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CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN IBIBIO PRE-COLONIAL SOCIETY: THE COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Diplomacy has been an instrument used in the establishment and management of relations in all human societies since the dawn of history. Communication enhances smooth diplomatic process and serves as a gateway of diplomacy such as blood is to the human body. This might be the reason why some scholars narrowly equate communication with diplomacy. Whenever communication ceases, diplomacy has always been hampered, thereby resulting in conflict. Communication methods adopted in diplomatic intercourse may be verbal or non-verbal. The pre-colonial Ibibio extensively integrated non-verbal communication into its diplomatic profile. The nonverbal communication instruments included: leaves, feathers, horns, stones, water, etc., used to express desires and needs; assert authority; initiate action; share jokes; opinions and sentiments as well as the enforcement of sanction. These instruments were part and parcel of the way of life of the people and utilised symbolism from the community, hence they could readily connect with the people. The use of these cultural methods also demonstrated that communication system has been part of a common social heritage that makes cohesion and solidarity and helps to ensure the continuity of group's life. However, in the contemporary era, these methods have been neglected and are at the verge of extinction. The paper refutes the Eurocentric view that the art of diplomacy was introduced to the Africa by external agents. It advocates that some of these methods should be used alongside with the modern methods of communication to sustain the cultural heritage of the Ibibio. It adopts a historical analytical method.

Keywords: Ibibio, Pre-Colonial, Culture, Diplomacy, Development

Introduction

Africa suffers the misfortune of seemingly remaining in a state of socio-cultural infantilism. This situation seems to have been created by both historical and neo-cultural factors. The historical factors arose from a definitely atavistic and myopic vision of the world and an excruciating colonial and oppressive experience at the hands of outside forces which have conspired to keep the continent and its people in this state of suspended growth and development (Wilson, 1987: 45). Wilson observes that on the other hand, the uncontrolled and needless embrace of technological and other cultural products from abroad by African elite and the conspiracy of the same elite with external forces to impose these products of an alien culture on the generality of the people have in turn smothered indigenous thought and creativity and create a climate of pessimism on the part of some of the indigenous people and that of cultural imperialism on the part of their external collaborators. Thus, in writing about traditional communication, the impression is often created by these agents of cultural imperialism that there really is nothing to write about this *terra incognita*. Some, out of ignorance, often join in this battle to belittle Africa's potent source of communication for majority of its people (Wilson, 1987: 45).

Based on Meliseen (1999: 28) definition of diplomacy as a mechanism of representation, communication and negotiation through which states and other actors conduct their business (Asobie, 2002: 26), it becomes obvious that the use of traditional instruments communication have for ages been part and parcel of Ibibio cultural diplomacy. Indeed, pre-colonial Ibibio diplomacy was anchored and driven by the culture of the people. Objects such as fresh and dry

leaves, stones, broom sticks, pieces of cloths; walking sticks, water eggs, machetes etc., were used in diplomatic communication. Because of the cultural relevance of these objects, diplomacy practice was enhanced. The negation of these traditional communication mechanisms in the contemporary era has undermined cultural diplomacy and its potency in Ibibio land.

Features of Communication

Every society has its own culture that helps in its organisation and sustenance. Also, every human society has its own unique system of expressing its culture. These systems vary in their structure and organisations from community to community as a result of the differences found among the inhabitants. Before the advent of European colonial rule which ushered in formal education and provided modern mass media, Africans had their own indigenous communication system which is still found in dwindling stage and form in some areas despite the effect of modernity, particularly urbanisation and technology (Ibrahim, 2009: 270). The importance attached to the art of communication in human lives has given rise to several definitions with specific conditions attached to each. These variations arose from the differences of opinions as to what exactly communication is. It is however the meaning of the word – the sharing of ideas – not its origin that is relevant in this instance. A few of these definitions relevant to this study are given below. Some sources maintain that the word communication is derived from the Latin verb “communicare” which means to “talk together, confer, discuss and consult with other”. Others believe it comes from a Latin noun “communus” which means “common”. They say with justification that to communicate means to make the message of communication common (Oreh, 1978: 95). According to Osborne and Mortley:

Communication is a process in which meaning is attributed to a message where those conditions required of the sender...the receivers and the message are fulfilled (Osborne and Mortley, 1999: 4).

Adegbija also notes that:

Communication is a combination of acts, a series of elements with purpose and intent. Not merely an event but functional, purposive and designed to bring some effects and some changes, however subtle or unobservable the environment of hearers and speakers (Adegbija, 1989: 13).

For the purpose of this discourse, it would be accepted that to communicate means to share one's ideas or feelings or messages with another or others by making one's message common property to others (Oreh, 1978: 95). It is an act of transmitting information from a source to a receiver with a clear intent to make some impact on the receiver. Communication is essential to lives, relationship and culture. Through communication, feelings, thoughts, desires and beliefs of a people are made known to others. One gets to know what is to be done, by who, when and how. Also, human activities are put under control and society gets organised. Through communication, the moral values of a group are exposed and promoted. It thus means that a group without a means of communication will definitely be a shapeless and formless if not a dead group (Ibrahim, 2009: 271). According to Ibrahim, while language is the most important method of communication, it is manifestly, not the only method but just one form of communication. He adds that there is nothing wrong therefore in a group using another method of communication different from language if the method communicates its purpose. One alternative method of communication is indigenous communication system whereby inanimate objects are used to encode messages. For the purpose of this study, these non-verbal communication methods are referred to as “diplomatic codes” or “diplomatic instruments”. It is different from the widely recognised systems of communication, speech and written language. The Ibibio indigenous communication system which served diplomatic purpose was mostly “coded”. In other words, those inanimate objects

were used to communicate messages, only users who displayed them can recognise and understand what they symbolized (Ibrahim, 2009: 271).

Akpan (1994: 77) has classified the functions of traditional media in Ibibio land into four groups as follows:

- a. Surveillance of the environment;
- b. Correlation of parts of the society in relation to the environment; (iii) transmission of social heritage from one generation to the next; (iv) entertainment.

Traditional methods of communication are grounded in indigenous culture, produced and consumed by grassroots members of society. Indeed, it has always been an admixture of social conventions and practices which have become sharpened and blended into veritable communication modes and systems which have almost become standard practices (Akpan, 1994: 77). After reviewing definitions of traditional communication by various scholars Onyiriuka (2015: 165), synthesises the following as common threads that run through them:

- a. it is part and parcel of the way of life of a people
- b. it utilises symbolisms from the community and hence readily connects with the people; and
- c. values of the continuity as well as age-old institutions come into play in the communication process (Onyiruka, 2015: 165).

Ugbojah cited in Onyiruka states that “indigenous media being interpersonal media could speak to the “common man in his idiom and through a familiar channel and deals with problems of direct relevance”. The foregoing shows that one cannot separate traditional media from the cultural milieu of the users. Traditional media of communication permeate everyday activities of the users (Ugboajah, 1989: 33).

Some Non-verbal Methods of Diplomatic Communication in the Pre-colonial Ibibio Society

The traditional Ibibio society made extensive use of vegetables and animals products as media of communication or diplomatic codes. Such products were used (and some are still being used) to warn people of unexpected danger. They partly helped in the enforcement of social norms. Some of these instruments are discussed below.

***Eyei* (Elais Guineenis)**

Prominent among the vegetable products used was the palm frond – a young folded leaf of the oil palm, used either as a bunch or a single leaf. The palm frond, popularly known as *eyei* or *ekpin*, has remained a very unique communication medium. If the palm frond was tied to any object, it communicates “prohibition” in most cases. When tied across a road or a compound, it signified that the use of the road or compound as access road was prohibited. The palm frond has remained a medium of communication as well a diplomatic instrument. As a language of communication, its usage and meaning depended and still depend on how it is knotted (Akpan, 1994: 78). *Eyei* (Elais guineenis) can also communicate danger if the encircled area or object is made use of by unauthorised persons. If placed around a plot of land, it simply means that the occupants of the plot must quit immediately.

***Okono* (Dracaena Fragan)**

The *okono* (*Dracaena fragan*) tree remained the most reliable boundary communicator. The leaves when placed at the door steps of any house indicate the presence of a newly born baby. There is a belief that *okono* leaf can ward off evil from the hands of those women visitors to the house who have had history of having dying babies. Among the people *okono* seems to generate greater faith as boundary marker than modern day boundary stone. The belief came from the fact

that once *okono* is driven into the ground it soon sprouts into a tree and grows very fast and does not die easily. Like any other vegetable communication/diplomatic instrument, it has some religious connotation. It was feared that tampering with the *okono* boundary indicator could cause the offender strong reappraisals by the ancestors. The point to note about this indigenous diplomatic instrument is that it made sense to the people using them and the people had faith in them (Noah, 1988: 13).

Mkpatat (Ferns)

When the plant was placed on any property – landed, moveable or immovable, it meant a serious ban. According to *The Report of the Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces* (1930: 73), *mkpatat* could also be referred to as a green creeper and it associated with a determination to achieve victory or die. The women of Akwa Ibom extensively used *mkpatat* as a demonstration of their determination to uproot the obnoxious colonial policies during the 1929 Women's War.

Mbrirem (Bush Cane)

Mbrirem (bush cane) was always associated with ghosts or evil spirits. When placed on any property or object, they were dreaded by people. Instead of tampering with *mbrirem* placed, the offended could place another *mbrirem* on top of one already placed to counteract and restore equilibrium. Such a case was described as “*mbrirem ekpo – anim ono nim uno*” meaning “bush cane ghost or evil spirit, keep for me I keep for you”. The bush cane evil spirit kept is reciprocated. In such a case both parties abstained from making use of such property until all issues involved were duly and peacefully cleared, solved or settle (Antia, 2005: 95).

Ekusang (Tied Dry Leaves)

When a village in the past was ravaged by war or famine, the village head, chiefs and elders of the village would gather some dry leaves, tie them firmly with ropes and send them through some delegates to friendly leaders of another community. The dry leaves symbolised famine, the emptiness represented the fact that nothing was left for the people to live on while the ropes conveyed that people were already dying of hunger. Immediately the receiver got these symbolic objects, he became aware that the sender was asking for relief materials. He therefore responded by sending down whatever was available through the messengers. The indirect way of making the request never failed to yield result and usually helped in fostering unity among communities. For instance, such a community that received the “bailout” would never plan to wage war against the benefactor or even align with an aggressor community against the benefactor (Ibrahim, 2009: 271).

Ndekusang (Fresh Leaves)

In some parts of Ibibio land, if a man did not like the wife arranged for him by his parents, he gives her a pot of palm-wine stuffed with some green leaves to go home to her parents with. Anybody who sees her carrying this pot understood at once that she has been rejected by her husband and the divorce proceedings had just started. If she carried the pot of wine with another type of fresh leaves, people would know that she has just been accepted by the man who would eventually become her husband, and she was going to inform her father (Oreh, 1978: 104-105).

Nkwatit (Stones to Communicate Prices)

In the pre-colonial period, Ibibio people used cowries as the medium of exchange. Most of the time, people who had goods to dispose of did not have the time to stay with the goods to inform the buyers of the prices. Yet, they were able to sell through the indigenous diplomatic instrument devised by the people – the use of stones. Assuming a farmer wanted to sell some tubers of yam for three cowries, what such a seller would do was to move those yam tubers near the road for

the intending buyers to see. He then placed three stones on the yam tubers coding the amount required for the yam tubers. Because of mutual contextual belief which the people of the community shared, whoever needed the yam and saw the three stones would understand the message coded in the stones that the price was three cowries. If the potential buyer was capable, he would drop the three cowries at a close range for the owners to see and pick while he would go away with the yams. No one would drop a lesser amount for the goods. The advantage of this indigenous method was that it saved time to be wasted in bargaining and prevented conflicts between the seller and buyer (Antia, 2005: 95).

The existence of this economic diplomacy in pre-colonial Africa has been confirmed by a Mary Kingsley, who wrote in 1897 thus:

I have often seen on market roads a little space cleared by the wayside and neatly laid with plantain leaves, whereon were very tidily arranged various little articles for sale – a few kola nuts, leaves of tobacco, cakes of salt, a few heads of maize or a pile of yams or sweet potatoes. Against each class of articles so many cowrie shells or beans are placed and, always hanging from a branch above or sedately sitting in the middle of the shop, a little fetish. The number of cowrie shells or beans indicates the price of the individual articles in the various heaps and the little fetish is there to see that anyone who does not place in the stead of the articles their proper price or who meddles with the till shall swell up and burst (Cited Eyo, 1979: 12).

Okpo Ayang (Broom Sticks)

In traditional marriage in Ibibio land, diplomacy was extensively used in the process of negotiation. For instance, short broom sticks or vertical marks on the ground could be used. Where broom sticks were used, the bride's family would place a number of sticks on the floor each representing *ebep okpoho* (a bundle of manila), demanded. The groom's family would then eliminate some of the sticks leaving a number representing the amount they wanted to pay. The addition and subtraction would continue until a compromise was finally reached. This method of pricing was used in order to differentiate the bridal transaction from the ordinary transaction. In other words, the bride was not being sold like a goat or a cow (Ekong, 2001: 28).

Edairat Ofong (Red Cloth)

This was a symbolic way of communicating danger to someone. In the Ibibio pre-colonial society, if there was a sick person in the family who was at the point of death, the eldest person in the family would look for a piece of red cloth, put a small stick inside, wrap and send it to the next of kin of the sick person. The cloth symbolised the fact that a person's life was in danger while the small stick represented a coffin. The combination of these items was to convey the fact that the sick person was nearer his/her grave and the receiver's attention was urgently required. As soon as he/she received these symbolic items or diplomatic instruments, he prepared to come down and see the situation. The euphemistic but symbolic way of communicating serious issues helped to conceal serious information from public consumption and enabled the receiver to prepare for any unexpected or sudden occurrence (Jacobs, 2017).

Adisat Eto (Traditional Comb)

This was a piece of locally designed comb made from wood with big and widely scattered teeth on the side, used to make rows or separate hair into bits. It is not like the normal comb used for making hair tidy. In Ibibio pre-colonial society, the wooden-comb was symbolically used to communicate a broken relationship as a result of distrust. This was commonly used by couples. Mathematically, it has been proved that two parallel lines cannot meet. So, those parallel teeth of the comb were to communicate the fact that the couple no longer enjoyed companionship as each went and did things the way he/she felt. When this happened, the husband or the wife who was not comfortable with the situation would wrap a wooden comb and send it to his/her parent. Immediately this coded diplomatic instrument got to the parents, the message was decoded and

it attracted instant response by either having someone sent to settle the differences between the couple or someone would be directed to visit the parents for reconciliation before the matter got out of hand. Obviously this indigenous system saved many relationships from collapse (Ibrahim, 2009: 272).

Okobo (Machete)

One of the rules of engagements that guided pre-colonial warfare in Ibibio land was the necessity of giving prior information before any outbreak of war. Consequently, if a village intended to embark on war against another, it was expected that the chiefs and elders would notify the other village and ask them to get ready. If there was encroachment on the land of a particular village by a neighbouring community, the aggrieved community intending to embark on warfare against the intruding community would send a cutlass, representing war through some emissaries to the chiefs and elders of the community that trespassed into its land. When the elders received the coded message, they usually understood its implication. If they were ready for war, they would collect the cutlass and send their own cutlass in response to the demand of the aggrieved community. If they wanted peaceful resolution of the matter, they would reject the cutlass but would in turn send "baked" salt that was already solidified, to the chiefs and elders of the aggrieved community, codifying the search for peace. The solid nature of salt signified oneness. The two communities would agree on a date to meet and amicably resolve the issue at stake (Antia, 2005: 95).

Ika (Sharp Double Edged Knife/Dagger)

Ika (sharp double edged knife/dagger), was a sign of danger or war when carried, displayed or pinned to the ground anywhere disturbances existed. More often than not, warriors carried it. Soothsayers pinned it at their oracles while chiefs pinned or placed it at their dais for protection. Diplomats carried it while on assignments.

Mbamba (Cowries)

Mbamba (cowries) was ornamented and portrayed affluence. Dresses decorated with *mbamba* were expensive and worn only by special and reputable traditional rulers or envoys. It was used as currency for buying and selling. Its volume of possession dictated or signified the wealth and status of an individual. When threaded together and placed on any property, it signified a ban and its violation attracted heavy fines.

Edet Ekpe (Leopard's Teeth)

Edet Ekpe (leopard's teeth) were scarce, ornamental and invested with power. Those who wore them were seen as special and powerful, depicting the power of a leopard or lion. They portrayed affluence. Any messenger or an envoy on an errand holding a chief's *edet ekpe* as a symbol of authority was highly respected and protected by the community in honour of the chief. Chiefs wore them as part of their regalia. Any property that a traditional ruler placed *edet ekpe* on automatically and unquestionably reverted to him. The mere sight of *edet ekpe* on a traditional ruler's neck meant a great humility to his subjects who were by love or force, bound to respect and honour him (Antia, 2005: 101).

Ayang Ubong (Kingship Broom)

Ayang Ubong (kingship broom) was an emblem of the ruler's authority. Any ruler's messenger who carried this broom was respected, protected and highly honoured by the ruler's subjects. Traditional rulers used *ayang ubong* to bless or curse anybody or thing. It was believed that any blessing or curse given to anybody and confirmed with a soft touch of *ayang ubong* by a traditional ruler remained efficacious and irrevocable until and unless reverted. With it, the traditional ruler waved off evil incursion into his domain whenever this course of action was necessary. Subjects therefore gave much reverence to this diplomatic and chieftaincy symbol (Antia, 2005:103).

Ntinya (Crown)

Ntinya (crown) was reserved for only kings or chiefs. At coronation, kings/chiefs were given *ntinya* to wear on their heads by the kingmakers as the glory of the community. They were marvelously designed to preserve the dignity and elegance of the kings/chiefs. Once a king/chief wore *ntinya*, no person had the right to touch his head unless when protocol permitted such a touch. In the pre-colonial Ibibio society, a king could authorise his envoy to wear his *ntinya* when he was on a diplomatic assignment. With this diplomatic emblem, the envoy was covered with immunity and could pass through any territory including an area that was at war with the king's/chief's community (Antia, 2005: 104).

Esang (Walking Stick).

Esang (walking stick) indicated the need for support. Usually hot-blooded young men needed no walking stick. It was reserved for the elders for self-support. King and chiefs, whether old or young, were presented with walking stick as part of their paraphernalia of office and as a sign of the community's support in their efforts to further their administration and maintain discipline in the society. A messenger carrying a chief's walking stick without lowering it to touch the ground was respected and protected. Young people could only carry walking sticks when they were disabled or wished to bluff the community. Any property officially touched or hit with a chief's walking stick automatically reverted to the chief but this action was governed by checks and balances to neutralise victimisation, injustice and highhandedness (Antia, 2005: 104)

Nsei (Yellow Chalky Powdery Substance Derived from Yellow Wood)

Nsei was a very important and significant traditional item or material portraying holiness. It was made into little sticks or rods, soft and portable enough to be conveniently handled between fingers, pressed and crushed into tiny particles or dust and poured or spread as powder on the ground at important and serious ceremonies, particularly the one that had diplomatic links. It was applied in the process of libation pouring which preceded important events or occasions. It was used to approve and confirm blessings, curses and execution of human beings, invite ancestral spirits and offer sacrifices to the ancestors. When any traditional ruler, fortune teller, sorcerer rubbed it on the head of anybody, it portrayed good fortune and blessing. New initiates into traditional societies had their foreheads daubed with *nsei* to confirm their membership and this process was described as *utuak nsei*, (meaning bestowing of blessings). Any decision followed with the pouring or spraying of little quantity of *nsei* was irrevocable unless otherwise directed. Chief's guests/diplomatic envoys whose foreheads were touched with *ndom* (clay) on arrival after due reception were given *nsei* as a sign of goodwill and blessing for all the members of the household/community (Antia, 2005: 104).

Mkpok Ekwong (Snail Shell) and Mkpok Ikut (Tortoise Shell)

These symbols served as prohibitive diplomatic instruments. When these objects were conspicuously placed on farms, palm trees, firewood, bush or other belongings, they provided traditional protection for these items.

Ifid (Sweeping Brush Made from Oil Palm Fruit Bunch Fibre)

Ifid was used as a very good and effective sweeper in the domestic circle. Throwing it on or beating somebody with it was regarded as a bad omen especially early in the morning and must be counteracted by spitting on it immediately. When an *ifid* was placed on any property, it signified a ban supposed to bring misfortune to any violator.

Ndom (White Clay)

Ndom was used to signify happiness, honour and success. Exchange of *ndom* meant goodwill, friendship and good wishes. Victors in many circumstances rubbed *ndom* all over their bodies or at least on their necks and joints. Mothers and relations of new born babies rubbed *ndom*. Winners in court cases, those who outlived periods of fixed maturation of oaths rubbed it as a sign of

innocence. Any path marked with *ndom* was peaceful and free to be traded. Judgments or verdicts of serious cases such as witchcraft, murder etc., showing innocence were demonstrated with the medium of *ndom*. Chiefs, after pouring libation, smeared *ndom* solution stored in small earthen pot called *usan idem* on important visitors particularly envoys as a sign of blessing and peaceful welcome. The envoys themselves in turn dipped their fingers in the solution and poured libation to show that they came as peaceful and well meaning diplomatic agents (Akpan, 2018: 148-149).

Nkang (Charcoal)

Nkang was an emblem of failure, disgrace, taboo and misfortune. It was mixed with palm oil and daubed on the bodies of confirmed thieves, witches and other groups of miscreants. Fortune-tellers, soothsayers or sorcerers gave it to those predicted as unfortunate. Suffice it to say that *nkang* was used in cases opposite to those involving *ndom* (white clay). Any *nkang* receiver was miserable, dejected and frustrated. Any allround unfortunate or unsuccessful person was described as having daubed himself or herself with *nkang*. It indicated a very bad omen for somebody to receive *nkang* from anybody, anywhere or anytime (Akpan, 2018: 149).

Mmong (Water)

Mmong was seen and generally accepted as a very important traditional instrument. In addition to being a prime necessity of life according to common or conventional knowledge, water could be given to anybody as a sign of blessing. When water was thrown on the roof and allowed to drip or drop on any person including visitors, it was believed to bless and cleanse such a person or persons. At the end of any libation with "hot" drink such as schnapps, palm wine, water was poured last to confirm the libation. At any meaningful diplomatic settlement, water was usually put in a cup and given to the conflicting parties concerned to drink as a sign of confirmation of peaceful settlement (Antia, 2005: 106).

Nkwa Unen (Eggs)

Nkwa Unen was considered as a sacred diplomatic instrument. When it was placed on any item, it was a sanction or taboo. It was sliced and each slice given to a child during the traditional *Abasi* feast which was observed once a year as a form of protection against all evil, sickness and misfortunes throughout the year. When any limb had any problem or anybody had any misfortune, an egg was rolled on such limbs or the face of the unfortunate person and thrown on the ground to break. This was believed to have cleansed and restored the affected to normalcy. It was used with some incantations to avert a curse. Where and when parents or relations were annoyed and decided to sever relationship with or disown their children or relations, they, after some incantations and spitting on them, would break an egg, showing that they, from thence, had nothing to do with them. This act was and is still known as *ukpekke nkwa unen* (breaking of egg). Once performed, both parties had nothing to do with each other unless and until heavy sacrificial items were offered by traditional priests to appease the gods and re-establish friendship and cordial relationship. After each operation, the egg was thrown to break on the ground. Where and when it refused to break, it was a bad omen showing that the request or purpose had naturally failed. This usually caused a lot of apprehension (Akpan, 2018: 149).

Ndukpat

Another potent tool or pre-colonial diplomatic mechanism in Ibibio land was *ndukpat*, a dark sharpened customary object which was prepared from a dried piece of bamboo. It was sharpened at both ends until it became needle-like and sharp enough to incise boils. In Ibibio traditional society, *ndukpat* conveyed symbolic messages, which when interpreted clearly meant the golden rule; namely: "do unto others what you want others to do unto you". Whenever *ndukpat* was sent to somebody, the recipient was simply asked to use the sharp edge to prick his skin and, by implication, if in his conscience, he felt any pain, he was expected to discontinue forthwith all

actions considered hurtful to the sender or family of the sender of the *ndukpat*. Therefore, *ndukpat* had restraining effect and was used to resolve and manage conflicts in Ibibio land (Akpan, 2015: 68). Akpan and Ekpoattai elaborate the point further thus:

....*Ndukpat* was a veritable traditional symbol employed in the process of managing domestic conflicts either real or imagined. For instance, if one gave out his daughter in marriage to a man and along the line the husband started maltreating the daughter through means capable of taking her life and matter (sic) got to the hearing of the wife's parents, the family usually prepared *ndukpat*, which was sent to the culprit through his village head or lineage head. The diplomatic instrument usually conveyed a severe warning that if any harm happened to their daughter, they would surely revenge...*ndukpat*...was never issued alone. Obviously, there were other traditional items, attached to *ndukpat* whenever it was issued out to someone. These items included *ukai idid* (rope or twine), *mkpa* (bark of dry tree) *ududu* (fresh local tree leaf) and *ntuen ibok* (alligator pepper) (Akpan and Ekpoattai, 2017: 60).

The message conveyed was: "eat the alligator pepper, if your throat hurts, do not serve it to someone else". From the fore-going, it became evident that *ndukpat* constituted a veritable symbolic diplomatic mechanism employed in the process of managing potential domestic conflict. Whenever one party issued *ndukpat* to another, it denoted a serious breach of peace. It always indicated that someone's life was in danger and often called for immediate summoning of the parties involved for hearing and possible settlement. On the final note, by functioning as a sort of deterrent, limiting the harshness or wickedness meted to the other person, *ndukpat* played a functional role in the deescalation of potential conflict situations – be it real or imagined, impending or manifest (Akpan and Ekpoattai, 2017: 60).

***Ndak Eyop* (Palm tree leaves)**

It was used as a sign of happiness. It was used to line routes for important personalities to walk through. This was what was done to Jesus Christ during His triumph entry into Jerusalem (Matthew Chapter 21, Verses 1-11). It was used to provide shades for big occasion including festivals. When secret societies left their abodes for outing to streets, *ndak eyop* was used to provide cover so that non-members were unable to identify the members in operation. In Ibibio society, *ndak eyop* is still used along side with modern canopy during any traditional event such as marriage or burial (Antia, 2005: 103).

***Ndam* (Raffia)**

Raffia was associated with secret societies. Masquerades wore raffia to hide their identity from people especially non-initiates. When it was tied in a special way, it conveyed messages to special quarters. When it was woven in a special manner, it provided cloth called *ikpiya* (Antia, 2005: 104).

***Udung* (Mortar)**

Mortar was used in domestically in pounding food, but used diplomatically when for instance two neighbouring communities were in a dispute over a matter like the boundary; mortar was usually used in the preparation of the ritual items that were buried at a spot on line amicably agreed as the boundary after peaceful settlement. None of the disputing communities could again pass the buried mortar to the other side to foment trouble. The diplomatic ceremony was called *ubuk udung* (burying the mortar) (Udo, 1983: 157-158). Akpan (2016) has given a specific historical episode that mortar was used to concretise the diplomatic pact of kinship known in Ibibio as *imaan*, in Etoi clan, Uyo Local Government Area. He submits:

Each of the two parties brought a he-goat, a hen and a fish. Each side also brought water while the two villages combined and bought a mortar. At the boundary of the

two villages (if they were adjacent) a hole was dug in the ground, and twelve leaves called *nweweb* were lined on each side of the boundary. The people from both sides donated their blood, which was poured into the water. The leaders from both sides then made some pronouncements which would have binding effect on them. After that, the blood was mixed with water and drunk by everyone present and the mortar was buried with everything inside. Finally the goats were killed, exchanged and taken home for eating accompanied by either an *ekpo* or *ekpe* play (Akpan, 2016: 158-159).

***Ntibe* (A Special Perforated Earthen Pot)**

This kind of pot was domestically used in storing crayfish, the holes allowing in air for freshening purposes. It was used diplomatically in covering the heads of those who died of misdemeanor including adultery, or those who died of dreaded diseases including leprosy, small pox etc, at burial. When it was placed on any property, it signified a ban.

***Afuo* (A Shrub)**

This was a kind of shrub, the leaves and barks of which were regarded as antidotes, anybody providing fodder for domestic animals must ensure that *afuo* was included to counteract the stinging and killing effect of caterpillars' poison on domestic animals feeding on the fodder. Any concoction or *juju* suspected to be poisonous or harmful was touched or handled with *afuo* leaves to permanently neutralise its effect. When placed on any property, it signified a ban on its usage. People preparing antidotes for protection used it. When placed across the road or path, it banned unqualified and *juju*-bearing persons from passing through such path of road for the avoidance of danger (Antia, 2005: 95-96).

Conclusion

Diplomacy was indigenous to the Ibibio people and its practice in the pre-colonial society was succeeded overwhelmingly because it was anchored on the culture of the people. The instruments adopted in the day to day diplomatic intercourse were hinged on the cultural practices of the people. To that extent, whoever shared the cultural milieu with the Ibibio was able to interpret the diplomatic code. Since culture is passed on from one generation to another, it was possible to transmit those codes; consequently, the embedded practices were perpetrated. As the work has shown, each of the diplomatic code has its peculiar significance and tremendously performed the intended purpose. Traditional media of communication which go by such other names as oramedia, indigenous media, in-formal media etc., facilitated diplomatic practice in the pre-colonial Ibibio and still exists in a declining form. According to Ugboajah, traditional media of communication or oramedia "are grounded in indigenous culture, produced and consumed by grassroots members of society. (Ugboajah, 1989: 33). Indeed, these traditional media were credible and acceptable channels of diplomacy.

One significant point that has been noted is that diplomacy has been an indigenous art to the Ibibio like other Africans and was not introduced to them by the Europeans. This assertion becomes very obvious based on the prevalence of the cultural instruments such as: leaves, stones, cloth, sticks, horn, feather etc. that were commonly used. They were used to express desires and needs, assert authority, initiate action, opinions and sentiments, enforcement of action etc. Unfortunately, in the contemporary era, most of these instruments have been abandoned while emphasis has been placed on foreign methods. Based on simplicity and availability of these practices and the fact that it is embedded in the culture of the people, the paper advocates the integration of some aspects in contemporary diplomatic practice.

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