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Diplomatic Relations Between the Lower Cross Region and Cameroon in the Pre-colonial and Colonial Periods

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***Abstract:** Nigeria shares a common boundary with the Cameroon on the east spanning about 1,030 kilometers beginning from the tip of Lake Chad in the North to the Atlantic Coast in the South. Unlike the cordial relations that Nigeria enjoys with the other near neighbours, Nigeria's interactions with the Cameroon has generated a lot of conflict in contemporary times. It should be noted that there were extensive inter-ethnic movements and relations between most groups in the Lower Cross River region and the Cameroon in the pre-colonial and colonial periods. For instance, the Ibibio and her related groups in Akwa Ibom State are believed to have migrated from the Cameroon area. During the colonial period, the artificial boundary created by the European powers failed to prevent intercourse among the people. The deep interactions culminated in the League of Nations decision that mandated Britain to administer the Southern Cameroon as part of Eastern Region of Nigeria until 1961, when a plebiscite was conducted, and Southern Cameroon decided to separate from Eastern Nigeria. This decision officially separated the related groups and reduced the contacts between them. The discourse centres on the Ibibio and her related groups in Akwa Ibom State and the Efik of Cross River State as the representatives of the groups in the*

Cross River region of Nigeria. It advocates that the primordial links between the related groups in the two countries should be explored to provide a concrete and useful basis for the inter-state harmony and development of the two modern African states. It adopts a historical narrative method.

Introduction

Extensive weight of historical evidence points to the fact that the area stretching from the Western Niger Delta (including the Cross River Region) to the Benue valley (particularly the Lower Benue section) and the South-West Cameroon existed as a "region" as well as a cultural watershed and witnessed intense social, political and economic interactions in the pre-colonial and colonial periods.¹

Geographically, the Cross River region covers some Southeastern states of Nigeria such as Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Abia, Ebonyi, Enugu, and part of Anambra. It also extends to a section of present-day Benue State and continues into Mamfe Depression within which it flows into the upper courses of the Cross River in Western Cameroon.² The extensive socio-economic interactions within the region was facilitated by the favourable geographical and natural features of the region particularly the river system.

It should be noted that the Nigerian-Cameroon corridor has served as the gateway of migration of most of the ethnic groups in the Cross River region such as the Ibibio and her related groups (Annang, Oron, Eket, Ibeno and Andoni in Akwa Ibom State) and those of Cross River State.³

During the pre-colonial period, the relations was well managed through the use of requisite diplomatic methods such as inter-marriages, in-laws, grand-children, negotiation, mediation, pacts, gifts etc., consequently, the people enjoyed maximum benefits of their endeavours. The advent of the Europeans increased the volume of interactions, particularly economic, in the region and also led to the establishment of some urban centres particularly Calabar, and Douala and Mamfe. Eventually, events relating to the end of World War I resulted in the Southern Cameroon being administered as part of Eastern Nigeria by the British government on-behalf of the League of Nations. This resulted in the harmonisation of interest. For instance, many qualified Nigerians of Akwa Ibom extraction were engaged in the civil service in the South West Cameroon while thousands of others served in the agricultural plantations. Equally, many Cameroonians moved to Nigeria to do business as well as the pursuit of education.

The paper is particularly concerned with Akwa Ibom/Efik relations with South-West Cameroon. The inclusion of the Ibibio people of Calabar, in present-day Cross River State in

the discourse is because the Efik is considered as a section of the Ibibio people of Akwa Ibom State⁴ and because of the fact that until 1987, Akwa Ibom was part of Cross River State with Calabar as the capital. Indeed, it should be added that the advent of the Presbyterian missionaries to Calabar in 1846, led by Rev. Hope Masterton Waddell, resulted in the establishment of schools in Calabar. Consequently, the Efik language, considered as a dialect of the Ibibio was adopted for use in schools. The Bible and hymn book and related literature were translated and written in Efik; hence, the language gained prominence in the Cross River region.⁵ Scholars agree that Efik became the language of commerce and was spoken in some parts of Cameroon.⁶

Geographical Particulars of Cameroon

Geographically, Cameroon lies between latitudes 2° and 13° North of the Equator and between longitudes 9.34° and 16.15° of Meridian. It is bounded on the West by Nigeria, on the North and North-East by Chad Republic, on the East by Central African Republic and the South by Atlantic Coast. It has an area of about 475, 000 square kilometers. Nigeria and Cameroon lie within the same latitudes and consequently have almost the same climatic conditions and vegetational belts except where modified by topography. The two countries share a common border which runs from Lake Chad in the North to the Atlantic Ocean in the South, a long and ill-defined border which is of colonial origin.⁷

The Cross River region as noted earlier, encompasses a substantial part of South Eastern Nigeria and extends to Mamfe Depression in Western Cameroon. The entire drainage basin of the Cross River including the catchment area of all its tributaries covers about 53,590 square kilometers of which 39,490 square kilometers fall within Nigeria while the remaining 14,100 square kilometers lie in the Cameroon Republic. Apart from the Cross River which rises from the Cameroon, the Benue River also takes its rise from the interior of Cameroon and the people of the two countries have often utilized the two rivers as channels for transport and communication. Indeed, the two rivers have facilitated trade and contacts thereby engendering economic and social relations.⁸

The Cameroon Mountain, situated along the South-West coast at Buea, impedes a shorter direct land communication between South-Eastern Nigeria and Fako Division of the South-Western Cameroon. According to Atem, without the mountain as a barrier, it could take less than six hours to drive directly to Calabar. The mountain has therefore impeded regular contacts between the semi-Itantu people of Fako Division in Cameroon and those in South Eastern Nigeria.⁹

Early Migrations/Contacts

According to Akpan, all the groups in Akwa Ibom and Cross River States, link their migration from the Cameroon area. "A source states that:

Upon leaving the Central Benue Valley and migrating south wards through the forest, the Ibibio later settled in Usak Edet in the Cameroon side of the Nigeria-Cameroon border... while in Usak Edet, the Ibibio were referred to as Afaha people and they lived in Edik Afaha (Afaha valley). From Usak Edet region in the Cameroon, the Ibibio seemed to have migrated to their present location via three major directions."

It should be added that a section of the Ibibio known as Uruan believed that they settled at a location known as "Uruan Akpeh" meaning "Uruan country" in the Cameroon area. According to Essien, at the time, Uruan Akpeh covered the entire area which is now called Idombi (Barombi) and its vicinity. Here, Uruan people continued with their familiar occupations such as hunting, farming and fishing. In Uruan Akpeh, Uruan neighbours included: Efut, Balondo, Bakundu, Bafe, Batanga, Balue and Bamboko, who were descendants of the Semi Bantu or Bantoid.¹²

Even though available evidence does not provide details on how Uruan people lived in these early days, it is suggested that Uruan ancestors wore clothes which were made from tree bark. The material of the cloth was made by carefully stripping the bark from trees and beating it with little hammers. Apart from using the bark from trees to make cloth, Uruan people used raffia. Both materials (tree

and raffia) were also utilised for weaving *biddak* and other traditional or chieftaincy wears. It is believed that Uruan ancestors learned some of the aforementioned skills from the people whom they settled with in South-Western Cameroon.¹³

Essien adds that the Uruan dynasty consisting of 12 traditional houses claims its origin from Uruan Akpeh in Idombi of the South-West Cameroon. Also, a system of tax or tribute collection was developed in the area. He opined that Uruan people settled in South-West Cameroon for several centuries before their migration to the Cross River Basin area which later became a part and parcel of Nigeria.¹⁴

Writing on the Obolo (Andoni) migration, Ejituwu states that they migrated from a place known as "Ramby" in today Bamusso or Kole coast, a sub-district of Ndian Division of South-West Cameroon. He adds that their ancestor was a Kole fisherman who migrated west-wards from Douala to Ramby estuary. The ancestral affinity is still maintained in the sense that one of the gods of the Bakole in the Cameroon had to make an annual journey to Oron to confer with *Ekong-Ese*, one of the Oron water deities. Like the Ibeno, Obolo (Andoni) and Oron, the ancestors of the Bakole were fishing people and had to remain constantly close to the seas to enable them to fish.¹⁵ According to Uya, there are several evidences in support of the Uruan (Cameroon) as the point of Oron's dispersal

into present day Nigeria. First, there is the prevalence of such Cameroon names as Akan, Ekang, Abang, Etong, Okung, Utang in Oron. Second, there is the familiar saying among the Oron people indicating that the farthest point in the world was Usahadit. Thus, when a child sent on an errand takes an unusually long time, he is always rebuked with words "ake-ku Usahadit" (did you go to Usahadit). As recorded by Uya, some older Oron people have vivid memories of the people of Usahadit coming to Oron annually to attend festivities in commemoration of their oneness. He adds that the Oron word for white man "Mbatang" (stealer of men), is of Cameroon origin. Citing Jefferys, Uya adds that the Oron word for white man "is an importation of Yaoundé word coming from Douala via Usahadit and is the word the Cameroon "natives" probably used to describe the Portuguese at Fernando Po. It was the general acceptance of this Cameroon origin that underlay the address presented to the Federal Inspector of Education of West Cameroon, G. Nseke, during his visit to Oron in 1972.¹⁶

Addressing the visitor, the chief said:

You must have heard the legend among Oron people that Cameroon direction is our original home when Abang, the great ancestor or Oron migrated into this land now occupied by his descendants. As tradition lasts longer than city walls, it is then reasonable and correct for Oron man to regard anything Cameroon as native.¹⁷

According to tradition, Ibeno like the rest of the groups in Akwa Ibom State came from the Cameroon. Specifically, they claim that they came from the area of Cameroon known as Ramby. It is believed that from Ramby they moved westwards. Tradition of origin of the villages in Ibeno points to their migration from the Cameroon. Ibeno villages such as Mkpanak (Big Town) and Iwoachang claim that a storm separated them from the others, and eventually they entered a creek and landed at the present site of Ibeno. The majority of Ibeno villages such as Upenekang, Okoroutip (Old Town), Ntafre and Atabrikang hold the opinion that from the Cameroon they voyaged to Andoni and that it was from Andoni that they migrated to the present locale. The only bone of contention is the routes taken to settle at Ibeno.¹⁸

Other inter-ethnic movements between Nigeria and Cameroon before the European period have been recorded. Such movements might have been due to population pressure, economic changes or internal disputes. For instance, in the 16th century, the Effiat moved from Isangele village in Enyong clan near Itu on the Cross River. In search for contacts with European traders, the migrants moved to Calabar and first settled at Udah, near James Town. Being a minority group in the new environment, they felt uncomfortable and so left for Rio del Rey and founded some settlements there. Having established contacts with the Portuguese traders at Calabar, the migrants acted as commercial agents between the Balondo

of Rio del Rey and the Portuguese at Calabar. From Calabar, they collected Europeans goods and exchanged them with oil produced by the Balondo. In that way, they explored the creeks between Ndiun and Meme rivers where they exercised a great deal of influence.¹⁹

According to Anderner, a group of Efik from Calabar later met the Effiat at the new settlement. Together, they formed a new settlement known as Isangele. Further evidence shows that other Ibibio later followed, perhaps individually. A man, by name Umo from Eket founded Abana. Ataiyo-Umo and Akaka Eyen also from Eket, founded Ine Ataiyo. From these accounts, it could be argued that the fishing towns of Oron and Amato and other fishing settlements in Isangele sub-division in Cameroon were principally established by migrants from South Eastern Nigeria. Ross, cited in Atem, records that in 1877, during his journey to Rio del Rey, the Efik exercised a high degree of influence at Isangele.²⁰

He wrote:

*We visited all the 13 towns, three in Nsahavet and then in Kameroun. Seven of them speak the Efik tongue, and the six in Bakish speak a different language. From trustworthy source, I ascertained that there are 16 towns in Kameroun that speak Efik, with aggregate population of about 22,000.*²¹

Economic Relations

Early migrations were closely linked with economic contacts between the people of the two countries. As noted by Atem, in terms of relations, the commercial links further involved inter-territorial connections which in turn fostered inter-personal relations. Inter-territorial connections involved those trade routes that linked the southern, middle belts and northern regions of the two countries. Using the directions of the major routes, the Cameroon-Nigerian early trade could be classified as southern, middle and northern trade. The Southern trade embraced the trade that went on between Cameroon and South-Eastern Nigeria. In Nigeria, this trade was mostly centred in Calabar because of its position as an early seaport capital of the Oil Rivers Protectorate and also because of its nearness to Cameroon. Though Douala and Victoria existed as seaports in Cameroon, they were not well linked up with the hinterland and so Cameroonian produce from the western hinterland found their outlets through Calabar. The Cameroon-Calabar trade was principally in two directions – the south-eastern and north-eastern.

In the South-Eastern direction (which concerns the area of study) the Efik of Calabar had long years of trade contacts with the Balondo of Cameroon. Commenting on the Efik's influence over Balondo land through trade contacts, Holt, cited in Atem, points out that in 1885, the Efut country (Balondo land) was under the influence of Calabar chiefs.

The trade of the area, up to the western foothills of the Cameroon Mountains, had been dominated by Calabar chiefs especially Yellow Duke, Chief Henshaw, Duke Henshaw, Ephraim Yellow and Egbo Egbo Bassey of Duke Town. Some of these Chiefs had their plantations in the area. So it could be seen that at the height of their prosperity, the Efik wealthy class invested externally in Cameroon.²³

In the Efik-Balondo trade, the Balondo supplied slaves, ivory and palm produce. Of these items, slaves were predominant. Yellow Duke is said to have owned about 3,000 slaves and most of them might have come from Balondo. From Calabar, the Efik middlemen supplied the Balondo with a variety of European goods prominent among which were drinks, cloth, salt, iron goods, guns and gun-powder. For many years, the Efik traders kept Ndiian trading area hidden from Europeans for fear that their monopolistic position would be broken. It was only in 1877 that Rev. Alexander Ross reported that Yellow Duke was the major trader handling trade whose base was Odobo, and he provided a fleet of canoes that sailed in the creeks between Calabar and Cameroon.²⁴

Besides the trade with Balondo to the South-East, the Efik also traded with a number of Cameroonian ethnic groups to the north-west of Calabar. At the initial stage, the Efik traded with the Ejagham whose role was dominantly intermediary. Douala which is seaport in Cameroon had to

rely on Calabar at certain periods for imported goods. As Atem has recorded:

The Balong and Abo towns to the North are far from being dependent upon water communication for their supplies of barter goods. Cameroon is more accessible market, but Old Calabar is always available by an overland route which is kept open. The Wuri people are always able to receive their most pressing wants such as their need for salt and tobacco, by the same route when by reason or any of the many pretexts for doing, their communication with the Cameroon trader is interrupted (sic).²⁵

Linguistic Links

Using the Greenberg's linguistic analysis, the region occupied by Nigeria and Cameroon is broadly divided into the Niger-Congo group of languages and the Afro-Asiatic. Adopting physical characteristics, it has been confirmed that the region is principally occupied by the Bantu speakers, Negroid people of the Guinea coast, etc. The Negroid and the Bantu fall within Greenberg's "Niger-Congo". The Bantu occupy the Cross River/Akwa Ibom States of Nigeria from where they extend to the southern forest region of Cameroon. In Nigeria, they include Ibibio, Ejagham, Boki and related groups, while in the Cameroon they are Balondo, Bakweri, Bafaw, Doula, Ewondo and the Iung."²⁶

One of the challenges that both the Efik and the Cameroonian traders faced was that of language. The early Cameroonians who traded in Calabar understood neither English nor Efik, so trading transactions were carried out by signs and measurements. Later on, Cameroonians were able to learn Pidgin English and also pick up a few Efik words. When the Germans colonized Cameroon, they found that Pidgin English was very popular within the entire forest region of the country. They made efforts to suppress it in Victoria and Douala but failed.²⁷

Migrations and trade links led to the extension of Efik language to some sections of Cameroon. The Efik contacts with Rio del Rey and other Cameroon coastal groups in the early trade influenced the language of the coastal ethnic groups in Cameroon. In the early days, it was necessary for the Balondo to learn Efik so as to trade effectively in Calabar without being cheated by the traders. Some of the Balondo and Ekoi slaves, when freed, went back home taking with them the Efik language. A good number of Balondo and Ejagham elders currently understand and speak Efik fluently.²⁸

According to Atem, in addition to Efik being spoken by some ethnic groups in Cameroon, certain words borrowed from Efik have become characteristic of the languages of some of the Cameroonian ethnic groups. He cites the Efik/Ibibio name for "European" to have been embraced by the Bakweri and the Douala.²⁹

| | |
|------------------|----------------|
| European in Efik | <i>Mbakara</i> |
| " in Bakweri | <i>Mokala</i> |
| " in Douala | <i>Mukala</i> |

Since Efik might have had earlier contacts with Europeans than their Bekwari and Douala neighbours, the Efik name for "European" had to be adopted by the neighbours. Some of the Efik names of European goods bought from or first seen at Calabar were inherited by some communities in Cameroon. Those words became characteristic of the local languages without any local equivalent.

The following list shows some Efik/Ibibio words that are characteristic of Ejagham, Balondo, Banyang and Bangwa

| English | Efik/Ibibio |
|------------------|--------------------|
| Ejagham | |
| Umbrella | <i>Ufok-eyo</i> |
| <i>Ofuk-oyu</i> | |
| Book | <i>Nwed</i> |
| <i>Nwed</i> | |
| Table | <i>Okpokoro</i> |
| <i>Okpokoro</i> | |
| Bell | <i>Nkanika</i> |
| <i>Nkanika</i> | |
| Bottle | <i>Ekpeme</i> |
| <i>Ekpeme</i> | |
| Lamp | <i>Utune-ikang</i> |
| <i>Utunikang</i> | |
| Key | <i>Ukpoodhe</i> |
| <i>Ukpogoro</i> | |
| English | Efik/Ibibio |

Balondo
European
Mokara
Bottle
Ekpeme
Book
Ngweri
Key
Ukporore
Banana
Mboro
Umbrella
Ufok-eyo

English
Banyang
Lamp
Eturuikang
Bottle
Ekpeme
Soap
Esoup
Box
Ekebe
Bell
Nkanika

English
Bangwa
Lamp
Atulikang
Bottle

Mbakara

Ekpeme

Nwed

Ukpohoede

Mboro

Ufok-eyo

Efik/Ibibio

Utuen-ikang

Ekpeme

Swop

Ekebe

Nkanika

Efik/Ibibio

Utuen-ikang

Ekpeme

Kupama
Box

Ekebe Akeb

Source: Atem, George. "Cameroon-Nigeria Relations 1888-1961. A Study in Political, Economic and Social Interactions Between Two Neighbouring States". *Unpublished PhD Dissertation. Department of History, University of Calabar, 1984, pp. 50-51.*

Indeed, language played a prominent role in the interaction between persons, communities and nations. The spread of the English and Efik languages from Calabar to Cameroon was of great significance to the Nigerian-Cameroon relations as well as the internal relations among the people. The two languages facilitated the commercial, social and cultural contacts between the groups discussed.

Inter-Marriages

The diplomatic relations between the Lower Cross River region and Southern Cameroon was also sustained through inter-marriages, especially between the Efik and Balondo. For instance, marriages were contracted between some Efik traders and Balondo women. The mothers of some important Efik traders, such as David Henshaw and Richard Henshaw came from Balondo towns of Illoani and Ube respectively. Edidem Essien Ekpe Oku V, the Obong of Calabar, in 1955 traced his mother's lineage to the Balondo of Cameroon.³⁰

Other Socio-cultural Relationships

Ekpe Society: Through migrations and commercial contacts, there were cultural interactions between Lower Cross River region and Southern Cameroon. The social interactions apart from language also involved the adoption of common secret societies. The most important cultural society that could feature prominently in the discussion of diplomatic relations between these groups was the *ekpe* society, which is said to have been brought from Usak Edet in the Cameroon. Being a secret society associated with forest, *ekpe* fitted well in the communities within the forest region of South-Eastern Nigeria

According to Atem:

In ekpe, South-Eastern Nigeria inherited from Cameroon, a cultural society of immense importance. It was an institution with varied functions. It performed political, economic, judicial, social and even religious duties within the community. Politically it was a unifying institution. It brought together into a single disciplined organisation all the leading men in each local community. Communities living apart came to be united under ekpe. For example, in Calabar where the house system existed, ekpe brought unity to the entire community without abolishing the different houses. This was possible because ekpe legislated for the entire community and its laws were commonly applied. Each house, while receiving protection and obeying ekpe laws,

*still retained its autonomy.*³¹

The functions of *ekpe* society in Cameroon were the same like those in South-Eastern Nigeria. As noted by Akpan, *ekpe* greased the engine of inter-group relations, became the basis of governance for the communities of South Eastern Nigeria and had overwhelming influence over their lives as a whole. In each of these communities, *ekpe* was a widespread, powerful and prestigious institution in the pre-colonial and colonial periods. Its membership conferred great advantages and immunities on the initiates. For a man to effectively exercise his citizenship rights, he had to be an *ekpe* member and the higher his grade, the greater his authority.³²

The Impacts of Colonial Rule

The colonial enterprise greatly shaped the relations between the Lower Cross River region and Southern Cameroon in many ways. However, as already discussed, the interactions between the people of present-day Akwa Ibom (the Efik of Calabar inclusive) and Southern Cameroon pre-date the establishment of colonial rule in the area. According to Latham, the Europeans had embarked on slave trade in the Calabar area as far back as 1650.¹¹

However, Bassey states that the year 1841 marked the beginning of formal relations between Britain and Old Calabar because it was in that year that Britain signed the anti-slavery treaties to stop slavery in Calabar area. In 1849,

John Beecroft was appointed Her Britannic Majesty's Consul to protect the British commercial interest in the region. Being the first British Consul, Beecroft's jurisdiction covered the Bights of Benin and Biafra. The area covered not only the Niger Delta and Lagos, but also extended to the Kingdom of Dahomey and Cameroon, including the Bakassi Peninsula. Despite the repeated appeals by the chiefs of Old Calabar and in Cameroon to grant protection to the people, the British delayed until the Germans robbed them of the golden opportunity of extending its jurisdiction to Cameroon. On the 14th of July 1884, Germany occupied Cameroon officially and raised a German flag in several towns of the new protectorate.³⁴ The implication of this scenario was that the Germans colonized the part of Cameroon under study while the British administered the whole of Nigeria.

During World War I (1914-1918), the British led the allied forces against the Germans. This extended to the German's interests in the Southern Cameroon. Consequently, troops of the Nigerian Regiment along with other allies interacted with some individuals and communities in Cameroon. Nigeria contributed about 17,000 combatants, 1,800 gun carriers and 35,000 transport carriers (many of these soldiers came from the area of study). Calabar served as the major centre in the Lower Cross River region where policies of the allies' invasion of Cameroon were decided.³⁵ In May 1919, the allied powers relieved Germany of all her colonies. The territories were allocated to different powers

that had conquered them. The colonies were to be held as Mandates, that is, the power administering would exercise control in the name of the League of Nations. In July 1922, the mandatory status was confirmed. Consequently, South West Cameroon came under the administration of the Nigerian government as part of the Eastern Region with the capital at Enugu. That development engendered stronger administrative, political and economic integration between the two areas. The colonial government linked the ports of Douala, Tiko and Victoria with Nigerian ports including Calabar. The Cross River from Mamfe and the Ndian River from Ikassa linked up Western Cameroons with South Eastern Nigeria through Calabar.³⁶

During and after the inter-war years, several Nigerian groups started to move into the British Cameroon and the dominant groups were the Igbo and Ibibio. With the arrival of the Igbo and Ibibio, both simple and economic life of Victoria and indeed the entire Southern Cameroonian society changed radically. In effect, migration and intermingling of people from different cultural backgrounds have been seen as a vehicle of national and indeed international integration and the evolution of various cultures. Population movement across ethnic and national boundaries ensures the development of understanding and stimulates common economic interest between migrants and their host communities.³⁷

From the beginning of the experience, Britain recognized

that the Cameroon was not viable enough for exclusive independent administration as a colonial entity. At that time, Nigeria was divided into Northern and Southern Protectorates. In the circumstance, it became convenient also to divide the British Cameroon along Northern and Southern lines, which were added for administrative purposes to Nigeria to which they were closely connected or linked geographically. The administration of Southern Cameroon as part of Eastern Nigeria was therefore seen by the people of the Lower Cross River Region of Nigeria as an expansion of their area of influence. Also, the provision of jobs in the Victoria plantation as well as a ready market increased the rate of the integration of Nigerians in Southern Cameroon.³⁸

According to Akparawa:

In effect, the pressure of the new colonial order necessitated migration to the colonial centres. Foreign personnel were in short supply to handle the various existing colonial institutions. Therefore, local labour was required. To meet this demand, several devices were used to procure the labour. Some Nigerians voluntarily migrated to areas of colonial activities because it offered greater and better social and economic rewards than those of the rural life. Also the British use of forced labour for essential development programmes such as building of railway lines and for work in the mines

and the monetization of the economy, compelled people to go out in search of money... the traditional subsistence economy was transformed into a monetized and commodity one. In response to these structural changes people were compelled to migrate for the sake of making money as cash crop producer or generally to sell their labour power. Local craft and other allied products were attenuated and this forced people to seek new means of livelihood in the emerging colonial enclave.³⁹

With the introduction of British currency around, it was virtually difficult to buy and sell goods and services in the new order without money. Furthermore, the introduction of taxation compounded the problems of an average Nigerian. All these increased indigenous participation in the economy. On the whole, the structural changes introduced into the economy, such as: enforced laws, monetary system, development of communication network of roads, railways and the presence of large foreign owned firms instigated many members of the indigenous population to migrate to areas of new colonial activity.⁴⁰

When the British took over Douala, they brought with them few British personnel. After World War 1, it was obvious that the early British colonial administration in

Cameroon should be staffed completely by Nigerians. This was so because Britain had by this time established her presence in Nigeria, employed and trained many Nigerians for purpose of administration. Equally, the new language of administration was English, which Nigerians were familiar with, but strange to the Cameroonians, who were hitherto administered by the Germans.

The first classified labour statistics shows that in 1930, there were 128 Nigerians out of an African staff of 164; in 1936, there were 129 Nigerian out of an African staff of 163; and thereafter, there were 267 Nigerians out of 323 African civil servants. The impact of Nigerians in Cameroon was undoubtedly remarkable, considering that they were the elite, and they were accompanied by the families and relations and subsequently generated the information flow on available opportunities in Southern Cameroon. They also provided the initial social security base for later individual Nigerian immigrants into the Southern Cameroon.⁴¹

The population of Nigerians in the Cameroon Province rapidly increased between 1923 and 1955. Indeed, the population rose from 310 in 1921 to about 61,700 in 1952. The majority of the Nigerian migrants were employed in plantations in Victoria and Kumba Divisions. The bulk of Ibibio migrants in Cameroon were from Uyo Division.⁴² Another group of Nigerian salaried workers in the Southern Cameroon included those who came to work in

private commercial expatriate firms and those who were employed to work on the Nigerian Cameroon road. Of this number, some died, others returned home, but the resilient ones endured the condition and followed the road construction in its progress to Cameroon. These labourers settled along the road, wherever there was a camp. Initially, they came single. As time went on, they brought their wives and relations, principally to help them in domestic work. After some time, their families began to farm around the camps. The families of civil servants farmed around government stations, while those of workers in towns farmed around warehouses. Eventually, they diversified into trade and produce buying. At first, this was part-time, but gradually, they took to trade and produce buying full-time. Progressively, they appeared to their new neighbours as a privileged group, and thus, aroused resentment among the Cameroonians.⁴³

The Nigerian workers in the Cameroon went on their own and got jobs in the plantations, or were transferred there by the government or commercial houses. They did not sign contract to stay in Cameroon, and did not acquire citizenship. Their prospect of eventually returning to Nigeria was never given up. Eventually, many of them stayed in Cameroon longer than they had originally expected because they resigned, retired or were retrenched from their jobs to take up private business in Cameroon. This was the case of one Mr. Alex Okon Akparawa, from Ekamba Nsukara, Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa

Ibom State who lived in Cameroon for more than 50 years. Mr. Akparawa served and retired as a plantation worker. Before he died in Tiko, Victoria Division, Mr. Akparawa grew from a retail trader to one of the major importer and wholesaler in general merchandise with shop No. B192 in Tiko market.⁴⁴

Apart from civil servants and plantation workers, the great increase in recruitment from the Lower Cross River Region and indeed immigration into Victoria Division in the 1930s, was due to the so-called “garri-contracting” by the Efik and Ibibio, who brought in Igbo migrants by canoe from Oron, and who only received payment from their passengers when the latter became employed. The term “garri contracting” refers to the fact that, in the 1930s, various plantation managers gave the Efik and the Ibibio traders contracts to supply garri to the estates. The garri was imported from Nigeria through the port of Oron. In the process of buying the garri, these contractors spread information about available opportunities in Cameroon plantations. The contractors gained not only direct monetary rewards accruing from transport fares and favour from plantation managers through the renewal of their contracts, but also indirect benefits by way of increased volume of food supply that would be required for the increased labour force.⁴⁵

While Nigerians moved into Cameroon in greater numbers, some Cameroonians, including some from the

French section also moved into Nigeria especially to Calabar. There was a substantial population of Cameroonians in Akim, Calabar. While Nigerian traders extended their commercial activities into the hinterland of Cameroon, some Cameroonians also established trade contacts with Nigerian trading centres such as Calabar, Aba and Port Harcourt. In addition to legitimate trade, there was high rate of smuggling and evasion of exchange control between Nigeria and Cameroon. The border towns on both sides of the two nation's borders were centres of illegal practices. Calabar, Ikang, Oron, Ikom, etc., served as gate ways for smugglers.⁴⁶

Akpan notes that one of the ways through which British Cameroonians came closer to the Lower Cross River region was in academic institutions. On assuming control over British Cameroons, the British colonial authorities began to train Cameroonians in the institutions of higher learning, particularly in South Eastern Nigeria. In 1922, the Government operated seven primary schools in Cameroon Province which were staffed almost by Nigerian teachers. Many Cameroonians still attended Nigerian schools, particularly Hope Waddell Training Institute, Calabar, Methodist Boys' High School, Oron and Government Teachers' Training Colleges, Uyo.⁴⁷

Available records show that many Akwa Ibom educated elite served in the South West Cameroon and helped in the laying of the intellectual foundation of the territory. They

include: Chief Bassey Udo Adiaha Atta (father of Governor Victor Attah) who served at Quinine Plantation in Isososing Bakassi in Kumba Area of Mount Kupe, Western Cameroon and, in 1947, introduced cassava to this area. Chief A.J.U. Ema, a leading teacher of arts, worked as a tutor at Government Training College, Kumba in British Cameroon from 1946 and was elected the District Scout Commissioner in the Cameroon. Chief J.S.B. Ikpe was the Headmaster of the Government School, Victoria, South West Cameroon from 1946 to 1949. The establishment of the University of Calabar and the Polytechnic, Calabar also created room for many Cameroonians to come and study in Nigeria.⁴⁸

Noah in his work on the expansion of Efik influence in the Cross River Basin states that:

Without the Efik trained teachers, government attempt to augment missionary educational efforts by way of establishing government-run schools would have largely been a failure. As the government embarked upon a programme of directly managing schools, Efik teachers found the condition of service in these government schools more attractive than in schools managed by the missions or other private agencies and they were constrained to join government service as teachers. The case of Etubom Eniang Essien clearly illustrates this point. Etubom Essien first taught at Duke Town but opted to

offer his service to the government after World War I. He was subsequently posted to Mamfe in the Cameroon after the Germans had lost that colony to the British. He later served in Victoria where he and other Efik teachers became the pioneer teachers of the English Language in the Cameroon.⁴⁹

Before World War II, there was no road linking Calabar in Nigeria, a British territory, with the former British Cameroon. In 1945, the colonial government started the construction of a road to link Calabar with Mamfe in the British Cameroon. One Edem Umo Eka, an indigene of Ekput in Ibiono Ibom, was the Secretary/Accountant to the then Central Government of Nigeria, which was responsible for the construction of the road. Mr. Eka was in-charge of the recruitment of labour. It is estimated that at least 3,000 labourers were engaged in the construction of the road. The labourers comprised people from various ethnic groups in Nigeria, particularly from the Lower Cross River region. The construction of the road lasted almost for 14 years or more. Work on the Calabar-Mamfe Road was arduous and of a pioneering nature. There were no machines used in the construction. The available equipments were manually operated.⁵⁰ The new road greatly enhanced cross-cultural links between Nigeria South Eastern Nigeria and the Cameroon.

Conclusion

The people of the present-day Akwa Ibom and their counterparts in Southern Cameroon have had extensive relations since the pre-colonial period. The relations span political, social and economic. Theories of Akwa Ibom migration claim that the Cameroon highland was the area of the evolution of the people. From there, they dispersed to their present location in South-Eastern Nigeria. According to Akpan-Umana, on reaching Nigeria, the Akwa Ibom homeland became a centre of dispersal to other groups of people in Nigeria and Africa.⁵¹ For instance, the Efik of Calabar, whose diplomacy with the Cameroon has been discussed are believed to be of Ibibio stock. According to Noah, the Efik left their Ibibio brothers to settle around Calabar in the 15th Century.⁵² Available evidence shows that the Akwa Ibom people are related with the Balondo, Bakundu, Bafe etc. in Cameroon.⁵³ As stated, the common origin engendered the deep relations that span centuries.

The relations between Akwa Ibom people and Southern Cameroon were also facilitated by the favourable geographical conditions, particularly the river system. Migrations boosted the economic contacts. Trade in particular, maximised contacts between the groups. This was consolidated by the Atlantic slave trade experience, and later the trade in staple commodities. During this period, Calabar emerged as one of the important centres of trade.

Colonial rule was another important factor that brought the

people together. As noted, at the end of World War 1, the League of Nations mandated South West Cameroon to be administered as part of Eastern Nigeria. Consequently, many Nigerians flowed into South-West Cameroon and got employment in the public service. Infrastructure such as roads and port services were developed. Many Cameroonians attended schools in Nigeria. Undoubtedly, the bond of friendship was deepened. In October 1961, following agitation by some Southern Cameroon nationalists, a plebiscite was conducted by the United Nations to determine whether Southern Cameroon would continue to remain as part of an autonomous region of Nigeria, a status they enjoyed since 1957. During the exercise, 233,571 people voted in favour of separation from Nigeria and unification with French Cameroon, as against 97,741 people who voted in favour of integration with Nigeria. Consequently, Southern Cameroon ceased to be part of Nigeria.⁵³ This development officially reduced the level of interactions between the people of Cameroon and the Lower Cross River region.

There is need for these positive antecedents to form the basis of relations in contemporary period. In time past, the diplomatic variables such as inter-marriages, gifts and kinship stabilized the relations. These variables and modern methods of diplomacy should be re-invented to engender harmonious relations between these two important modern African states.

Endnotes

- ¹Uwem Jonah Akpan. *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre-colonial Period*. Uyo: Heritage Preservation Foundation, 2018, pp. ix-x
- ²S.W. Peters. "The Physical Environment of the Upper Cross River Area". *History and Culture of the Upper Cross River*. Jaja, S.O., Erim, O. E., Andah, B.W. (Eds.). Enugu: Harris Publishers Ltd. 1990. p. 2
- ³See Sandy Onor. *The Ejagham Nation in the Cross River Region of Nigeria*. Ibadan: Kraft Books, 1994, pp. 141-145 and ⁸Uwem Jonah Akpan. *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre-colonial Period*. pp. 613
- ⁴The description of the Efik people of present-day Cross River State as being part of the Ibibio ethnic nationality has generated some intellectual controversy. The Efik however trace their origin from the Palestine and insist that even though their ancestors migrated from Uruan in Ibibio land to live in the present locale, they are distinct from the Ibibio. See E.U. Aye. *Old Calabar Through the Centuries*. Calabar: Hope Waddell Press, 1967, p. 22
- ⁵Edet Akpan Udo. *Who are the Ibibio?* Onitsha: Africana FEP Publishers, p. 16
- ⁶See Monday Noah. "Efik Expansion and Influence in the Cross River Basin. 1884-1955". *The Calabar Historical Journal*. Vol. 2, No. 1, 1978, pp. 8, Okon Edet Uya. "Historical Trends in the Cultural Development of Nigeria,

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- ⁷George Atem. "Cameroon-Nigeria Relations, 1884-1961: A Study in Political, Economic and Social Interactions Between Two Nigerian Neighbouring States". *Unpublished PhD Dissertation. Department of History, University of Calabar*, 1984, p. 8
- ⁸Uwem Jonah Akpan. *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre-colonial Period*. p. 514
- ⁹George Atem. "Cameroon-Nigeria Relations, 1884-1961: A Study in Political, Economic and Social Interactions Between Two Nigerian Neighbouring States". p. 8
- ¹⁰Uwem Jonah Akpan. *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre-colonial Period*. p. 514
- ¹¹Edet Ukpong. "The Origin, Migration of the Ibibio People (Part One)". *Ibom Journal of History and International Studies*. No. 8, 1999, p. 60
- ¹²Dominus Essien. *Uruan People in Nigerian History*. Uyo: Modern Business Press, 1993, p. 14
- ¹³Ibid.
- ¹⁴Ibid. p. 15
- ¹⁵Nkparom Claude Ejituwu. "The Lower Cross Region: Andoni Migration and Settlement". *A History of the Cross*

River Regio of Nigeria. Enugu: Harris Publishers, 1990, pp. 28-29

¹⁶Okon Edet Uya. *A History of Oron People of the Lower Cross River Basin*. Oron: Manson Publishing Company, 1984, p. 11

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸*A Memorandum Submitted by Onna Local Government Area Caretaker Committee, Traditional Rulers, Community Leaders and people of Onna Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State to the Chairman, State Creation, Local Government and Boundary Adjustment Committee, on Boundary Adjustments from Eket Local Government Area and Uquo-Ibeno Local Government Areas into Onna Local Government Area*, 1996, p. 41

¹⁹George Atem. "Cameroon-Nigeria Relations, 1884-1961: A Study in Political, Economic and Social Interactions Between Two Nigerian Neighbouring States". *Unpublished PhD Dissertation. Department of History, University of Calabar*, 1984. p. 8

²⁰Edwin Anderer. "Documentary and Linguistic Evidence for the Rise of Trading Politics Between Rio del Rey and Cameroons, 1500-1650" Lewis, I.M. (Ed.). *History and Social Anthropology*. London: Barnes & Nobles, 1968, p. 110

²¹George Atem. "Cameroon-Nigeria Relations, 1884-1961: A Study in Political, Economic and Social Interactions Between Two Nigerian Neighbouring States". p. 21

²²Ibid. pp. 33-34

²³Ibid. p. 35

²⁴Ibid. pp. 34-35

²⁵Ibid. p. 49

²⁶Uwem Jonah Akpan. *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre Colonial Period*. p.521

²⁷George Atem. "Cameroon-Nigeria Relations, 1884-1961: A Study in Political, Economic and Social Interactions Between Two Nigerian Neighbouring States". p. 50

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid. p. 37

³⁰Ibid. p. 46

³¹Ibid. pp. 46-47

³²Uwem Jonah Akpan. *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre-colonial Period*. p. 514

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³⁴Joseph R. Bassey. *Impact of International Laws and Diplomacy on Pre-colonial Africa, 1807-1913. The Nigerian Experience*. Calabar: University of Calabar Press, 2016, p. 421

³⁵George Atem. "Cameroon-Nigeria Relations, 1884-1961: A Study in Political, Economic and Social Interactions Between Two Nigerian Neighbouring States". p. 135

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⁴²Ibid. p. 71

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⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷George Atem. "Cameroon-Nigeria Relations, 1884-1961: A Study in Political, Economic and Social Interactions between Two Nigerian Neighbouring States". p. 239

⁴⁸Uwem Jonah Akpan. *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre-colonial Period*. p. 531

⁴⁹Monday Effiong Noah "Efik Expansion and Influence in the Cross River Basin. 1884-1955". *The Calabar Historical Journal. Vol. 2, No. 1*, 1978, p. 30

⁵⁰Edet Akpan Ukpong "Some Aspects of the Economy and Society of Ibiono Ibom During the Colonial Period". *Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Department of History, University of Calabar*, 1986, pp. 226-227

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⁵²Monday Effiong Noah. *The Proceedings of the Ibibio Union, 1928-1937*. Uyo: Modern Business Press, 1980, p. 7

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⁵⁴George Atem. "Cameroon-Nigeria Relations, 1884-1961: A Study in Political, Economic and Social Interactions between Two Nigerian Neighbouring States". p. 247

