik first learnt about, and eventually adapted, the *ekpe* secret society (which the Ekoi most probably originated). *Ekpe* names and titles like *Nkok*, *Ofuta*, *Mutaka* and *Eyamba*, for example used by Efik are Efut names. Inter-marriages also occurred particularly the Efut who were much fewer than the Efik and largely cut off from their ancestral Balondo land, reportedly “frequently took wives from Old Town, Henshaw Town and so on. The Efik sooner or later became commercial middle men between European traders on the coast on the one hand, and the Ibibio in the mainland and the Qua (Ejagham) and Upper Cross peoples like the Biase,

Uyanga and Ekuri on the other hand. Hence the Efik controlled much of the commercial intercourse of the Efut who were predominantly farmers (Ekarika, 2014).

Being closely associated with the Efik, largely isolated from Balondo land, and numerically insignificant, the Efut sooner became closely assimilated into Efik culture. Except their government, *ekpe* secret society and few tribal titles and personal and place names, the Efut became virtually indistinguishable from the Efik people. Alderton who researched among them during 1932-1933 wrote that although the Efut were originally of completely different origin, generations of close contact have made them in many ways one with the Efik majority, whose language and customs they have entirely adopted. Their own organisation, speech and religion long ago fell into disuse and are now forgotten, and it is doubtful if there is any accurate recollection of their indigenous institutions (Ekarika, 2014).

2.2. Akwa Ibom Diplomacy with the Okoyong and Ododop

According to Abasiattai (1991), Okoyong belongs to the Ibibio group of languages. The Okoyong migrated from the Cameroon as most other Semi-Bantu groups now occupying Southern Nigeria. Ekarika states that they travelled by land through Ekang border (Nigeria/Cameroon border). From there they crossed Awa, Achang and Eku rivers and settled at Ododop for a very long time. As their population multiplied, and being a warlike and invading people, the Okoyong fought among themselves and scattered far and near into the present-day Nigerian territory, some settling in the forest region, first at Ekron, others moved further to establish Ekong Anaku, while others migrated and invaded the settlement of Adadia Uruan in Western Calabar.

Significantly, the Okoyong have Afaha group of people, like the Ibibio. The Okoyong migrated to their present habitats from the Cameroon, settling first at Ododop north of Calabar. During their further migrations from Ododop, they established enclaves at Okoyong Usang Abasi and Buden in Uwet before settling at Atakpa between the present Uwet and Odod Ndon Nwong. At Atakpa, contacts developed between them and the Adiabo-Efik further south. However, as Atakpa was swampy, some of the Okoyong eventually left for Ndun Ebe, the present site of Odod Ndon Nwong while the rest, after remaining for a while, also left for Adiabo on the west bank of the Calabar River, where they established the settlement of Ekon Atan Aku (Abasiatt, 1991; Ekarika, 2014).

Okoyong traditions describe the nature of the early relations between sections of the Okoyong and the Adiabo and Adadia-Uruan who, as noted, already occupied the region. The Okoyong left behind at Atakpa became “very friendly” with Adiabo “as the mother of one of their chiefs was an Adiabo woman”. At the end, the Adiabo invited these Okoyong to live near them which they did when they established Ekon Atan Aku.

Relations between the Okoyong faction that went to Ndun Ebe and the Adiabo-Ibibio whom they eventually met markedly contrasted with Atakpa-Adiabo relations. According to

Okoyong traditions, “the Ibibio and Okoyong were unable to understand each other’s language; hence, a fight eventually broke out between them during which the Ibibio were driven out and chased to the other side of the Cross River and the village of Adadia was burnt. After a while, the Okoyong themselves went to live at the Adadia site which they renamed Okpok Ikpa and from there they spread to their present villages in Okoyong. A more probable reason for the Okoyong-Adadia “fight” was the determination of the Okoyong, after wandering for so long in search of good land, to possess Adadia territory. (Ekarika, 2014).

Although Okoyong traditions reportedly contain “no record of any further trouble” between the Okoyong and the neighbouring Ibibio group such as Uruan, Efik, Odod and Ediong until 1867, it is likely that some skirmishes did occur. It should be noted that, by the 1880s, many Okoyong had started to bear Efik names, worship *Abasi* and swear by *mbiam* (besides the poisonous esere beans). They sacrificed to *eka Abasi*, the Ibibio fertility god; they used *usan Abasi* in their ritual ceremonies and Efik names for their week-days; and practiced Efik marriage customs, including fattening. Above all, the Okoyong speak Efik (in the place of their indigenous language known as Ododop) and the *lingua franca* of other traders such as Aro-Igbo with whom the Okoyong also traded (Ekarika, 2014).

Oku notes that in an enquiry instituted by the then South Eastern State Government in 1973, it was revealed that a large portion of what is now Okoyong was originally occupied by the Adadia. When the Okoyong migrated from Ododop in the Cameroons to the north of Calabar in the 17th century, they met the Adadia and the struggle for existence between the two “tribes” erupted into a bloody war in which a Creek Town man was inadvertently killed. Creek Town immediately declared war on Okoyong and compelled the majority of the latter people to leave their settlement called Ekong Atan Oku towards a place called Akamkpa. Meanwhile, the chase against Adadia by Okoyong continued until they were driven across the Cross River to Ibibio land where they are till today (Oku, 1989). Some remnants of Uruan people still inhabit Okoyong area. It should be added that there are few parts of Cross River State that Akwa Ibom are not found in large numbers.

3. Missionary Enterprise: Integration of the People of the Cross River Region

According to Coleman (1986) Christianity was an integrative force, in that it provided a trans-tribal bond uniting individuals of different and formerly hostile traditional communities. The missions made evangelistic efforts among virtually all the provinces and groups of Southern Nigeria. Annual church conferences attended by African clergymen and lay agents of diverse cultural backgrounds, helped to break down parochialism and awaken a wider view and a consciousness of racial identity. Moreover, in the rapidly growing multi-tribal urban communities, Christian churches provided a link among converts of different “tribes” and a new basis of loyalty in which ethnic origin became less relevant. As missions had a monopoly over education, the Christians in urban communities included most of the educated elements,

who were later to become the leaders in protest movements and in the awakening of a political and trans-tribal consciousness.

This assertion applies vividly to the activities of The Presbyterian Mission, the oldest Christian missionary group in Eastern Nigeria. The group arrived in Calabar in 1846, led by Rev. Hope Masterton Waddell. Expansion of the mission field outside Calabar took place after 1880, mostly through the Calabar and Cross River – the major highways up country. Mission stations were opened at Ikot Ana in 1884 under James Luke, a missionary explorer; at Akpap Okoyong and Unwana in 1888; at Arochukwu in 1903 and at Itu in 1904, under Mary Slessor and Emuramura, further up the Cross River.⁷ Other stations were opened at Ikoneto, Adiabo, Uwet, Okoyong, Ekri Tabaka, Umon, Ikot Offiong (an Efik commercial settlement in Ibibio land), Agwagune, Adadama and Oban. The mission also penetrated the central part of present-day Cross River State (Aye, 1987, Njoku, 2000)

Educational institutions such as the famous Hope Waddell Training Institution, Calabar, founded in 1895, Girls' Institute in Creek Town were established in Creek Town in 1897, and Edgerley Girls' Primary School at Calabar in 1898, undoubtedly served as nursery for the "fusion of tribes" (Cited in Akpan, 2018). In addition, The Presbyterian Mission established the Mary Slessor Joint Hospital, Itu, in 1905, as a tribute to Mary Slessor's pioneering work in the Cross River Region. The hospital served the people of some part of present-day Akwa Ibom State and Cross River States. In 1928, a leper colony was also established by the Mission by Dr. A.B. Macdonald. Leprosy patients from the Cross River region beyond received succor at the institution. These medical institutions like the educational institutions brought the people under study closer than before.

4. Conclusion

The concept of inter-group relations which is the "how of diplomacy" implies that there is usually the existence of more than one or two groups and usually what happens or follows is that there is exchange of relations which may be political, social or economic. The concept signifies a mutual world of inter-dependency in which no group or single individual is all sufficient and all knowing. It implies that no group or individual is an island and because of individual specific limitation and short coming, there is always exchange of relations in order to complement shortfalls in relationship. In economic enclaves, where there is economic specialisation in the production of goods and services, there is also need for exchange of goods and services thereby creating a world of inter-dependency and mutual relations. Either as an individual, group or society, it is impossible to produce everything a society or individual needs and thus, the need for inter-relations (Cited in Akpan, 2018).

This scenario applies to the aforementioned groups in the Cross River region of the Eastern Niger Delta. The groups, as the study has shown, migrated from the Cameroon area and settled in the respective domains. Natural features, particularly the Cross River provided

the natural channel of linkage between them. The Ejagham, Efut, Okoyong etc. of present-day Cross River State related very closely with the Efik, which has a tradition of being an off-shot of the Ibibio. Economic and social interactions also took place between the groups in Akwa Ibom and these groups in present-day Cross River State.

From all indications, the contacts pre-date the advent of the Europeans to the area, but the tempo was increased with the activities of the Europeans in the area. Colonial rule came with urbanisation and improved infrastructure, Itu, a settlement in Akwa Ibom State became the fulcrum of contact between the people. Moreover, the missionary enterprise provided the desired platform for integration, particularly through educational and health institutions established in the area. The work has shown that the people relied heavily on the other groups and were not atomistic people who were perpetually at war with themselves as was postulated by a major Nigerian historian. The lessons of the past fruitful contacts should be assimilated by the present generation as the people of the Niger Delta region continues to yearn for development.

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