

# Warfare and Diplomacy in the Cross River Region Before 1900

By

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## Abstract

Conflict is a recurrent phenomenon in inter-group relations. Whenever conflict is not properly handled, it escalates into war. Indeed, there is no existing human society that has been spared its occurrence including the Cross River region. In the region, the people engaged in warfare as a matter of functional social interactions. The causes of warfare were many and its consequences far-reaching but it did not permanently disrupt interactions between groups. Wars were fought within the limits of existing diplomatic norms that govern such engagements. For instance, alliances/pacts were forged and conventions such as immunity which exempted the intentional killing of women, priests and non-combatants strictly adhered to. The people also devised mechanisms within the confines of their cultural milieu to bring succor to war victims, negotiate a truce and prevent the outbreak of incessant wars. Instruments such as arbitration, conciliation and mediation etc., were elaborately adopted in this respect. This paper examines warfare and its counterpart, diplomacy, in selected sections of the Lower and Middle Cross River region before 1900. It notes that the region shared some peculiarities in their military exploits. For instance, weapons of pre-colonial warfare included machetes, spear, clubs, bows and arrows. Because of the nature of weapons as well as strong kinship relationship, the level of destruction was limited. However, the introduction of Western weaponry dramatically changed the general character of the pre-colonial warfare in terms of strategy and scale of destructiveness. The paper adopts a historical narrative methodology.

## Introduction

Warfare is an ancient malady and an integral part of human nature. Violence has ebbed and flowed through history. There is no human society

that is quarantined from warfare and no human society has been spared from the turmoil of war in its various gradations. Put in another way, man is both an aggressive and defensive being. Both *impeti* give birth to his bellicose tendencies (Etuk, 2013). Indeed, Rourke (2008) states that “war is as ancient as humanity”. War involves “a pulsation of violence variable in strength and therefore variable in speed with which it explodes and discharges energy”. In short, violence in war is not the type that explodes in a single discharge (Noah, 1992).

The people of the Cross River region such as the Ibibio of the present-day Akwa Ibom State, the Efik and Okoyong and Biase of the Lower Cross River region as well as the Yakuur, located in the middle section of the region, like their related groups, engaged in intra and inter-ethnic wars as part of their inter-group relations in the pre-colonial period. As noted by Noah (1992), any effort to identify a single cause of war which can be acclaimed relevant to all times would be futile. A number of factors or conditions can be said to be the cause of war, including economic imperialism, human aggression, small-group conspiracy, “nationalist” expansion and irredentism, systemic inadequacy and what has been described as “general cycle of history”. However, Anderski (1957) has shown that “the major causes of most wars centered around the need for power, wealth and prestige.

In the Cross River region, indigenous methods and strategies were adopted in warfare and because of the fact that diplomacy is a counterpart of warfare which has been in existence from the ancient period, requisite diplomatic norms guided the execution of warfare and related methods were also used in arriving at a truce. As posited by Afigbo (1981), in all, wars were not as destructive as were popularly assumed. They did not necessarily create the degree of discontinuity in inter-group relations as was often supposed. He rather calls for the viewing of warfare as a continuation of relations by other

means other than by diplomatic means. In other words, warfare formed a part of the gamut of inter-group relations.

The paper examines intra/inter-state warfare in Ibibio land of Akwa Ibom State, Efik/ Okoyong areas and Biase area of Cross River State (located in the Lower Cross River region), and in the Yakurr axis of the present-day Cross River State (located in the Middle Cross River region). Inter-state wars between Biase and the Ohafia-Igbo of the Lower Cross River region are also mentioned.

### **The Concept of War**

War is a concept which defies exactitude in meaning because of its various genres and graduations. Often times, war is reckoned as the absence of peace and therefore peace is seen as a diametrical opposite or the absence of war (Etuk, 2013). Waltz (1959) opines that war is human nature; it is inherent and this flows in human vein. The reason why the issue of conflict and war is unabated is simple, man gives birth to state and state, which forms the international system and the nature of man, is embedded with knacks of war.

According to Etuk (2013), man, in polemological reckoning, has been shown to be a studied creature in terms of unmitigated cruelty to fellow human beings. In his epic publication *Vom Kriege* (translated as *On War*), Etuk cites Karl Von Clausewitz (the Prussian veteran of Napoleonic Wars, a military tactician, theorist and, arguably, one of the greatest authorities in war) as defining war as:

Not, merely a political act, but also as a real political instrument, a continuation of political commerce, carrying out same by other means (Clausewitz. 1946: 22).

Generally speaking, Clausewitz' study of war shows war as a normal way of nation-state's co-existence. His definition also postulates that war is inevitable for as long as international relations suffices and intercourses among states and groups deepen, war and conflict are eminent and inevitable, and it is part and parcel of diplomatic relations which inter-group relations is part of.

War does not locate solely within the province of politics as suggested by Aristotle. Indeed, it transcends all planes of human existence. This state of affairs suggests the evolution and existence of a war culture in all human societies. War is characterised by violence in its extreme form with incalculable consequences including death. Akpura-Aja (1999) notes that in war, life, which is precious, is at stake. In spite of the constant threat which war places on human life, it continues unabated. By implication therefore, warfare is part of human nature and a curious aspect of social relations. The causes of war are multi-situational, yet, the roles played by war are crucial in bargaining over conflicts (Etuk, 2013).

### **Diplomacy**

Diplomacy may be viewed as the "how of inter-group relations". It is an art of conducting relations with other states or communities so as to further the interest of the states concerned (Usman and Odeh, 2015). Warfare and diplomacy were dynamic variables in the Cross River region inter-group relations. Whereas warfare as pointed out above is a condition of hostility, involving the use of arms resulting in destruction, diplomacy on the other hand is the effort of people to minimise the occurrence of wars. Consequently diplomacy is synonymous with the preservation of peace. The two variables are related in the sense that both are part of the problem of conflict management, war, beginning where diplomacy ends. At that point, emotion takes control of reason and force replaces dialogue and humane treatment until one side in the conflict emerges victorious.

In some war situations, the victory may not be total; hence, diplomacy becomes the search for peace and harmony. The search for peace can sometimes be difficult because of the presence of certain natural and human elements in the structure of the relationship (Ejituwu, 1992). For instance, a community may have the advantage of producing certain products or easier contact with another area but no easy access to market to sell those commodities because the people concerned would have to pass through routes occupied by communities hostile to their economic interests. In such scenario, elements of war and peace are ingrained into the structure of its relationship making the failure of one to trigger the other in quick alternation. In some instances, victory may not necessarily translate into peace because of the prevailing alliance system. Thus, Ejituwu (1992) submits that a situation that the victor wins the war not peace complicates the process of inter-group relations.

### **Warfare in the Ibibio Axis**

As mentioned earlier, all the communities in the Cross River region had a fair share of warfare in the per-colonial period. According to Okpe (2008), war was a factor in inter-group relations in pre-colonial Nigeria whose significance has been blown out of proportion by ethno-centric scholars. He adds that Nigerians (and in fact Africans) were not as belligerent as portrayed by European scholars and their African lackeys.

Noah confirms the above position thus:

Unlike after the arrival of the Europeans, inter-ethnic warfare was rare. The inter-dependence of the various communities made warfare unnecessary and economically expensive and unwise (Noah, 1990: 91).

Even though the communities in the Cross River region used to wage war, the destructive effects of war were held in check because of the existence of elaborate set of diplomatic conventions. There were two basic categories of

wars. The first was that between several members of the same village group. According to Noah, at this level the loss of life was forbidden. No formal declaration of war was needed. Sticks, stones and machetes were used, but those wielding machetes took pains to avoid fatal blow. However, sometimes these civil wars escalated to more serious dimensions (Udo, 1983, Ekong, 2001).

The conventions and codes of conduct which governed warfare in Ibibio land ensured that women, children and priests were not killed. Markets and those visiting them were left in peace, in theory, though not always in practice. Shrines and places of religious festivals were similarly untouched. For example, if there was a war between village "A" and village "B", the former had to send *eyei* (palm frond) to village "B" to announce where and when the war would be fought. Village "B" would then reply by also sending *eyei* (palm frond) to village "A", agreeing to fight at a particular place and a specific date (Udo, 1893).

An order would be given that no one was to enter the surrounding bush. The women had to prepare the ground for fighting and they combed the surrounding bushes to see where the enemies were. The search was called *mfume ikot ekong* (clearing the bush for war). After the women had reported to the soldiers that the area was free for war, war signals were given through the beating of *ibit mba ekong* (war drums). The officer who gave the war signal never took part in fighting and he was never killed. Sometimes, he climbed up a tall oil palm and from its top beat the drum, informing his soldiers when to advance and when to retreat. Every soldier understood all the instructions given through the drum because it was a "talking" drum (Udo, 1983).

According to Noah and Ekpo (1992), when the date for the commencement of the war had been agreed upon either by the two parties or by the more aggressive party, the men would be magically prepared for war by the *okok*

*ibok ekong* (war juju priest). Each village maintained a village *juju* which was usually first introduced into the village during a war or any crisis which threatened the lives of the people. Where a village had no strong *juju* priest experienced in the making of war *juju*, it would hire one from a friendly village. The preparation for war consisted of the preparation of the fighters to render bullet, knife and arrow-proof, and the invocation and weakening of the souls of celebrated warriors in the enemy camp to render them physically incapable of fighting and therefore vulnerable. Where a war *juju* priest was very strong, he could also mesmerise and stultify any aggressor who found his way into a village. Such a victim would then be easily captured even by women.

Noah (1992) writes that the fighting men abstained from sexual intercourse for a specified period before, during and after war. During the period, the warriors might not eat food prepared by women, and they might not eat things such as cocoyam and pumpkin which are regarded as women's food and therefore weakening. The war *juju* priest was expected to remain in the village and "battle" with the souls of warriors in the opposing camp while the warriors went to fight.

The weapons used in war depended on the stage of cultural development of a given people as well as the type of war. The Ibibio were not exception to this general rule. In the early pre-colonial times, weapons included: *iyro* (pieces of sticks cut to sizes that could be thrown to hit the enemy, were used as a form of missile), *asa uten* (a kind of spear made from a young oil palm tree, shaped to look like a dart while at the other end a few palm leaves would be trimmed to enable it to literally "fly" to hit the target, most of them were poisoned), *abaam* (club) *usam* (spears) *ofut* or *okobo* (machetes), *idang mme utigha* (bow and arrow, arrows were poisoned – "cooked" – etem idang) and *ikang oboon* or *oduk inan* (dane guns which were introduced into Ibibio land by the Europeans slave traders in the 16th century. Another

method was filling of calabashes with bees which were thrown directly at enemies to cause a set-back in their advance (Noah, 1992, Etuk, 2013).

Another relevant military tactic was the system of ambush. Members of a community could lay ambush in a thick forest waiting for their enemies to pass during which they would be taken by surprise and killed. Another technique was digging of trenches at strategic locations. Thorns were placed in these trenches and the trenches were covered with green grasses, the enemies would fall into trenches and would be seriously wounded and possibly killed by thorns.

During the periods of fighting, numerous alliances were usually forged between the warring parties. An alliance could last for a period of time, but could be destroyed by a resumed conflict between the two groups. Peace was usually restored when two previously warring communities mutually agreed to a peaceful settlement. Important persons from both communities would meet on an appointed date in order to discuss and settle their differences. This often involved some ceremonies such as the performance of certain sacrifices and oath-taking to keep the terms of the treaty.

Apart from intra-state war, inter-state wars also took place. The first recorded war between the Uruan section of the Ibibio and the Efik people of the present-day Cross River State took place while the Efik were still part of the Uruan society. According to Aye (2000), the outbreak of the war was linked to one *Abasi-anwan*, an Efik housewife, who borrowed an axe from her Uruan counterpart to split firewood. The axe broke accidentally on its first application. When the owner of the axe refused to accept her explanation, *Abasi-anwan* was said to have dumped the axe and its broken handle into the latrine pit and prepared for any consequences. The crisis generated by the scenario was such that neither the Uruan nor the Efik could control the situation. While the elders from both sides were trying to settle the matter, some scuffles took place at the place of the meeting and



led to the dispersal of the assembly, which was hoped would reconvene, but it never met again because the matter boiled into an open war. There were losses on both sides. The Efik called it *Ekong Abasi-anwan* (Abasi-anwan's War).

Also in 1898, there were skirmishes between Uruan and some Efik settlers in the area. According to a source, one Umana Ebet of Ibiaku Uruan swore in the name of *inwong*, a society in which he was not a member. He was caught, flogged and finally put into custody by the members of *inwong* society who were mostly of Efik slave extraction. The people of Ibiaku Uruan reacted and released Umana Ebet from the custody at Ikpa. This release was followed by a fight which nearly developed into war; but the incident was timely quelled by the interference of the important men from Efik and Uruan. From this incident, a slogan emerged – *Umana Ebet esin ekong ono inwong* (meaning that Umana Ebet caused war between the two parties) (Ekereke, 1957).

In 1874-75, there was a war between Joseph Henshaw, an Efik businessman in Oron. This followed the establishment of a lucrative business by Henshaw in partnership with a British merchant, George Watts in Idua/Qua Iboe. Idua people reacted to this encroachment by demanding tribute on goods passing through their territory. This dispute is said to have been resolved militarily when a formidable Efik force organised by James Henshaw subdued the Idua people who were responsible for the blockade (Uya, 2005).

Also in 1895 there was a war between the Efik and the Ibiono Ibom people of Ididep and Use village in Ibibio land. Nair (1972) discloses that the Ibibio resented the Efik middlemen's monopolization of trade and wanted to sell their produce by themselves at Calabar. Chief Udo Udo, village head of Use in Ibiono Ibom alleged that an Efik traders made away with oil without paying the owner. In the course of the dispute, an Ididep woman

challenged an Efik merchant and a fight ensued. Some Efik traders returned to Calabar but came back with their kinsmen ready for war. This single incident appears to have been the immediate cause of the war. The Use village and Ididep people attacked the Efik at Itu. It is believed that about 40 to 50 settlers at Itu were killed including the Efik, Enyong and Umon. But the Efik residing at Itu were not driven out as a result of the war. After the war, they continued to do their business unmolested. By the end of the century there were about 1,500 Efik people living in Itu. They still speak the Efik language and maintain Efik culture though surrounded on many sides by their Ibibio neighbours (Nair, 1972).

### **Warfare in the Efik/Okoyong Axis**

There was war during the reign of King Archibong (1859-1872) between the Efik of Creek Town and their Okoyong neighbours. Sources believe that another aspect of King Archibong's steps to strengthen his position was his move to bring Okoyong anon-Efik community under his control. Okoyong situates behind Creek Town, a visible Efik settlement and Ikoneto plantations. The reason was that Okoyong had successfully defied the authority and commercial ambitions of the Efik during the period. It happened that there was a boundary dispute between Ikoneto and Okoyong and the slightest provocation from either side was always enough to start a fight. When therefore a quarrel broke out between the two peoples at an Ikoneto market, there was a fight in which three Okoyong indigenes were killed. With no attempt at obtaining redress, the Okoyong invaded the farm districts of Creek Town and Ikoneto, plundered and burnt their houses, killing people indiscriminately (Oku, 1989).

Seeing this as an opportunity to realise his ambition, King Archibong ordered Duke Town to join Creek Town, Ikoneto, Uwet and Odot in the battle which ensued. Several versions of the war have been given but in Efik tradition, any group of people who, during a fight, decides to wear the

*mfang* (a fruit of spice of *Amomum*) round their neck is regarded as having surrendered.

According to Hugh Goldie, a Presbyterian missionary in Creek Town:

Okoyong surrendered at discretion to Duke Town in the usual way, a messenger with *mfang*, a fruit of a spice of *Amomum* hanging from his neck, indicating that they were reduced to live on such wild fruit...Duke Town troops withdrew and left Creek Town and the others to bear the brunt of the war (Cited Latham, 1973: 107-108).

The war however continued at Creek Town sector and before full victory was won, it was Creek Town, Ikoneto's neighbour, which was anxious for the latter's victory and therefore cut its way up to Okoyong's position and obtained its total surrender. According to Nair (1972), this was the second time that the Okoyong had fought against the Efik. The cause of the first war was similar to that of the second one, except that it was an Efik who had been killed. Abasiattai(1991) notes that mutual hostility and suspicion persisted between the Okoyong and the Efik. According to a report, "the Okoyong still considered themselves at war" with the Efik since the Efik refused to ratify the peace treaty by burying a slave alive. However, after the Presbyterian Mission had been established in Okoyong in 1890, the founding missionary, Mary Slessor, persuaded both the Okoyong and the Efik to resume mutual trade. Slessor eventually facilitated trade and friendship treaty between them (Abasiattai, 1991).

### **Warfare in Biase Area**

Biase situates along the Cross River north of Efik land and South of Yakuur area. According to Attoe (1990), during the period under study, the different units did not keep a standing army. However, in the event of war, every adult male between the ages of 30 and 50 years was expected to fight for his unit. The final declaration of war lay solely in the hands of the

Council of Elders in each unit. On declaration of war with a neighbouring community, *abu* drum was beaten. The beating of the drum was done to alert the indigenes of the impending danger. Before the drum was beaten, oracles were usually consulted. This was done in order to find out whether the unit concerned would be victorious or not in the impending war. If the oracular response was positive, the people would go ahead with the fight. However, if the response was negative, there was the tendency to withdraw from the impending war.

Also, before embarking on warfare, the people in a unit usually offered sacrifices to different deities in order to achieve strength and success. In most outings, the priest provided the warriors with protective charms in order to render them invulnerable to the onslaught of their enemies. Charms were supposed to make the warriors invisible to their enemies. During the period of study, there were numerous wars between Agwagune and Adim in connection with boundary and fishing ponds. Agwagune also fought wars with Abini, the Abayongo, Abrijang and Akpet as a result of land boundary. It is alleged that the fight was motivated by the fact that Agwagune felt that the establishment of a market in Abrijang would bring about a serious decline of the Agwagune market centre at Odum-Ugom.

Attoe (1990) also notes that in Ugbagara, there were numerous feuds between one unit and another as a result of the desire to acquire fishing ponds and fertile land. Ikun and Etono 1 continually fought over very fertile pieces of land situated between both units. According to her, during the reigns of Onun Egong and Onun Kanu Uno of Ikun, there were clashes between Ikun and Etono 1. Also, there were incessant wars between Ikun and Biakpan as a result of farmlands. Similar situation occurred between Biakpan and Etono II as a result of land boundaries. In Umon clan, incessant boundary disputes were recorded between Ikot-Ana and Igbofia and also between Ikot-Ana and Ufut.

In addition to inter-unit disputes in Biase area, there were also inter-clan disputes, such as the dispute between Ikot-Ana (in Umon clan) and Ugbem (in Egip-Ipa) as a result of fishing pond. There were numerous land disputes between Agwagune (in Egip-Ipa) and Abanwan (in Erei). The land in question was a farmland situated on an island in the middle of the Cross River, opposite Agwagune. Also, lots of clashes were recorded between the Ugbarara and Ohafia-Igbo. Numerous skirmishes also occurred between Ikon and Okon, Ohafia-Igbo, between Biakpan and Asaga, Ohafia-Igbo and between Erei communities and their Ohafia-Igbo neighbours (Attoe, 1990).

During the periods of fighting, numerous alliances were usually forged between groups. In Biase, an alliance could last for a period sometimes, but could be destroyed by a resumed conflict between the two units or groups concerned. For instance, whenever an Ugbara or an Erei unit fought with a neighbouring Ohafia (Igbo) unit, other units in Ugbarara and Erei naturally formed alliances with the Ugbarara or Erei unit involved. In some cases, Adim formed alliances with Abanyongo against the Agwagune, Aso Adim, Abayongo and Abini (all in Egip-Ipa) usually formed alliances against Ugep in present-day Yakurr Local Government Area.

Male captives were usually killed while women captives were rarely killed; they were usually taken into the victorious unit and married off to members of the community. Women might have been given such a privilege because they were considered very weak and not likely to threaten the survival of the victorious units when integrated. Moreover, it was considered easier for a woman to be assimilated into a new society than for a man. Generally, in Biase, more often than not, the number of human heads acquired by a unit during war determined the degree of success of the unit in war (Oke, 2019).

Some traditional weapons were adopted in warfare. The level of war technology during the pre-colonial era hampered the practice of lengthy and protracted warfare. This was because the methods of warfare could not

adequately sustain any lengthy and sophisticated encounter. The spears, swords etc., were locally manufactured by Ariba blacksmith and “imported” to Biase area. However, with the advent of the Europeans in the Cross River region, guns and gun-powder were gradually introduced into the area. The new military technology was gradually adopted by the people and utilised alongside the indigenous weapons (Oke, 2019).

There were numerous methods of fighting in the pre-colonial Biase. An important military tactic was the system of ambush. Members of a community could lay ambush in thick forest waiting for their enemies to pass by during which they could be taken by surprise and killed. Another technique of fighting was the digging of trenches at strategic locations. Thorns were placed in those trenches which then were covered with green leaves and grasses. When the enemies fell into the trenches, they would be seriously wounded and possibly killed by the thorns. In times of war, some Biase communities usually went as far as engaging spies to learn the language and dressing pattern of an enemy. This camouflage was often intended to deceive the enemy. At the end of the feuds, the borrowed traits were usually retained, thereby enhancing interaction between the two previously warring factions. Also during the periods of warfare in Biase, members of some communities usually scouted far and near for mercenaries to recruit. This gesture went a long way to strengthen the relationship of the communities involved in exchanging mercenaries (Attoe, 1990; Oke, 2019).

Also in Biase, inter-unit, inter-clan and external warfare often resulted in travel over a wide area by members of the warring communities. Such travels were usually motivated by the search for better weapons, allies and powerful charms which were supposed to aid in the successful prosecution of conflicts. Attoe (1990) emphasises that such wide range of travels enhanced inter-group relations in Biase in the pre-colonial period.

### **Warfare in the Yakurr Axis**

The Yakurr people consisting of Ugep, Ekori, Nkpani, Nko and Idomi of the present-day Yakuur Local Government Area, live in the middle Cross River region, north of Biase. The area experienced wars of various dimensions during the period under review. Ubi (2004) believes that when the Yakurr migrants arrived their present-day abode, the area had already been occupied by other groups of people, such as Yagai (Erei) and Yakumero (Bahumono). In a bid to take over the area, the Yakuur exerted heavy military pressures on the new environment. The Ugep went to war with Egai (non-Yakurr indigenous people of the new homeland); Ekori went to war with Anong (non-Yakurr); and Nko went to war with Adun (non-Yakurr). In all these wars, the Yakurr are said to have emerged victorious. The Anong fled to the northwest while the Adun accepted a new boundary with Nko, near Lopoi River (Ubi, 2004).

According to Ubi (2004), a significant event in Yakurr in Yakurr cultural life took place within this period. This was a treaty-making event with Egai and the formal possession of *ekoi* drums said to have been captured from Egai during the war mentioned above. The treaty gave birth to *ekoi* dance in Yakurr. *Ekoi* dance today marks the beginning of a new year for the Yakurr. The dance is performed once a year; during the New Yam Festival. The treaty also ensured the cessation of hostilities and the strengthening of boundaries between the Yakuur and the defeated neighbours a development that ensured a steady flow of trade between them and other neighbours. Similarly, the end of Ekori-Anong War resulted in another treaty, symbolised by the erection of two shrines variously called *Atewa* and *Akwo Ateba* by the Yakurr and Bahumono respectively.

Treaty-making was one of the familiar ways by which the politically independent settlements of the Yakurr and other non-Yakurr villages settled their differences or inter-village disputes and thus ensured amicable and enduring relations. Such treaties were diplomatically sealed by oath-

taking. The most important terms of the accords forbade Yakuur and the other parties from shedding each other's blood. In other words, the diplomatic measure was supposed to bring to an end any form of hostilities. Another Ugep community, Nko is said to have made a peace treaty with Adun (a non-Yakurr group). The Yakurr fought series of wars to acquire land, power, prestige and wealth. Indications are that Yakurr military pressures on non-Yakurr arose from two factors: an increase in population and economic demands in the new environment (Effiom, 2015).

The Yakuur used diplomacy to acquire weapons of warfare such as guns. (Ubi, 2004) records that the guns that the Ugep used in the wars were possibly obtained without payment in cash. They got the guns from the Agwagune as well as salt, machetes and rod money which they (Agwagune) got from the Europeans at the Calabar port. The Agwagune traders exchanged these items with food items particularly yams.

The military organisation of the Yakurr centered around the *Onun Eko* (commander-in-chief). Warfare was classified into three broad categories: first, some wars were considered to be of major importance. These were caused by land disputes or the killing of a Yakurr by a foreigner. Such wars often involved more than one Yakurr village. In the second category were wars between two Yakurr villages and in the third were wars between two wards of the same Yakurr village (Effiom, 2015).

An aggrieved family was expected to make an oral report to any of the following officers: *Obol lophon*, *Okpebri*; *Onun Eko* and *Edjukwa*. The causes of the grievance(s) could range from land dispute with non-Yakurr to a Yakurr indigene being killed by a non-Yakurr. In such and similar instances, the Council of *Yabol* was summoned to make a decision. Since there was no regular army, a decision was followed by the raising of troops. In many instances, village meetings were convened to alert the people of the imminent war and also extract the support of the able-bodied adult males.



The *Onun Eko* – the general and tactician – in the event of war took command of all such fighting men. It was his responsibility to ensure that each warrior brought the necessary fighting kit; a bag containing ammunition, charms, machetes, missiles, and, for some, a dane gun. Before the Yakurr engage in a fight, they would camouflage themselves with soot and green leaves; carry their *akokpa* (war bags) on their backs and drink the potent medicinal concoction called *ojilikpoto* (Ubi, 2004).

Wars, often inter-ethnic, or the first category were fought in the forest. Movement in the forest was along the narrow winding pathways, requiring the adoption of Indian file and giving little scope for mobility or tactical development. Close combat and reliance on the ambush were obviously dictated by these conditions. As for logistics, the forest terrain of the Yakurr gave little scope for enveloping and movements or indeed for the exercise of military leadership and skill other than in the ambush or timely use of *ad-hoc* reserve. For the Yakurr, the introduction of firearms did not profoundly alter the method of warfare (Effiom, 2015).

Obi (2015) posits that the primary armament of the Yakurr armies before the general introduction of firearms consisted of *yakpetitan* (missiles) and *yowon* (bifurcated knives). These were blades which slope or curve outwards from the hilt to reach their greatest width of about three inches. They were in the length from about 18 to 24 inches. They were of iron and appear to be locally made. The third primary armament was *letipi* (club). This was a thick heavy stick used to hit an enemy or thing. This was probably their oldest and certainly the simplest form of weapon. This was used as a secondary armament for close fighting and also developed in various forms. Clubs were used as cudgels or as throwing sticks. They were smeared with poisonous substance.

The destructive effects of war were held in check by an elaborate set of military conventions. The conventions relates to the three categories of war

outlined earlier. In an inter-ethnic war between Yakurr and non-Yakurr, it was total war and any fallen foe had to be beheaded and his head taken home. In inter-Yakurr feuds, guns were used, but victims were not to be beheaded. In a war between members (wards) of the same settlement, no formal declaration of war was needed, only clubs, missiles, stones and machetes were used, but those wielding machetes took pains to avoid a fatal blow. This, strictly speaking, may not qualify as war but Yakurr terminology refers to this as war.

In all the categories of warfare, women, children were unharmed. Markets and those visiting them were to be left in peace. This, however, was in theory and not always practised. Sometimes war dragged on for many years but agriculture and other forms of economic life continued. Feats and festivals were still held. In most cases, combat was restricted to the clearing season – December to February. Generally, warfare had its codes of conduct. Warfare took into consideration blood relationship of the combatants and sex. War with sister community with blood ties and war with an unrelated enemy community with no ties whatsoever. In either case, women and children were never touched.

### **Warfare and Inter-group Relations in the Cross River Region**

As noted by Afigbo (1981), it has been customary to regard warfare among the different communities in Nigeria as a divisive rather than as an integrating factor. It is no doubt true that warfare in pre-colonial times brought about destruction of inter-group relations. However, the negative picture has so much been exaggerated in recent historical scholarship that it over-shadows the positive aspect. Thus, in an attempt to redress this imbalance, he argues that wars were not as destructive as were popularly assumed, and that wars did not necessarily create the degree of discontinuity in inter-group relations as was often supposed. Afigbo advocates for the viewing of warfare as a confirmation of relations by other means other than by diplomatic means.

It has been observed that warring communities usually went as far as engaging spies to learn the language and dressing pattern of an enemy and at the end of the war, they borrowed the culture of their opponent. They also scouted outside their domain for allies, mercenaries, weapons and charms to aid them in the war enterprise.

Ubi (2004) notes that the period between 1710 and 1785 is significant in Ugep tradition because it was within this period that an Ugep monarch Obol Eja established a market in Ugep. Obol Eja is also associated with the military offensives and counter-offensives between Ugep and Egai. The establishment of a market at Ugep by Obol Eja and the Ugep-Egai war occurring at the same period suggests the possible causal link between the two developments. It is believed that during the Ugep-Egai War, Obol Eja bought guns from Agwagune with which the Yakurr fought. This suggests that trade commercial links must have existed between Ugep of Yakurr and Agwagune of Biase.

Also, after the market at Ugep had been established, traders from the neighbouring areas such as Agwagune in Biase and Arochukwu in Igbo land, etc., were attracted to the market. Thus, demand for Ugep goods increased. Such an increase in demand had the effect of stimulating production in the long run which could only be met by an increase in land utilisation. On the basis of such increase in demand for Yakurr agricultural products, the people could only meet the new demand situation by expanding their cultivation. Consequently, the Ugep needed more land the search for which might have triggered the Ugep-Egai War.

## **Conclusion**

As discussed above, war and diplomacy featured in the pre-colonial Cross River region's inter-group relations. However, unlike the period after the Europeans' advent, inter-ethnic warfare was rare. The reason was that the high level of interdependence and kinship relations among the groups in the region mitigated the needless outbreak of wars. In the event of the outbreak of wars, the destructive effects were moderated by indigenous diplomatic norms and conventions guided its flow.

The causes of wars in the region were similar and included boundary disputes, quest for markets, water fronts, kidnappings motivation of a community to display her strength by attacking a neighbouring community, etc. Also, the nature of weapons and methodology such as sticks, spear, arrow, spies, mercenaries, war charms, consultation of oracles, oath taking and forging of alliance (s) prevailed across the region.

Before the outbreak of war, diplomatic efforts such as negotiation, arbitration, etc., were employed to avert its outbreak. In the case of its outbreak, diplomatic norms and conventions guided its operation. For instance, certain categories of persons such as: women, children, in-laws, grandchildren, and priests enjoyed diplomatic immunity. Markets and places of worships, festival etc., were not disrupted. Moreover, diplomatic means and strategies such as negotiation and conciliation, use of symbols such as young palm fronds etc., were also adopted to end the war.

The advent of the Europeans and the loss of sovereignty by these polities in the region, as well as the introduction Western technological innovations permanently altered the configuration of warfare in the region. In all, the shared characteristics confirm the extensive intergroup relations and evidently point to the fact that peculiar warfare and diplomacy before arrival of the Europeans and did not live in isolation.

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