

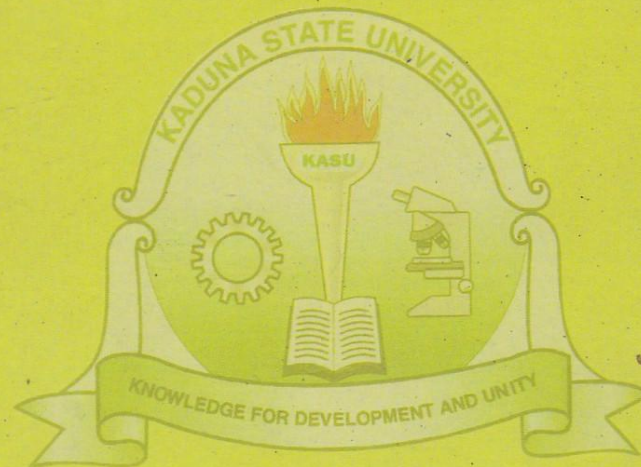


KADUNA JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES

VOLUME 1

NUMBER 2

2017



ISSN: 2636 - 6436

A Publication of the Department of History,
Kaduna State University, Kaduna - Nigeria

Ibibio/ Ijaw Diplomacy since the Pre-colonial Period

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Abstract

This paper examines the relations between the Ibibio and the Ijaw ethnic nationalities of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The paper notes that the diplomatic contacts between the two neighbours pre-date the advent of the Europeans to the region and was tremendously enhanced by the favourable geographical factors, particularly the river system. Trade was promoted and cultural exchanges took place. The advent of the Europeans triggered the Atlantic slave trade and eventually led to the blossoming of some coastal centres, particularly Bonny, which served as the major entrepot for the trade. After the slave trade came the era of trade in staple commodities, especially palm produce, the region also served as the major source of the raw materials. The establishment of colonial rule brought the Ibibio into the same socio-political realm with the Ijaw, except the territories that were administered by the Royal Niger Company until 1900. The missionary enterprise also served as fulcrum of integration of the people. Even though the Ibibio and Ijaw are at present grouped into distinct states within the Nigerian state, interactions have not seized. Adopting a historical narrative methodology, the paper enjoins the two most visible groups in the Niger Delta region strengthen the long historical interactions for sustainable national development.

Introduction

Diplomacy may be conceptualised as the “how of inter-group relations”, that is, an art of conducting relations with other states or communities so as to further interest” (Usman and Odeh, 2015). The concept of inter-group relations 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 relationship which

may be political, social or economic. The concept implies a mutual world of inter-dependency in which no group or individual is all sufficient and all knowing. Because of individual specific limitation and short coming, there is always an exchange of relationship in order to complement the shortfalls in relations (Uji, 2015).

Since the pre-colonial era, interactions have been in vogue particularly, among groups within the same region. This has long been the experience of the Ibibio and Ijaw ethnic nationalities in the Niger Delta region. The Niger Delta has nine constituent states with a span of more than 7,000 square kilometers an. It is said to be one of the world’s largest expanses of wet land (Akpan, 2011). It is an ethnographic melting pot with more than 50 ethnic groups (Gbeneye, 2009). From the 2006 census figures, the region has a population of about 32 million people. The Niger Delta stretches from Benin River in the West to the Cross River in the East. It is a low-lying land of innumerable creeks, water ways and mangrove swamps. It is roughly divided into three, the Central, the Western and the Eastern Delta (Akpan, 2011).

Some factors, especially the river system sustained the robust relations between the Ibibio and Ijaw. The Ibibio share open frontiers with the Ijaw to the Southwest (Udo, 1983). Indeed, any meaningful discussion of the external contacts and relations of the groups in Niger Delta must necessarily include an assessment of the extent to which its geography or natural features promoted contacts with the neighbours. Afigbo (1990) considers the Cross River estuary as the Eastern extension of the great delta of the Niger. He adds that the Niger Delta, which extends as far as the West of Nigeria through network of creeks, has been a highway of commercial and cultural contact. The maze of creek and in-land waterways made it possible for people to travel by canoe from Lagos to Calabar without necessarily having to enter the sea.

Though the term Ijaw is used in the discourse, emphasis is paid to the Ijaw groups of Bonny, Kalabari and Okrika. Moreover, the term Ibibio applies to the Ibibio and her related groups such as the Annang, Oron and Eket.

The Ibibio

The Ibibio dispersed from the Central Benue valley to Usak Edet region of the Cameroon, from where they migrated through

various routes into present day Nigeria (Akpan, 2017). Ibibio land is located west of the Cross River and east of the Imo River in what is now the South-South geo-political zone. Ibibio land is known for its rich natural resources. This ethnic group is found in Akwa Ibom State, which is also the indigenous home land of the Ibibio. They number about four million according to the figures of the 2006 National population exercise. Their language, "Ibibio" is spoken all over the state, while Annang, a dialectal variant of Ibibio is spoken in the former Abak and Ikot Ekpene Districts" (Esen, 1982). Eket dialect is also spoken in Eket area.

The main occupations of the indigenous Ibibio people are farming and fishing. They cultivate their main food crops: yam, cassava, maize, plantain and cocoyam. They also harvest from their numerous creeks, rivers and open sea: fish, crayfish, crabs, periwinkle and other sea foods. For their meat, they harvest from the rain forest, varieties of wild animals which abound in them (Udofot, 2017).

According to Ford and Jones, the Ibibio-speaking people can be classified into six main sub-groups or "sub-tribes":

Main Sub-Groups	Location
1. Eastern or Proper Ibibio	Uyo, Etinan, parts of Eket, Ikot Ekpene, Abak and Ikot Abasi
2. Western Ibibio or Annang	Abak and Ikot Ekpene Divisions, plus parts of Umuahia and Aba Divisions in Abia State
3. Northern Ibibio or Enyong	Parts of Itu, Calabar and Ikot Ekpene Divisions plus Parts of Bende in Abia State
4. Southern Ibibio	Oron and parts of Eket Division
5. Delta Ibibio or Andoni	Ibeno parts of Eket and Ikot Abasi Divisions
6. Riverine Ibibio or Efik	Calabar and parts of Itu Divisions

N/b: This Table has been modified in the light of current political developments in Nigeria leading to the re-adjustment of administrative boundaries (see Ekong Ekong (2001), *Sociology of the Ibibio: A Study of Social Organisation and Change*. Uyo: Modern Business Press. pp. 2-3).

The Ijaw

Okoroabia (2009) has classified the Ijaw into five geographical groups as follows:

- (a) The Ijaw of the Western Delta Fringe - Apoi, Arogbo, Furupagha, Olodiana, Gbaranmatu (or Oproza), Egbeme and Ogbo. They are found in present-day Ondo, Edo and Delta States.
- (b) The Ijaw of Western Delta - Obotebe, Mein, Seinbiri, Tuomo, Tarakiri, Kabowei, Kumbowei, Operemo, Oyakiri (or Beni), Ogulagha, iduwini, Kuo of Delta State.
- (c) The Ijaw of Central Delta - Apoi, Bassan, Olodiana, Oporama, Ogboin, Tungbo, Kolokuma, Opokuma, Gbarain, Okordia (Akita), Biseni, Oruma (Tugbene), Ekpetiama, Tarakiri, Bumo, Akasa (Akaha) and Nembe (Brass) of Bayelsa State.
- (d) The Ijaw of the Eastern Delta - Kalabari (New Calabar), Okrika (Warikike), Ibani (Bonny) in Rivers State.
- (e) The Ijaw of the Eastern Delta Fringe - Nkoro (Kala Kirika), Defaka and Ibani (Opobo) in Rivers State.

According to Owonaro (1949), Ijo (Ijaw) the progenitor of the Ijo (Ijaw) "tribe" was the first son of Oduduwa, the son of Lamurudu. His fervent and impatient desire to rule is said to have resulted in an order given by the king to banish him from Ife during which King Oduduwa asked him to go and guard the mouth of the River Niger in order to prevent it from being seized and possessed by foreigners. Ijaw's first place of call is said to have been Benin. From there, he and his people moved to the bank of the Benin River and continued to disperse eastwards through the Escravos River. Moving eastward, they got to Forcados River and founded some settlements. He got to Ofonitoru with his group and to Igbedi Creek, where he was said to have moved along what became known as "Wilberforce Island", and in the bush called Agadagbabon.

Owonaro (1949) adds that it was from this location that Ijaw settlements of the Eastern Delta such as Bonny and settlements in other parts of the Central Delta were founded. Obviously, this account places emphasis on west-east theory of origin. Derefaka (2003) however, opines that this unidirectional proposition of origin and migration is a "simplistic explanation of origin of the

people". He adds that the complexity of the language map of the Niger Delta confirms the complexity of contacts and movements within the area. This stance seems to be correct because some of the groups that now constitute the "Ijaw nation" have east-west theory of origin like the Ibibio.

Having presented a brief history of the origin, migration and settlement of the Ijaw, it is necessary to also examine the three Ijaw groups that this study is mainly concerned with.

Bonny

According to Jones (1963), the Bonny people were derived from a section of the Ndoki group living on the Lower Imo River, who claim to have migrated there from the Central Ijaw area. They gradually moved down the river into the Delta and eventually settled at the mouth of Rio del Rey in territory already occupied by two other communities such as Abalama and Iyankpo.

Alagoa (1972) states that European visitors speculated on the origin of the Ibani (Bonny) and linked their origin with the Igbo hinterland. According to him, some early European traders thought that Ibani language was similar to Igbo. One Eurocentric tradition has it that the Ibani sprang from an Ngwa Igbo hunters, Alagbariye, who accessed the Bonny area through Azumini Creek. However, Alagoa states that the ancestors of the Ibani had their original homes in the Central Delta. Afigbo (1987) opines that the ancestors of Bonny came from Benin and adds that a section under Alagbariye, the first King of Bonny, and the founder of the present Bonny House of Bristol, proceeded South through Opoku (in Ogoni country) and Essene (in Akwa Ibom State), reaching finally the site they called Okoloma before they got to Bonny. The section that remained behind settled on the sites now known as Umuagbanyi, Azuogu, Ayama and Obunku.

The Portuguese account of Bonny given at the beginning of the 16th century describes it as "a very large village of some 2,000 inhabitants". It discloses that the people were already trading in large canoes capable of taking up to 80 men to the markets and hundred "leagues" and more away (sic.) (Alagoa, 1972). Dike (1956) observes that with the Bonny settlers as middlemen in the trade with the Europeans, fresh voluntary migrations from the hinterland occurred. People continued to flow into the area and swell the Delta population mainly by way of slave trade. He adds

that Bonny was the economic and political centre of the Niger Delta during the greater part of the 19th century.

Okrika

The name "Okrika" is the Anglicised version of the word "Kirike", which is a short form for "Wakrike", the Okrika word for "we are not different" or rather "we are the same people". Okrika city-state is made up of nine main towns: Kirika (Okrika), Ogoloma, Ibaka, Ogbogbo, Ogu, Abuloma, Isaka and Ele. It has some 150 villages and many fishing settlements dotted over the Eastern Niger Delta. At present, Okrika speaking people are situated in three local government areas, namely: Okrika, Ogu/ Bolo and Port Harcourt. In addition, there are people of Okrika stock in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area of River State (Ogan, 2008).

As a matter of fact, Okrika people do not trace their origin to one ancestor. Several accounts point to migration at different times from various places, but particularly from Central Ijaw land. It is not also clear when such migrants started their movements and when they settled at Okrika. It is likely that each Okrika had its distinct history of migration and settlement but later became a federation for mutual defence. Solidarity of the different settlements with the Kirike settlement was achieved and perfected because in the early period, people formed alliances to ward off external aggression. The acceptance of the leadership of the Kirike settlements by all other Okrika settlement was cemented via a covenant known as *oboku* (Ogan, 2008).

An explorer Dappa, had mentioned *Mboko* (Ibibio) in his writing and reasoned that their territory was somewhere north of modern Okrika. A few years later, Jean Barbot wrote that "the territory of Okrika lies some leagues north-west of Rio Real and borders south of that of *Mboko*, which lies on the sea". This suggests that the Ibibio and Okrika had contact even before the advent of the Europeans in the 16th century (Noah, 1980).

Kalabari

Kalabari Kingdom is divided into three areas: the metropolitan city of Elem Kalabari: the outlying towns of Kalabari culture, and the communities of Bukuma, Elem, Bakana, Obonoma and Udekama (or Degema) some of which had been of clearly alien

culture. For instance, a community known as Ido (Otu Obulo) near Buguma, migrated from the Andoni area but have become almost completely acculturated to Kalabari. All the people are now known by the collective *Ibe* name of Kalabari, applying specifically to the city at which Europeans traded on the New Calabar River (Alagoa, 1972).

Early oral tradition traces the movement of the people from Elem Kalabari and the Eastern Delta to an Ijaw community called Owame, residing near Igbo village community or Amafo on the right bank of the New Calabar River. Here, they formed a number of small independent Ijaw communities of heterogeneous origin, some of whom claim to have moved into the Delta previously to Kalabari, others to have always been there. Contemporary traditions refer to the founder of this community as Kalabari, from whom derive the main group of Ijaw "tribes" of the Central Delta. His son Ende, is believed to have led this migration from Amafo and he was joined at Elem Kalabari by another group of migrants from the East (from Efik) under Opu-koro-ye, who brought with them Owame Akaso, the tutelary deity of the community (Jones, 1963).

Northrop (1978) states that the Kalabari later incorporated other immigrants, some said to be from Efik and others from Igbo, as is evidenced by Igbo names in the genealogies of important families in the 17th century. Although Alagoa (2005) has attempted to discountenance the tradition of Efik origin of Kalabari (New Calabar), Efik tradition has it that some Efik from Duke Town in Calabar founded a small settlement in the vicinity of Kalabari. Aye (1967) adds that Barbot Duke Aphrom's ancestor is believed to have been the one by whose initiative an Efik settlement was planted in the Eastern Delta of the Niger to be later known as "New Calabar". The colony failed to thrive because of constant quarrels between the colonists and their neighbours.

Oku (1989) cites the following from an account which Mary Kingsley, a great traveler, gave in 1899 in connection with New Calabar thus:

New Calabar was first founded some 250 years ago, when, tradition says, one of the Ephraim Duke family from Calabar settled at a spot from whence they retired in 1880 (Oku, 1989: xii).

It has been asserted further that the period of Efik settlement in the area would be around 1650 and seems to tally with Aye's assertion above that it was founded by Barbot Duke Aphrom's ancestor. Aye concludes that although Mary Kingsley recorded that Ephraim Duke family withdrew back to Calabar, there was evidence that not all of them did so for a good number remained permanently in their new home and were subsequently absorbed through inter-marriage with their hosts. Eyamba Town still stands south of Bonny and Duke's compound exists today in New Calabar (Kalabari) while some of the people there still answer Black Duke or just "Duke". It seems the settlement arose from commercial contact and not from war (Oku, 1989).

Amos, cited in Oku, has also commented on the Efik presence in Kalabari thus:

It can be validly asserted that Efik influence permeated and to a great extent dominated the entire spectrum of social, economic and cultural life not only in the present South Eastern State of Nigeria but far into the East Central State, parts of Rivers State (there is an early Efik colony – Kalabari in the Rivers State)...It is important to note that the period of Efik colonisation ushered European civilisation into South Eastern State and neighbouring lands (Cited Oku, 1989: xii).

Geographical Factor and Ibibio/Ijaw Diplomacy

As noted, geography played significant role in the diplomatic relations between the Ibibio and the Ijaw. Obviously, the areas have been united by rivers and waterways. The people of the Cross River valley and the Ijaw have moved from one region to the other. The Ijaw, mainly fish in the estuaries of the Cross River and the Bakassi (Tiko) areas and the Ibibio exploit the resources of Ijaw land (Alagoa, 2005).

Economic Diplomacy Between the Ibibio and the Ijaw

Trade has always been an important factor and indeed the life-blood of inter-ethnic relations. Scholars have classified pre-colonial trade patterns into two, namely: long distance and local trade (Akpan, 2016).

Long distance markets and the trade routes which served the Ibibio and Ijaw were far less numerous than their local

counterparts. Such markets varied in fame, importance and size. The volume and value of domestic goods traded over long distances were much less than those of goods traded in local markets. Yet in the broad historical development of pre-colonial Africa, long distance trade is usually seen as being more important than local trade. This may be partly because the local trade did not have sufficient internal momentum to defy pressures towards self-sufficiency. Long distance trade may be seen, as a mechanism by which the indigenous economy tried to overcome the limitations of local trade, such as the prevalence of low purchasing power. This encouraged occupational specialisation, implying a move away from economic self-sufficiency towards inter-dependence. Inter-dependence had implications for peaceful co-existence that defied ethnic and political boundaries (Njoku, 2001).

Some features of long distance trade contrasted markedly from those of local trade. Long distance traders often traversed diverse communities and territories varying cultures and political systems. The traders, therefore, had to deal with the problems of logistics – transportation, security, accommodation and storage facilities. In these respects, the traders worked in close liaison with the hosts/landlords and brokers. Secondly, unlike local trade, which was dominated by women, long distance trade was dominated by men in most parts of Nigeria. The tradition which tended to confine women to domestic chores made it difficult for them to undertake long-range journeys which would keep them away from home (Njoku, 2001).

Even though contacts between the Niger Delta people with Europeans started with the advent of the Portuguese to the area in the late 15th century, internal long-distance trade was already in operation. Canoes came from one hundred leagues (sic.) upstream to sell goods to people at the centres of trade in the Delta (Alagoa, 2005) The overseas trade in slaves in the area was conducted on the basis of European demand and African supply. While it lasted, the Eastern Delta states constituted the core areas of supply of slaves to destinations in the Americas. Kalabari, Bonny and Okrika traders obtained slaves from markets in their hinterland including Ibibio land (Derefaka and Orugbani, 2009).

Derefaka and Orugbani (2009), citing a Portuguese source state that the people of the Eastern Delta traded not only with their neighbours in the adjacent water swamp, but also people of

the hinterland. According to them, in 1506, Pereira reported that there was trade at a delta port on the Rio del Rey with those in the hinterland as far as “a hundred leagues or more”. The traders were said to have used large canoes made out of a single trunk and brought yams, slaves, cows and sheep from the hinterland.

In the 17th century, Barbot described trading canoes at Elem Kalabari which were very similar to these described by Pereira. Barbot listed banana, chicken, palm wine and palm oil as items the Ijaw peoples brought from the hinterland. In exchange for these, the Ijaw supplied salt to the people of the hinterland. According to John Adams, who reported early in the 19th century, the Eastern Delta states manufactured salt by boiling sea water in “neptunes, or large brass pans, taken from Europe to Bonny”. A north-south trade developed since food was in short supply in the delta and salt was in great demand in the hinterland (Derefaka and Orugbani, 2009).

Bonny was virtually forced by her geographical location in relation to the other states to concentrate on the development of markets in the trade area comprising the valley of Imo River and the lands adjoining it in the Cross River valley. Bonny traders could only reach markets in the northern mainland with difficulty by passing through territory under the control of the Kalabari or Okrika. Bonny established an accord with Okrika so that without direct outlet or port, Bonny could export the produce of the “outside world” through the port of Okrika. Bonny also reached eastern parts of Ogoni through the Andoni (Ibibio) area from such bases as Opuoko. But the major area of Bonny trade from early times remained the valley of the Imo River. Bonny developed markets among the Ndoki of the Imo valley at Azumini, Ohambele, Akwete, Obunku and others. At the Lower Imo valley, Bonny did business with the Ibibio from such outposts as Essene, Urata, Enwanga and others (Alagoa, 1990).

During the long period of trade, apart from fish and salt which were abundant in Ijaw land; European wares such as: metal, rods, manilla, etc., from overseas served as commodities for exchange with the hinterland producers including the Ibibio. They acquired from the Ibibio and other Cross River groups new goods demanded by the Europeans such as slaves, ivory as well as larger quantities of older items of trade such as yams and other foodstuffs for supply to the slave ships (Alagoa, 1990).

A missionary account confirms the existence of the trade relations between the Ibibio and Bonny thus:

Making to Etinan beach, the missionaries paddled about five hours up-stream, when their way was blocked by hostile Ibibio. The river was narrow and the armed savages had felled trees blockading the waterway to cut off any possibility of their return. The situation was saved by the sudden arrival of several large canoes from Bonny Creek, which swept round the corner and right up the beach, full of men armed with rifles and swords, about 150 of them. They were coming up to settle a private trading palaver. Taking their stand by the two white men, they carried the little mission boat safely over the trees, while the Ibibio fled into the dense forest (Howden, 1951: 58).

The movement of people from the core Niger Delta for economic and cultural reasons continues. Fishermen move from the "core" Niger Delta migrate to the creeks and estuaries of the Cross River region and beyond to the Rio del Rey in the Cameroon Republic. Similarly, farmers and palm-wine tappers from the Cross River region, particularly Akwa Ibom, operate in all parts of the "core" Niger Delta (Ijaw) as far as the Central Delta. Alagoa (1990) agrees that the interaction continues.

Medium of Exchange

In market economy, the use of money was the key to all transactions. In the 19th century Nigeria with its diversified market economy, exchange was facilitated by the use of currency. But, unlike in modern Nigeria, there was not one universally accepted currency, but several. These included manillas, brass rods, cowries, copper rods, copper wires, stripes of cloth, salt, etc. Each of these currencies had its area of dominance and acceptability. The manilla was dominant in the Oil Rivers, including Southern Igbo land, while the brass rod was in use most especially in the Niger Delta (Derefaka and Orugbani, 2009).

Other Aspects of Diplomatic Contacts Between the Ibibio and the Ijaw

As rightly recorded by Alagoa (2005):

People from the Cross River valley apparently penetrated the Niger Delta over thousand years ago. The Ogoni and the Andoni (Obolo) entered the eastern Niger Delta periphery long ago from the Cross River valley or east of it, and have made the Niger Delta their home. These cases confirm the possibility of movements through the creeks and rivers that naturally unite regions from antiquity. The Abua of River State and Ogbia of Bayelsa State suggest movements into the Niger Delta regions east of the Cross River State, and penetrating farther west into the Niger Delta (Alagoa, 2005: 137).

Alagoa (1980) notes that clearer evidence of the westward expansion of Benue-Congo speakers is perhaps, the presence of outposts of small groups within areas of Kwa speakers. That is the case with a number of small groups within Rivers State such as ...Mini, Kugbo, Oduval, Ogbogolo, Bukuma and Abuloma and added that traditions of Ibani (Bonny) suggest earlier contacts over a longer period with the Cross River valley. The Ibani relationship became deeper and closer relationship was forged after Opobo people was settled on the Imo River (Opobo River) estuary from Bonny in 1869.

According to Alagoa (2005), there is evidence of the age of these contacts in the record of the names by which the visiting Europeans identified various groups. Thus, European visiting the Cross River region referred to the Ibibio by the names of *Moco* or *Moko*, which are renditions of the term *Mboko* by which the Andoni, Okrika, Kalabari, Nembe and other Ijaw groups identify the Ibibio in general. The other name, *Qua* or *Kwa* that appears in some European documents for the Ibibio is said to have been derived from the Bonny name for Ibibio. According to Abasiattai (1991), the fact that the Ijaw separated from the Benue-Congo about 5,000 years ago does not imply that the Ijaw had no dealings with, or knowledge of, the Ibibio until recent times. Another aspect of relations between the Ibibio and the Ijaw is by intermarriage. This process has been going on since the pre-colonial period and continues till the present.

Colonial Rule and the Ibibio/Ijaw Diplomacy

The appointment of John Beecroft as the British Consul in the Bight of Biafra (now Bight of Bonny) marked the beginning

of direct British administration in the Niger Delta region. In 1885, a protectorate was declared over the Oil Rivers territory which brought the Ibibio and the Ijaw under a single administration with its headquarters at Calabar. The three Ijaw areas were administered from Calabar. One remarkable aspect of the establishment of colonial rule in Bonny was the establishment of schools by the colonial government. One of the earliest of such schools was Government School, Bonny, which became the nursery school for the educated elite in Ibibio land and many parts of the Niger Delta. Some of these nation builders from Ibibio land. Some of the educational institutions that existed in the area included National College Buguma; Okrika Grammar School, Okrika, Ibibio State College, Ikot Ekpene etc. These institutions were attended by Ibibio and Ijaw, thereby helping tremendously in the "fusion of tribes" (Akpan, 2012).

The Missionary Enterprise and the Ibibio/Ijaw Diplomacy

Christianity was introduced in Ijaw area during the second half of the 19th century through the indomitable faith, zeal and courage of the early missionaries, namely: Rev. Hope Waddell, who visited Bonny in 1850. Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther and his son Archdeacon Dandeson Crowther established the first church in Bonny in 1864. It later spread to Brass in 1868, Kalabari in 1874 and Okrika in 1878 (Derefaka and Orugbani, 2009).

Garrick Braide of Kalabari became the first Christian charismatic evangelist in most part of the Niger Delta. Garrick Braide was a communicant and warden of St. Andrew's Church in Bakana, his home town. He left the Anglican Church and became a famous healer through prayer. The movement spread to many parts of Ibibio land. Other Christian denominations spread vice-versa and helped in the process of integration as already discussed in chapter six.

Cultural Borrowing: Contemporary Experience

A substantial number of Ijaw fishermen migrated to settle with the Cross River peoples in the coastal littoral settlement of Ibeno, James Town and Oron. These Ijaw migrants made fishing their fulltime occupation with consequences which have impacted greatly on the eating habit of the Cross River peoples. Thus, seafood, items of crayfish, smoked or fresh fish have now become

a daily ingredient of Cross River meals from the coast to northernmost parts and beyond. The domestic demand could not be met by indigenous fishermen's supply. The Ijaw participation in the supply helped to satisfy it. The Ijaw have been and are still very useful in the Cross River valley. The Ijaw undoubtedly strengthened the fishing industry in the Cross River valley (Ubi and Igoli, 2009).

The Ijaw have also made impact in the Cross River valley in terms of fashion. Today, there is a pattern of dress that has been developed and worn by men and women which has become characteristic of the Cross River valley. In fact, the style of dress and hat is a recurrent motif in the Niger Delta. The Ijaw, Ibibio and Efik have extensively borrowed from each other. The bowler hat, a big wrapper or loin cloth and beaded neck lace which are popular among the Ijaw, Ibibio and Efik are products of historical commercial interaction. The form of the Niger Delta attire has now been given the appellation "resource control" by local politicians. Nigerians have a flair for naming their costumes after specific contemporary events or issues. Thus, for example, hair styles have been named "Nigeria drives right", "Eko bridge", and many more. At present, the burning issue, in the whole of the Niger Delta is "resource control". Consequently, the style of dressing is favoured by politicians from the area is aptly named "resource control", this consist of an upper dress and a trouser (Ubi and Igoli, 2009).

Conclusion

Akwa Ibom area, an integral part of the Cross River basin, also situates in the Niger Delta and is geographically contiguous with the Ijaw area of the Niger Delta region. According to Alagoa (2005), geography has been one of the determinants of historical events. It may be only one among many factors, but can be quite significant in some historical situations, as in the relations between the Cross River valley and the Ijaw. The Ijaw and Ibibio areas have, indeed, been united by rivers and waterways, a unity that extends all across the coast of West Africa through lagoons, creeks and seas and there has been continuity in the distribution of peoples and cultures between them. People from the Cross River valley apparently penetrated the Ijaw area a thousand years ago.

The advent of the Europeans to the area triggered deeper contacts between the Ibibio and the Ijaw. Many slaves were acquired from Ibibio land and shipped overseas from Ijaw port of Bonny. In the process some of them intermingled with the Ijaw. During the period of trade in staple commodities, which palm oil and kernel were the main commodities of trade, the Ibibio area was the main source of these commodities to Ijaw land. In addition, food stuffs were acquired from Ibibio land while, salt was brought in from Ijaw land. The fishing and palm wine industries also serve as the economic arteries of contact. Many Ibibio have decades been migrating to Ijaw land to fish and serve as palm wine tappers and distillers of palm wine. Indeed, Ijaw land serves as the main source of local gin to Ibibio people.

However, it should be noted that in recent times, there has been claims and counter claims by the Ibibio and the Ijaw on their numerical strength. In other words, the two groups contest the position of the fourth largest ethnic group in the country. This at times, tends to bring them to logger heads and become counter productive. There is no doubt that the two groups are the most visible groups in the Niger Delta region. It would rather be more beneficial for them to pull their strength together and contribute more significantly to the development of the region rather than unnecessarily contesting an issue that is within the ambient of the National Population Commission.

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