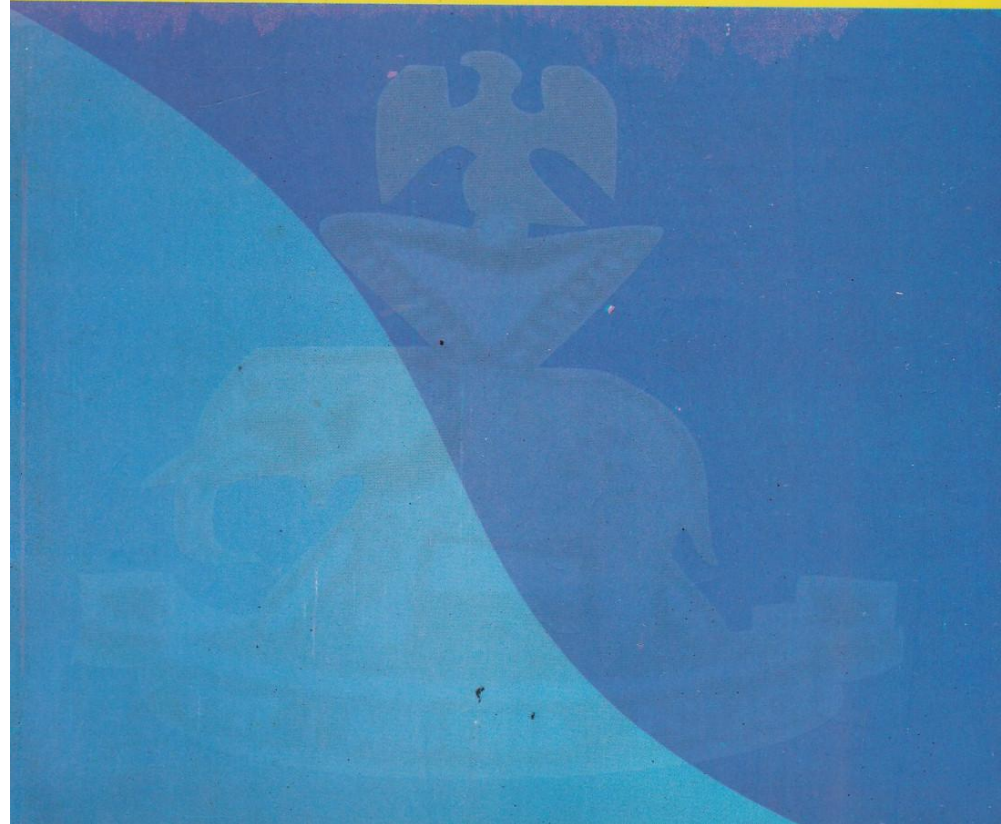


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## PRE-COLONIAL DIPLOMACY IN CROSS RIVER AND THE LOWER BENUE REGIONS OF NIGERIA

*Uwem Jonah Akpan, PhD*

### Abstract

One of the fundamental challenges currently confronting the Nigerian state is that of cordial inter-ethnic co-existence. This challenge arises primarily from the fact that Nigeria, like most African countries is still in search for national integration, hence, the plurality of the nation tends to aggravate the scenario. As an amalgam of different micro-nationalities divided along ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious lines, there is strong need to fashion national ethos that would bind the communities together and engineer political and economic systems that would eventually lead to stability and sustainability of the Nigerian nation. The usual excuse given for the elusive national integration is the idea that Nigeria is a "mere geographical expression" grafted by the British imperialists for the benefit of the metropole. However, despite this point, it should be noted that cultural, economic and political interactions among the people that were merged to form modern Nigeria pre-dates the 1914 amalgamation. For instance the people of the Cross River region had extensive diplomatic relations with their counterparts in the Lower Benue River region. The relationship which endured for many centuries was sustained through trade, inter-ethnic marriage, common origin, migrations and shared socio-cultural institutions and so on. The paper examines these robust pre-colonial diplomatic contacts and the need for Nigerians to learn critical lessons from the experience and manage the "north-south dichotomy" which in recent times has become very contentious and threatens the unity of the nation. The paper adopts a historical analytical method.

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Uwem Jonah Akpan, PhD, Department of History & International Studies, University of Uyo.

### Introduction

Evidence abound that formidable links existed between the Cross River and the Lower Benue River regions of Nigeria during the pre-colonial period. The relations was enhanced by shared historical experiences like common origin, common routes of migration and settlement of some groups, intermarriages, extensive commercial relations and even warfare. The immense contacts which were driven by sound pre-colonial African diplomatic practices occasioned mutual exchanges of socio-cultural values and institutions and respect for each other group, hence, the creation and sustainability of a common world view. Unfortunately, these historic relations have not been sufficiently, studied and documented by scholars. When an attempt is made in this direction, much attention is paid to economic relations to the exclusion of other factors that engendered the relations as well as the results of the relations. This scenario creates a gap in Nigerian historiography that the present study seeks to fill. However, it should be noted that the study concentrates with the areas that at present constitute Akwa Ibom and Cross River States which incidentally has been described severally as "human cluster", "a splinter zone" "a cultural museum" and "a cultural watershed" in the history of Africa (Erim, 1990).

### Theoretical Framework

There are two main theories concerning the relationship among the peoples of Nigeria before the colonial period. One is the theory of Fundamental Diversity while the other is the Common Bond Theory, also known as the Theory of Unity in Diversity. According to the first theory, the peoples of Nigeria in the pre-colonial period had little or nothing in common. They spoke different languages, had cultural differences and had no common ideological orientation; they were not united by common religion as they worshipped many gods. In effect, when they were brought together by the British at the dawn of the 20th century, they found themselves as "strange bed fellows". The theory goes on to stress that even during the colonial period, the peoples were not brought closely by the colonial administration based

on the principle of indirect rule which emphasised local particularism. Hence when Nigeria became independent, there was little, and still is, the difficulty of forging a nation of peoples so different in backgrounds. Thus, every problem in the process of nation building has been seen in terms of this theory of "strange bed fellows" (Ajayi, 2014).

The second theory negates, to a large extent, the first theory. This theory stresses that before the colonial period, common bonds existed among the Nigerian peoples. It states that the differences in language and culture were more apparent than real. For, very well considered, most Nigerian languages originated from a common parentage. Also, it is argued that the cultural differences, even today, are not as wide as is often emphasised. In other words, this theory emphasises that Nigerian peoples from the earliest times had links among themselves. What this theory is emphasising is that given the proper orientation, the problem of national integration is less complex than it appears. The nature of available evidences is more in support of the latter theory than the former. It is true, as the first theory states, that the peoples of Nigeria speak different languages and that they have different cultural backgrounds, but as it is known, they had common bonds as the second theory has stated which can mitigate the defects of the first one (Ajayi, 2014). This paper adopts the Common Bond Theory.

### **The Cross River Region**

The Cross River region is located in southeastern Nigeria and stretches from Benue State southward and covers all of Cross River State and Akwa Ibom, the Eastern part of Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Ebonyi and Abia States and continues into Mamfe Depression within which it flows the upper courses of the Cross River 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. About 49 per cent (19,350 square kilometers) of the Cross River Basin lies in Cross

River State, 29 per cent (11,452 square kilometers) fall within Anambra, Enugu, Abia and Imo states and an area 22 per cent (8,688 square kilometers) is situated in Benue State. The northern three quarters of the Cross River basin, between latitudes 5° 30' North and longitudes 8° and 9° 40' East, can be defined as the Upper Cross River area. A line running south of Ediba and Mamfe between the local watershed of the Calabar-Kwa River system and some northward flowing tributaries of the Cross River, forms an appropriate demarcation between the upper and lower coastal parts of the Cross River basin (Peters, 1990).

As a natural region, the identity of the Cross River basin is evident from its physical setting which defines a lowland surrounded by watersheds of varying elevation and prominence. To the north lies its watershed with the Benue basin which is formed by a rise in the plains to slightly over 200m. On the east, the headwaters and tributaries of the Cross River descend from Obudu and Bamenda highlands which are westward extensions of the Cameroon and Adamawa highlands. Elevations of more than 2000m are attained in the Eastern watershed of the Cross River basin. The Enugu escarpment or cuesta in the west constitutes the divide separating the Qwa Iboe and Iboe Rivers basins from the Cross River basin. The steep face of Enugu ceusta fronts the Cross River basin westward and forms a steep watershed which rises from about 120m near Umuahia in the south about 500m near Nsukka in the north. Although the Oban Hills are mostly drained by the Cross River system, these hills which are the southward extensions of the Cameroon Mountain provide a local watershed within the Cross River basin and furnish the geomorphological basis for separating the Upper area from the lower part of the basin (Peters, 1990).

The Cross River which is the third longest river in Nigeria is a major geo-physical feature after which "Cross River State" is named. The river has played a very fundamental role as a vehicle through which the healthy socio-cultural exchanges between groups were affected. From very early times, the river has always served as a highway of migration, commerce and civilisation for the peoples of the area. Enforced by various tributaries and



streams which occasionally also strengthened by it, a ramified network of waterways was created across thickly forested areas of the state, thus facilitating easy movement of its peoples and their civilisation (Onor, 1994).

### **The Lower Benue River Region**

The Benue is West Africa's second longest river flowing from the Cameroon Highlands for approximately 750 miles before joining the Niger at Lokoja. The Lower Benue is used as a geographical expression to describe at least 300 miles of the river. The Lower Benue and indeed the entire Benue has remained largely unresearched for a number of reasons. First, it was an area that the Europeans penetrated rather late in time. As a result, there are few documentary sources on the early history of this area. Secondly, the Benue valley is usually treated within the context of the Niger, and therefore, the analysis of the details on developments on the Benue itself is absent. This notwithstanding, efforts have been made over the years by researchers in various disciplines to elucidate the rich history and economy of this area (Ochefu, 2002).

The Lower Benue has long been a major centre of political and commercial activities. Some researchers now consider the valley to have been the home of proto-Idoma, Igala and Yoruba societies or the "East" commonly referred to in some Yoruba and Igbo traditions of origin. Archaeological evidence suggests very close relationships between some communities of the Lower Benue and the famous Nok Culture. Some of the major groups found there today share similar stories of origin and migration from the Upper Benue and Gongola River Valley. This study is concerned mainly with the Tiv, Igala, Idoma, Igbirra, Bassa, Igede, Aragi and to some extent the Jukun (Ochefu, 2002).

### **Patterns of Pre-colonial Diplomatic Contacts Between the Cross River and the Lower Benue River Regions**

#### ***Origin, Migration and Settlement***

Traditions of origins and migrations of several ethnic groups provided an important contact, interacting and integrative

mechanism in pre-colonial Nigeria. Although characterised by controversies, claims and counter claims, it is important to point out that certain areas in Nigeria such as the Upper Benue Valley, the Niger-Benue Conference and the Central Highlands of the Middle-Belt have been identified as centres of origin or parent stock from which many groups in Nigeria branched out to their present settlement areas. In the course of these migrations, it is now clear from available evidence that groups came in contact with one another and through such processes as inter-marriages, settlements (however temporary) and mutual cultural borrowings, impacted on one another (Afigbo, 1997).

Abasiattai links the migration of the Ibibio to the Central Benue region:

It was probably during the late Stone Age that the ancestors of the Ibibio, moving probably "from further north" occupied the Central Benue valley. Here, along with other populations living in a fairly well - defined area over which they still wandered to hunt and gather, they evolved the proto-Bantu language and other common religious and social institutions, including conceptions of God. This conclusion, based partly on Greenberg's linguistic studies, identified the Central Benue region as the original home of the Proto-Bantu - speaking people (Abasiattai, 1991: 62)

Abasiattai (1991) opines further that the ancestors of the Ibibio and other proto-Bantu people left the Central Benue region because after 2,500 B.C., the Sahara region, hitherto supporting vegetation and some population at advanced stages of hunting, gathering, fishing and possibly agriculture, began to desiccate. This forced its population to move outwards towards the Maghreb, and southwards towards the Guinea Savannah and forest fringes. Those moving southwards must have pressed on the proto-Bantu speakers in the Central Benue region, which eventually precipitated the beginning of Bantu dispersals into Equatorial and the present Cross River and Akwa Ibom States of Nigeria.



Ikiddeh (2005) corroborates the above assertion and noted that the Ibibio-Benue relationship may not be unconnected with what is known of the presence of the Jukun people of today's Taraba State on the Ibibio coastal area and beyond in the 16th century. Links have also been suggested between the Ibibio and the Plateau region of Nigeria, which inspires curiosity about recent discovery but yet to be explored similarities between key words including numerals in Gwari, the language of the indigenous population of Abuja, and the Ibibio language.

Apart from the Ibibio, the Annang, Oron, Eket, Ibeno and Obolo (Andoni) people of Akwa Ibom all link their migration into Nigeria via the Nigeria/Cameroon route (Akpan, 2012). In the Cross River State, groups such as Biase, Yakuur, Mbembe, occupy Biase, Yakurr and Obubra Local Government Areas, are unanimous in their history origin. They all uphold the Nigeria/Cameroon border as their original homeland. From there, their ancestors migrated under different leaders and through various routes to the modern settlement in the Middle Cross River areas. The Ejagham and Boki share the view expressed by the Biase, Yakuurr and Mbembe groups of people by upholding the Nigeria/Cameroon border as their ancestral homeland. The analysis of the foregoing reveals that all the aforementioned groups except perhaps the Efik belonged to the same general homeland within the historic Nigeria/Cameroon border area. Having occupied this area, "an intricate network of common ethnic origins, cultural ties and relationships among the inhabitants of this region occurred. The final effect of which was to transform these ties into a cultural watershed in the history of Africa (Onor, 1994).

The Tiv are the largest group of people in the Benue River Region. They occupy the northern and southern banks of the Benue from modern day Makurdi in Benue State to Wukari in Taraba State. By the beginning of the 18th century, the Tiv had expanded into the Lower Benue and Katsina-Ala River valleys from the Cameroon Highlands by displacing Chamba, Jukun, Idoma and some northern Cross River communities. Although fragmented into numerous clans without a centralised form of

political authority, the Tiv have a very strong sense of identity which has not only enabled them to coexist peacefully with their neighbours, but also facilitated their thrust into the Lower Benue region (Ochefu, 2002). There is a preponderance of evidence that the Tiv lived in a multi-ethnic environment; and that, in all probability, may have spoken dialects of a parental language which may be referred to as proto-Tiv. The area of the Nigeria-Cameroon plateau which the Tiv occupied is still inhabited by groups that share linguistic and cultural similarities with the Tiv (Iyo, 2002).

The Igede, are closely related with some of the ethnic groups that surround them. The people known as the Igede are found in Oju and Obi Local Government Areas of Benue State. The inhabitants of Oju and Obi Local Government Areas are linguistically and culturally homogenous. The Igede claim a legendary father called Agba and he is said to have originated from Iyakworro in Obudu Local Government Area of Cross River State. He had thirteen sons who make up the thirteen clans of Igede. They also claim a distant relationship with Isheike and Ezza of Abakiliki in Ebonyi State. In the course of their migrations, the Igede settled for some time among the Igbo at a place now forgotten. Apart from the Iyakworro of Obudu Local Government Area of Cross River State, the Igede have close affinities with the Igbabu and Itakpa in Ogoja Local Government Area of Cross River State. These people are by descent and culture, Igede. They migrated together from Ora after the war which caused their dispersal and settled together at Ipinu-Igede, but were severed from Benue State and included in Cross River State by the regional boundary Proclamation L.N. 126 of 1954. The Igbabu and Itakpa have become largely bilingual with the Yala and Yache, those with whom they have arbitrarily lumped (Ogbaji, 2002).

According to Afigbo (1990), many Cross River peoples of Ogoja such as Bokyi, Mkum, Yache and the Yala (who are Idoma) and the Yakurr have traditions of recent migrations from the Benue valley into the Upper Cross region. He opines that the migration took place in the wake of Jukun military terrorism and the attractions of the trade and the fact Idoma were absorbed into Ogoja and Ibibio societies.

### *Economic Relations*

It is important to note that the ultimate foundation of external relations was the quest by each sovereign community for self-sufficiency. This quest arose from the fact that no community, no matter how rich and however favoured by nature, could produce all it needed to attain what its people consider the good life and self-fulfillment whether at the individual or group level. To attain these goals, geographical, economic and other advantages provided by nature and history were utilised and maximised, while disadvantages in the same areas are transcended, through relations with neighbouring peoples and regions (Afigbo, 1990).

The people of Cross River region were effectively linked to the Benue valley area by means of trade routes, followed by long distance traders. According to Effa-Attoe (1999), available evidence points to the fact that trade between the two regions pre-dates 1600 and spilled into the 20th century. According to her, the origins of the formidable trade network is closely associated with the trans-Saharan slave trade and large scale and forcible transfer of population, commonly referred to as the slave trade, linked the Cross River basin with the societies of the Central Sudan through the activities of the Jukun (Effa-Attoe, 1997).

One such route was the Cross River which as noted rises from the Cameroon Mountains and flows through areas such as Ikom, Itigidi, Ediba, Biase territory (comprising areas like Agwagune and Umon), Eniong and Itu in Ibibioland into the Cross River estuary. Much of the pre-colonial trade from the Benue valley, the Cameroon and the Igbo area passed through this river. From Ikom, this route extended by land to Ogoja, Yala, Obudu up to the Beune valley. A very important route ran from Ibi, on the Benue, via Wukari (the Jukun capital), Yala, Ogoja, Ezza, Uburu, Afikpo, Bende and Arochukwu. From Arochukwu, the route stretched to Itu in present day Akwa Ibom State, where it joined the main river route to Calabar. Another route may have run from Calabar estuary, through Qua territory to Akamkpa, Yakurr, Ikom up to Ogoja, Yala, Obudu, extending to the Benue valley region (Effa-Attoe, 1997).

Okpeh (2008), confirms that the existence of trade routes and water-ways suggest the integrated nature of the economic activities of the people in the past. He cites the opular land route like Kano-Badagary route crossing the Niger; N'Garzagamu (Borno)-Yola route which criss-crossed the Jukun and Igbo countries as well as areas in modern Cross River and Akwa Ibom States and through Bauchi with connecting centres in the Panda, Abinchi, Ibi, Muri, Wukari and Alagoland; and water ways like the Niger and its tributary, the Benue and network of creeks. Afigbo (1990) also adds that the southern portion of the Benue East of the Niger was an economic unit – in the sense of (a) being effectively linked by trade routes (b) using more or less the same currencies – brass rods, copper wire, cowries, manillas etc.

Various commodities were moved along these routes. The most important of them were slaves, ivory, wild rubber, camwood. Also yam and various food crops and domestic animals such as chicken, horses and cow were also traded on. The goods from the Benue region were exchanged form European wares such as gun, gunpowder, textiles, tobacco, rum, hardware (principally utensils and tools) and beads. These wares were obtained by the Efik at the coast of Old Calabar and distributed through the Aro, the Agwuagune, the Umon, the Abriba and other groups along the trade routes, to the Benue region.

Salt was a very crucial item of trade, which served also as a currency in pre-colonial transactions between the Tiv and their neighbours. By the middle of the 19th century, the use of salt had permeated the Tiv society so much that salt stood out as the most important product of trade in Tivland. Pre-colonial Tivland did not undertake salt production. Its salt needs were therefore met via importation. Salt was brought into southern part of Tivland from Udam. Production took place here in the Ogoja Division. Exchange of Tiv goods took place along the frontline markets of Obudu, Ogoja and so on (Atagher, 2006).

Traders travelling from one political unit in order to attend the market of another unit ensured their safety by travelling in armed groups. Traders also cultivated the friendship of certain

people in the political unit hosting a market. The cultivation of such a friendship, it has been observed, often yielded a lot of benefits for the visiting merchant. On arrival in a political unit hosting a market, it was usually in the residence of such a friend that trader would stop to drink water, eat and re-arrange his wares before going down to the market square. It was also in his friend's house that the trader would spend the night, gather and arrange commodities that he was able to buy, including the remnants if any, of the goods he came to sell, for onward movement to his home. On arrival in the market square, traders would spread their mats on the ground and place their wares on the mat. The use of mats for placing trade goods continued even till the first decades of the 20th century. It was in the 1950s that traders began to actually appreciate the use of wooden tables in placing their wares (Effa-Attoe, 1997).

The importance of cotton as an item of trade derived from the fact that Tiv cloth *tugudu* was used extensively as a form of currency within the areas. The bulk of Tiv woven cloth went to the Udam because they had neither cotton nor weavers. Tiv in return got commodities such as iron bars, camwood, palm oil and livestock from Udam. These items were indispensable among the Tiv. Principally, women, for personal adornment for example, used camwood. There was constant demand for it by every household. It was considered a necessity for infants. Being farmers, the Tiv found the purchase of iron bars a necessity. Iron bars were needed for making of farm tools or weapons. Bearing in mind that the appearance of iron revolutionised agriculture, the importance of iron among the Tiv cannot be over emphasised. In addition to cloths, Tiv gave yams, millet, guinea corn in exchange for the above Udam items. Exchange also took place between the Tiv along the frontline markets of Obudu and Ogoja.

#### **Language Factor**

Language was a cultural instrument of diplomacy which helped to forge inter-group relations. Communities situated on either side of each frontiers of contact speak each other dialects of their

mother tongues. According to Alagoa (1980) within Nigeria, the Efik, Ibibio and Cross River peoples are closest linguistically to groups to the north of them in the Central Benue valley. Such groups are those of Jos Plateau, the Jukun and Tiv which belong to the same Benue-Congo sub-family with the Efik, Ibibio and the majority of Cross River languages (Including Ogoni of Rivers State).

In the Benue-Congo sub-family, the member languages have been classified into Plateau, Jukunoid, Cross River and Bantoid groups. Within the Cross River Greenberg classified the languages into three sub-groups as follows:

1. Boki, Gayi (Uge), Yakoro
2. Ibibio, Efik, Ogoni (Kana), Andoni, Akoiyang, Ododop and Koro
3. Akunakuna, Abine, Yako, Asiga, Ekuri, Ukelle, Okpoto-Mteze Olulumo.

The Ekoi people of the Cross River basin have been classified as speakers of languages not only in the Bantoid group along with the Tiv and Bantu, but are thought to have descended "from the same immediate parent languages as that of the Bantu languages". These linguistic affinities suggest that the peoples inhabiting the territory watered by the Cross River and Qua-Iboe Rivers formed a cultural continuum with the peoples of the Central venue valley. Further, that this area may have formed a cultural watershed in ancient times in the history of Africa, as the cradle of the great Bantu peoples of Central and Southern Africa. The language also provides leads to the directions of migrations of the peoples or of the exchange of ideas and of various forms of contact between the peoples (Alagoa, 1980).

#### **Shared Cultural Values/Borrowings**

One of the essential elements of culture is its dynamic nature. Though every culture has its distinctive features, these do not insulate it from internal and external factors of change. While the internal forces may take inspiration from indigenous



elements, the external forces are brought through contact with neighbours, diplomatic relations either separately or in various combinations. Consequently, there are hardly any culture, which does not show traces of these external influences in the form of language, beliefs, morals, values, music, diet and other social habits. Apparently, the degree of adaptability as well as the extent of assimilation varies from society to society. It is logical to postulate that the vulnerability of a culture to change is a function of the degree of interaction with the neighbouring cultures. As people moved from one place to another and settled in one place or the other, they also borrowed from each other. For instance, the "salt tradition" is a common phenomenon among the people of the Benue valley and a section of the Upper Cross River region. This theory features prominently in the formation of *Tor-Agbanda* institution (Drum chief). Among the Tiv the varying traditions of the origin of the institution agree that it was the share of a gift of salt to an external king that culminated in the appointment of the first *Tor-agbande* (Apanda, 2006).

It should be noted that it is not only in Tiv tradition that salt featured so prominently. Indeed, this can be said to be true of most ethnic groups that inhabit the Benue valley area at present. The most interesting one relates to the Tiv episode with regards the founding of Alago kingdom of Keana. According to the tradition, Akeana Adi, the founder of Keana, during the early migrations of the Alago people came across a pond containing a salt crust. He then tricked his elder brother, Andoma to move ahead while he remained to solely take possession of the pond. After settling at Doma, Andoma realised that he had been deceived by Akeana and attempted unsuccessfully to prevent the processing of the salt. Later, when Andoma received a gift of two bags of salt from his brother, he in return sent a royal gown, thus confirming Akeana Adi as the ruler of Keana. Salt also featured prominently in traditions relating to Alago-Jukun relations (Varvar, 2002).

Among the Yala of Ogoja area too, there are traditions that hold that one of the Yala founding fathers - Ala, also referred to variously as Ode, Ochumode, arrived modern Ogoja area from

Idoma in present Benue State in the 17th century to exploit the salt deposits. There, he displaced the indigenous Igbadu proprietors of the salt ponds at Yala. The Yala story bears similarity with the Tiv traditions, not just because it touches on salt, but also because one of the names of the founder - Ala is similar to Allah Sariki of the Tiv episode (Afigbo, 1990, Vavar, 2002).

In his work on Idoma, Erim (1981) notes that the sovereignty of the Kwararafa confederacy, which was one of the seven greatest kingdoms of the Sudan, whose territory included all the lower and part of the middle portion of Hausaland, to the south, their sovereignty extended beyond the Cross River region as far as the Atlantic. He cites the description given of the Kwararafa by Sultan in 1827, that:

Among the provinces of Bow-sheer (i.e. Bauchi) the following are the most considerable...and the ninth is Koronorfa which embraces about 24 divisions, ruled by one king, who often sailed forth upon Kanoo and Barnoo....Near the province there is an anchorage or harbor for the ships of the Christians (Erim, 1981: 15-16).

The reference to "the Cross River as far as the Atlantic" and the "harbour for the ships of the Christians" certainly seems to refer to the area later known as Calabar. This may be combined with the fact that in Calabar, there is a community known as *Abakpa*, the name used for *Abakpawariga* (Hausa) in the Benue valley. Unfortunately, historians working on the pre-1600 history of Calabar have not sought to investigate the connection between Kwararafa and the sea port...before 1600, Kwararafa was probably a major supplier of slaves down both the Cross River and Niger Rivers (Erim, 1981).

Providing further insight, Alago states that:

"Akpa" by which the Jukun are identified in the Cross River region has been noted to have a wide distribution within the region. The Town of Calabar on the Cross River estuary, for example, is known locally as Atakpa, with a possible

correlation with Jukun *Ata Akpa* (Ata of the Akpa, that is, king of the Akpa). Further, "the descendants of the original Ejagham inhabitants of Calabar are known to the Efik as the *Abakpa* or people of Akpa, Great Sea. These *Akpa* references to the estuary may indicate the use of the area as an export outlet by the Jukun, for the slaves collected in their extensive raids over Northern Nigeria. The presence of manillas in the Benue valley is further evidence of trade links stretching from the Cross River estuary, possibly through the Aro system, to the Benue (Alagoa: 1980: 60).

Early relationships between the Jukun and peoples of the Cross River region have also been seen in institutions basic to the life of the communities. Thus, evidence of the divine kingship and sun-worship of the Jukun has been found in the titles of *Ntoe* among the Ekoi and *Ntinya* and *Okuku* among the Ibibio. Put differently, the influence of the highly ritualised priest-king of the Jukun spread throughout the Benue-Cross region. It may be noted however, that evidence of divine or sacred kingship exists among several peoples of Africa. Nigerians groups among whom the institution is found include the Nri Igbo, Igala, Benin and the Yoruba. Its presence among the Cross River peoples can only be used as an argument for relationship among the Jukun as cumulative evidence in combination with other evidence. It would further appear that both the *Akwanshi* (carved stone figures numbering about 295 found in Cross River region venerating the dead ancestors) and Jukun civilisation remained dominant in the Cross River region about the early years of the century after which the Jukun ancestors left their ancestral homeland in the Upper Cross River region further northwards and took over the lordship of the Kwararafa confederacy (Alagoa, 1980; Erim, 1991).

According to Afigbo (1990) in spite of the absence of political unity and group consciousness at the ethnic group level, there was an intricate network of relationships among the village republics and states of the zones, the final effect which was to transform them into a "cultural area" - at least when looked at in counterpoise to the social and cultural systems surrounding

the area. He adds that "in short, we are dealing here with relations and contacts between neighbouring culture areas, whose boundaries, that is even linguistic boundaries, cannot be defined with any precision".

### *Inter-ethnic Marriages*

Another cultural factor of contact was marriage, and there is evidence throughout Nigeria that it promoted inter-group contact and integration in the period under review. The traditions of most ethnic groups are replete with example of nuptial relationship with others, a development which helped concretized cross-cutting loyalties between them long before the advent of the British. Okpeh (2008) has shown how Idoma intermarried with Yala and Bekwara neighbours. Thus, throughout the pre-colonial era, marriages between different groups helped to promote and or cement inter-group relations in Nigeria.

The Tiv people used the marriage institution to forge various forms of alliances. It was their practice of the Tiv to exchange women with her neighbouring groups including those in the Upper Cross River region; each ruling family provided a wife for the family of its counterpart in territory. A chief who gave his daughter in marriage to another established himself permanently through his daughter in the other community. Besides, inter-marriage and co-habitation were even common between ordinary folks of neighbouring territories, than were between royal families. By and through such, marriages, separate entities were linked together in friendly and lasting alliances. Inter-group marriages especially between members of different linguistic communities, also facilitated multi-lingualism because it involved not only constant visits to other group, but also prolonged residence of members of one linguistic community in the other area (Apenda, 2006).

Mixed marriage across the Tiv and their inter-ethnic communities were very common especially the south of Tivland between them and the Udam in Cross River region. The Tiv got the idea of female circumcision from the Udam and the Igede

their neighbours, but refused to engage in the practice because they believed that it negatively affected women, who spend several weeks in pains and agony to the operation, This was because as an agrarian society, they wanted their women to make greater economic contributions to the society (Apenda, 2006).

According to Agba (2006) of all the Tiv neighbours, Udam had been the closest to them in terms of marriage. To marry from Udam, the Tiv needed to take with them the following items: a keg of wine, *alie* (a variety of kola nut), and a leg of antelope – antelope was a highly valued animal among the Udam, hence its inclusion on the list of items to be brought before giving their daughters to the Tiv.

### **Warfare**

Even though the relations between the Cross River and the Benue regions were mostly cordial, conflicts and wars, which are major ingredients of inter-group relations sometimes, occurred. According to Yusuf (2006) “communities are human creations that reflect people’s needs, choices and decisions, but some people have more influence over those decisions than others”. Conflict therefore is interplay of various competing forces and their effects on the society. Conflict and war are sometime detrimental to the growth of the society and at another a source of mutual co-operation. Contact among these groups at early stage was characterised by war (in most cases) since each of them was in the process of occupying a heaven for itself at the expense of the other. Suspicion was therefore high among the people. For instance, in the process of expansion and subsequent settlement, the Tiv contact with the Udam of upper Cross River witnessed a lot of friction.

Atagher (2006) confirms this scenario that the Tiv contact with the Udam of Upper Cross River (comprising groups like the Yalla, Yache, Gakem, Yakoro, Otukwang and Bete, who were their southern neighbours) witnessed a lot of frictions. Tiv expansion against the Udam particularly by the the Kunav and Gaav, being the early groups of Tiv who first had contact with the Udam led to traditional enmity between them which the

British colonial administrators confirmed the occurrences of wars. This ultimately gave rise to the erection of the “Munshi Walls” by the British to check Tiv intrusion into the Udam territory (Atahger, 2006).

### **Some Aspects of Diplomacy**

Nigeria is not a mere geographical expression, if by that one means that before the advent of Europeans, the diverse peoples of Nigeria had little or no contact with each other, for on the contrary, a variety of links existed between various peoples. Hodgkin (1975) aptly observes: ... these relationships ... sometimes took the form of war and enslavement, treaties, the visits of wandering scholars, the diffusion of political and religious ideas, the borrowing of techniques and above all trade.

Uya (2012) commenting on the relevance of pre-colonial African diplomacy notes that “in the context of continuous interaction and linkage with the rest of the world as well as near and far neighbours which had to be properly negotiated to extract the most benefits or prevent the most disruptions whether in trade or commerce, in war and peace, in religion and so on that African diplomacy emerged long before the European intrusion into the continent”. Also, Agba (2006) has shown how diplomacy was used in the management of relations between the Tiv in the Benue region and the Udam in the upper Cross River region. According to him, not the whole of Tiv or the whole of Udam had hostilities against one another. Mbaduku (Kunav) were friendly with the Otukwang (Udam). There was a treaty of friendship between these two such that during wars between Mbaduku and Mbayongo, the Otukwang people assisted Mbaduku. By the time the British colonial administrators arrived, the pressure which the Tiv had exerted on Udam over acquisition of more land reached an advanced stage. This was so because by the time the “Munshi Wall” was about to be erected, the Tiv had already penetrated deep into Udam territory. The “Munshi Wall” did not extend up to Shangev-Tiev, although they shared a common border with the Udam. This was because of the good relationship existing between Shangev-Tiev people and the



Udam. The treaty of friendship between the between Gaav and the Udam entered at the border of these two communities was accompanied by the slaughtering of lambs. This was how Tiv and Udam in this area managed to mend fences and live harmoniously. As a result of this development, many Gaav people crossed into and settled in Udam territory.

Also accredited agents were employed by groups in one region to represent their interest of group in another region. This resulted in the use of traditional priests. These diplomats used emblems such as cane, traditional whistle, fan, sword and so on and peculiar uniforms which ensured their free passage in alien territories. They also enjoyed diplomatic privileges which caused them to be immune from unwarranted attack and arrests. Sometimes, there were exchanges of ambassadors with the neighbours (Akpan, 2016).

#### **Impact of the Diplomatic Relations Between the Cross River and Middle Benue Regions**

The participation of the peoples of the Cross River and the Benue regions generated tremendous impact on the people. For instance, extensive trade fostered inter-group relations. Part from exchange of goods and services, certain social, cultural and even political ideas were exchanged. This led to a proper cementing of the relationship between peoples of the two areas and consequently a relatively environment for the growth and expansion of trade. The involvement of the peoples of the Cross River and the Benue regions in this trade brought them into a network of the international economy. For the first time in the history of these people, they became fully involved in trade with peoples as far as Europe and the Americas. The result was the introduction into the Cross River/Benue valley region, of a new trade goods (e.g. guns, gun powder, beads and mirror), new ideas and culture (Christianity and Western education) (Effa-Attoe, 1999).

Moreover, a whole range of new goods such as slaves, camwood and ivory, gained new economic value, which hitherto they did not have. New methods of economic specialisation were

encouraged in the two regions. For instance, people of the Benue valley region specialised in the acquisition and supply of slaves. In addition, there was a creation of a new range of consumer demands for imported goods such as guns, gun powder, soap, gin, rum and brandy.

The sum total of the pre-colonial diplomatic relations relates to the promotion of substantial degree of peace and harmony among the people. Warm relations existed on a very large scale. This is not to deny the occurrence of occasional fracas. As a result of these contacts, each group of people learnt and benefited from the other. For example, the Udam learnt the knowledge from the Tiv. Economic activities gave rise to large scale inter-mingling. This also resulted in inter-marriages. These marriages produced a new breed of people whose loyalty transcended the narrow "tribal" loyalties of their ancestors. This intermingling and inter-marriages promoted the diffusions of culture and helped to bind the various people together. There was thus, a cross-fertilisation of ideas among the various peoples. Through inter-marriage, the Tiv succeeded in acquiring some of their crops such as *mondo Udam*. A Tiv man who married an Udam woman necessarily had to plant this crop for her. Tiv women too embraced the crop with the passage of time. New crops were generally introduced in the contact and trading. From Udam, the Tiv benefited the diffusions of such crops such as *dam yo*, cassava and groundnuts. Livestock such as *ikyegh dam* (duck) also came from the Udam area. Other culture diffusions included *akombo-a-dam*, cult (Atagher, 2006).

#### **Conclusion**

The study of pre-colonial diplomacy becomes very relevant, particularly, that of some regions in northern and southern Nigeria, in view of the "north south dichotomy", in particular and the fact that conflict among mankind seem to be escalating. Meanwhile, there is the outmost desire and efforts to curb conflicts in our midst and harmonise relations for the progress of mankind. Globalisation which has reduced the world into a micro village also calls for cooperation and understanding among

societies and nations in order to realise maximum benefits. There is need for Nigerians to appreciate the past linkages, build on them, de-emphasise the negative antecedents and promote the positive aspects.

In spite of whatever impressions of some contemporary ethnic chauvinists who are looking for secure political identity and autonomy of their ethnic homelands, the links which binds the peoples of each member state of the Nigerian federation to the peoples and regions around them are as ancient, as deep, as varied and therefore as important as the links internal to the state. Against the background of the evidences contained in this study, one can no longer hold to the theory that before the colonial period, Nigerians had nothing in common or that at independence, they were entirely strange people brought together. By stressing the links between the Nigerian peoples before the colonial period, however, it is not being suggested that they had no differences at all. In spite of the theory of languages with common parentage, there is no doubt that the different groups spoke different languages. In spite of the fundamental similarities in culture, there is no doubt that at least on the surface cultural differences did exist among the people. Nevertheless, it will be a negation of the natural process of historical development to emphasise only the differences. While the differences should not be overlooked, the common bonds should also be emphasised not only in the interest of nation-building, but as a true representation of the historical process in the country before the colonial period.

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