

Journal of African and Global Issues Quarterly (JAGIQ) Volume 1, Issue 1, 2021
**HISTORICAL REVIEW OF TRADITIONAL DIPLOMACY AND
CONFLICT IN ISUOKOMA**

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Abstract

In Isuokoma clan, the diplomatic activities used by the people makes it imperative to take a cursory examination of the nature of intergroup relations that has existed between her and her neighbours. The study of diplomatic and conflict relations between Isuokoma and her neighbours reveals the contributions of Isuokoma neighbours to the political, economic, socio-cultural and religious development of Isuokoma and vice versa and also debunk Europeans assertion that African communities were in permanently in hostility with one another before the coming of the former, which was often used to justify European colonial conquest. The study used qualitative methodology to identify the place of trade, marriage, cultural and labour exchange as well as sale of arms, blood oath and conflicts in the development of the historic culture of diplomacy and conflict relations between Isuokoma and her neighbours. The study recommends increased community development and peacebuilding in the relations between Isuokoma and her neighbours.

Key words: *Diplomacy, conflict, trade, marriage & Isuokoma*

Introduction

Talbot (1937) was studying Igbo people and the nexus they shared with one another when his findings made him sum that a negro is the most gregarious of all men; his greatest joy is found in amusing himself with his companions in dances, plays, etc., and perhaps, his greatest grief is solitude. This love for company is no doubt one of the chief causes of the existence of the innumerable societies and clubs, secret or otherwise which permeates the whole coast into when most people are subdivided.

This is to show that from time immemorial, the Igbo people have devised numerous ways they interacted with one another in what may be called diplomatic relationship in the present parlance. Many studies have described this diplomatic relation in the past under such titles as intergroup relations (Mbalisi, 2015, Onu, 2021, Chimezie, 2021a, Duru, 1984). The essence of this was because communities in Igboland in the past were not self-sufficient; they depended on one another for certain basic necessities of life. Therefore, the need to satisfy their immediate wants compelled them to move away from their immediate environments in search of other resources and relationship with their neighbours. The foregoing was also in line with the general view that man is a wanting being, (Chimezie, 2021b) who goes after emerging wants on daily basis. Due to this desire to satisfy his other needs, man interacted with his fellow man which brought mutual understanding between the two and sometimes, this understanding was sealed with blood covenant, (Ajaegbo, 2021). With this in place, Isuokoma community in Ebonyi State, Nigeria was not isolated rather it had at various times interacted with her neighbours. Such neighbours the community had diplomatic relations during time under study included Isiogbo and Naara of Nkanu, Enugu State. These people occupied the North-Western borders of Isuokoma; on the North were the Ezza-Egu and Ohafia Agba of Ishielu. At the Southern part is bounded by Uburu in Ohaozara Local Government Area

of Ebonyi State, at the Eastern part of the clan were the Oshiri people (North East) and Onicha people (South East) all within Onicha Local Government of Ebonyi State; while on the North East and North West were the Ezza-Nkerefi and Nkanu of Enugu State, respectively.

Notwithstanding the complexities and skillfulness of the diplomacy practiced in this area for centuries, the history of Isuokoma has remained a field little explored, especially in the area understudy. A study on the origin and settlement of the people of Isuokoma is obviously difficult because of more or less scanty or complete absence of historical document of the people, (Chimezie, 2021c). Study on Isuokoma people has become imperative for clear understanding and appreciation of diplomatic relations between this ancient community and other neighboring communities. Even though a few history texts that dealt with the Onicha history which Isuokoma is inclusive exist, these only covered origin, political and social history of the people, in fact, it is tempting to go on to list neglected areas of Isuokoma historical research. The aforementioned gaps necessitated this study. This is a historical expository study that tends to unravel the technicalities of diplomatic relations that existed in Isuokoma during the period under review: (1989-2007).

Methodology and Scope

This study is essentially a qualitative research. It utilized mainly primary and secondary materials to develop its content. The primary data were collected from different villages of Isuokoma. Special emphasis was paid on the aged townsmen, who gave their consent that their real names be used to sight the randomly selected key informant interviews. The information gathered from the field was thematically interpreted and presented in different sessions of the study.

In 1989, the Onicha Local Government Area was created in Ebonyi State. This local government contained the Isuokoma and majority of the communities it had diplomatic nexus. The creation of the local government

created a level of unity and another dimension in the diplomatic ties between these communities. By 2007, the diplomatic ties culminated in the settlement of one of the historic conflicts that bedeviled the communities starting from the colonial era. The subsequent paragraphs discussed the various diplomatic techniques observable in Isuokoma. But before that, a brief description of the concept of diplomacy was given below.

What is Diplomacy?

Diplomacy can be said to have more political than cultural inclination. In its simplest form, it is the term used to describe the mode of interaction between two or more countries of the world. Although the art and act of diplomacy is not a recent occurrence and tracing the origin does not fall within the concern of this particular study. But suffices to stress here is that modern diplomacy is traceable to the 5th Century's Italian City-States where its goal was to establish representation and create a communication channel between the monarch and the city-states, Trunkos (2017a). Nowadays, diplomacy has developed to embrace wide range of activities which were never thought would be there from time immemorial. What then is diplomacy?

Kissinger was quoted in Jonathan et'al (2012a) to have defined it as a plea for good relationships between nations through negotiations against wars. The living Webster encyclopedic dictionary puts it as the science or art of conducting negotiations between nations", Jonathan et'al (2012b). According to the traditional American view, diplomacy is a process of ironing out differences through discussion with eventual agreement based on rational accommodation of reasonable interests" Jordan et'al, (2009). Furthermore, Jonathan et'al (2012c) concluded that it is "the science or art of resolving international conflict peacefully through agreements, compromises and settlements found in negotiations". (Nicolson, 1964) added that it is "the management of international relations by negotiation; the method by which these relations are adjusted by ambassadors and envoys; the business or art of the diplomatist." Trunkos (2017b) stressed that it covers all "the main instrument to implement national foreign policy

during peace and is also a tool that can be used to communicate during conflict”

All the definitions given above have one thing in common. The fact that diplomacy deals with verbal negotiation was overemphasized. It was Trunkos quoted above that attempted to include both conventional and unconventional instruments of communication. These researchers in the lieu of the foregoing give the operational definition of diplomacy to mean the activities, actions and reactions of both government officials and non-government officials that include but not limited to verbal negotiation and cultural dispositions that are geared towards obtaining and maintaining peace across borders. The multi-dimensional nature of international system from the last decades of the 20th century has made it difficult to pin diplomacy at official government-government talks as it used to be. Trunkos (2017c) observed that because of technological advances that have led to cheap and easy transportation and communication, the world is increasingly interconnected and many new tools are now available for diplomats. Bilateral negotiations and summit meetings have been the traditional approaches to resolving international issues, but in the 20th century, new diplomatic communications tools have emerged, such as public diplomacy (Cull, 2008), cultural diplomacy (Arnd, 2005), and cyber diplomacy (Potter, 2002). Since the beginning of the 20th century, how diplomacy is conducted and who the actors are have changed significantly.

One of the new dimensions of diplomacy enumerated above was cultural diplomacy. That is the area that mostly covers the diplomatic relations that existed between the Isuokoma and her neighbors. Here, their motive was to achieve the maximum group objectives with a minimum cost within a system of politics in which war is a possibility. To further do justice to this, finding on diplomatic and conflict relations between Isuokoma and her neighbours will be accessed under the following; blood oath, exchange of labour and sales of arms.

Findings on Diplomatic and Conflict Relations

Blood Oath

It is of important to state that, one of the diplomatic relations between Isuokoma and some of her neighbours (Uburu, Oshiri and Agba) was in the area of not shedding each other's blood . That of Uburu and Oshiri was due to the fact that Oshiri, Isuokoma and Uburu have a common tradition of origin. Furthermore, during an interview with Elder Odii (2020), he reiterated that there exist a historic alliance where both Oshiri and Isuokoma sought the protection of each other during wars. He furthermore added that they had common founding fathers (Akpata Eze and Eze Ntum) that during settlement periods, were not able to defeat each other during a confrontation. Consequently, both swore an oath of allegiance to be each other's keeper and to carry out hunting expedition which was what they hitherto, were known for. Furthermore, Oka (2020) explained that Isuokoma and Agba clans had bitter wars over supremacy which resulted in loss of lives and properties. Both clans decided to settle the conflict and swore an oath of allegiance not to harm any person that comes from both sides which up till today is been respected by the present generation of both the both clans. Philosophically, Isuokoma and these communities (Oshiri, Uburu and Agba) could not live to witness the killing of the other by any living being in any form to testify a bond covenant explained Odii, (2020). Generally, the blood oath between Isuokoma and the aforementioned served as a sealed and bond that made their diplomatic relations to remain cordial.

Exchange of Labour

Labour can be defined as a man-made effort geared towards production of goods and services. It is germane to state that, during farming season there is to a very large degree an exchange of labour amongst Isuokoma and her neighbours. This is because during this season (farming), the labourers from Isuokoma community engaged in farming activities in her neighboring communities' farmland and vice versa. It is of import to note that, employing other labourers depended on the type of farm produce the farmer wanted to cultivate, (Omeke, 2020). The major occupation of people of Isuokoma is

farming. They cultivate yam, cassava, potato, rice, maize, palm produce (palm oil and kernel) and vegetables. Labourers from Ezzaagu, Agba, Oshiri and Onicha came to Isuokoma during farming season with their hoes and machetes to work on hire for Isuokoma farmers and vice versa. Those who owned tractors from Uburu came with their tractors to plough and harrow parcels of land for Isuokoma rice farmers observed Chukwu, (2020). With this, the relationship between these people remain cordial, not just during the farming season, but beyond. The essence of maintaining this cordial relationship without season is to always be in good terms to have each other's services whenever needed.

Sales of Arms

Another area of diplomatic relations amongst Isuokoma and its neighbours was in the area of sales of arms. Ani, (2020) during an interview to these researchers explained that this diplomatic relation was necessitated as a result of the 97 years' wars also known as O.M.O (Obeagu-Mgbalukwu-Ojiegbe) war. The Isuokoma communities of Mgbalukwu and Obeagu who were persecuting the war against the Ojiegbe people were in dire hard need of arms and ammunition to continue the fight. The Isuokoma people approached the Oshiri people which the later was hitherto known to have fought the Ezza people during its early days of settlement at her present abode. Due to the cordiality between Isuokoma and Oshiri, the latter agreed to sell arms to the former. This has over the years remained a strong diplomatic bond that knitted these two together.

Exchange of Political and Cultural Ideas

Culture is a term used to generally describe the totality of a people's way of life, or those distinctive attributes by which a people's way of life, or those distinctive attribute by which a people can be identified. Thus, it bestows an identity on a people. Over the years and due to the course of inter-group relations between Isuokoma and her neighbours, there have been a considerable exchange of political and cultural ideas between them (Isuokoma and its neighbours). These exchange ranges from alliance, burial

and marriage list. It is germane to take a cursory look at some of the exchange.

It is instructive to note that, the Isuokoma people exchanged some form of burial functions with her neighboring communities of Onicha and Agba. In Onicha community for example, the people do not bury their loved ones during January which is the beginning of year. This is due to the fact that January marks the beginning of a formal year and it is not wise to start the year with burial and mourning. The people (Onicha community) has decided to observe it as a custom to keep the month of January as a festival period marked by celebration, narrated Okorie, (2020) in an interview. Whilst in Agba community, the people do not bury during December and January due to the fact that the former is used for festive period which is characterized by celebration whilst the latter marks the beginning of the year which may result to a bad and unfruitful year if burials were to be held (Oka, 2020). It is important to note that, the Isuokoma people borrowed this culture from her neighboring community of Onicha. Hence, the people (Isuokoma) do not bury during January which is used to celebrate the beginning of the year. By extension, this share cultural practice has made their diplomatic relations to be cordial and lasting.

In the area of exchange of political idea, the Isuokoma people have often times established political alliance amongst her neighboring communities in order to protect her political ambitions. A notable example was her (Isuokoma) alliance with her Oshiri neighbours during one of the Local Government election which brought an Oshiri man, Chief Hon. Obasi Nwode to office. During the build-up of the election, the Isuokoma and Oshiri exchanged political ideas which paid off and eventually brought their candidate (Chief Hon. Obasi Nwode) into the position of Chairman of Onicha Local Government Area.

Warfare and Conflict

Wars are very diverse. Wars arise from different situations and play different sorts of roles in bargaining over conflicts. Whilst conflict, by definition, is an intrinsic and inevitable part of human existence. However, violent conflict is not inevitable and as such is an anomaly. Conflict can also be defined as the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups. Armed conflict is the resort to the use of force and armed violence in the pursuit of incompatible and particular interests and goals. The worst forms of armed conflict include mass murder and genocide against unarmed civilians:

The major causes of conflict amongst communities is land which in international affairs is known as territorial disputes. The values States place on home territory seem undiminished despite the apparent reduction in the inherent value of territory as technology has developed. Historically, territory (land) was the basis of economic production – agriculture and extraction of raw materials. Winning and losing wars meant gaining or losing territory, which meant increasing or decreasing wealth. The goal of regaining territory lost to another State is called ‘irredentism.

The Isuokoma people have overtime, had conflict with her neighbouring communities based on land. This is due to the importance of land in Igbo land. Amongst these conflict was; the Isu Achara people and the Onicha people, Agbaebo and the Agba people, Mgbaleze and the Nkerefi people. It is of import to note that, all these conflict was based on land. That of Agbaebo and Agba was hinged on land and supremacy. Although, these conflicts never led to war because there were quelled by the Elders of the communities in order to maintain peace.

Although, the only known war the Isuokoma people has fought over land dispute was the 97 years’ war between the Obeagu and Mgbalukwu communities of Isuokoma and the Ojiegbe people. The war is also known and called O.M.O (Obeagu-Mgbalukwu-Ojiegbe) war, the war was

prolonged as a result of the lukewarm attitude of government and the spirit of retaliation amongst others.

The Ojiegbe people migrated from Ezza Ezekuna clan in the present Ezza South Local Government Area of Ebonyi State to Mgbalukwu Isuokoma. They were well received. They decided with time to pay taxes to Isuokoma where they lived and by so doing became citizens of Isuokoma through naturalization.

With time a big problem arose between the new settlers and that was the issue of tax payment. Some of them opted to pay tax at Afikpo because they were living in Isuokoma land which is in former Afikpo division. Others chose to pay at Abakaliki, their place of origin. This disagreement lasted many years. To resolve the conflict a tax boundary was drawn from Efuru stream at Okpuru Nwaneke shallow pond back to Mgbalukwu settlement by the white man. Those who lived between Mgbalukwu and Efuru stream pay tax at Afikpo. Those who lived between Efuru stream to Abanaba pay at Abakaliki division though living in Isuokoma land. Those who paid their taxes at Afikpo were given the name “Ojiegbe” to differentiate them from their kits and kins who paid at Abakaliki. The name Ojiegbe is also translated by some to mean “the people with gun” in recognition of their fighting ability.

The O.M.O (Obeagu-Mgbalukwu-Ojiegbe) war was as a result of struggle for more land which led to disorder culminating in physical confrontation in 1910 and also refusal to pay tributes and rents which resulted to three court cases which all cases were decided in favour of the landlords. The judgment of the courts was, however disobeyed. The continued disobedience of the court judgment led to bitter quarrels which prolonged the dispute to 2007. The Obeagu-Mgbalukwu-Ojiegbe) war lasted for 97 years. This war crippled economic activities, led to lack of infrastructural development, loss of lives and properties, fear of another, hunger and starvation, breakdown of law and order. It also strained Isuokoma relationship with the Ojiegbe people

especially the Ezza people because the latter assisted the former in persecuting the war.

Although, it is pertinent to note that, the war has been settled, it took a devastating effect on the inter-group relations between Isuokoma and Ojiegbe. Committees were set up to see to the maintenance of peace amongst the belligerent groups and to improve the already strained relationship between the warring groups.

Marriage

This is the most popular amongst the social institutions world over. The institution is so important and highly recognized throughout Igbo ethnic group with particular reference to Isuokoma clan. The people of Isuokoma inter-marry with their neighboring communities of Onicha, Uburu, Oshiri, Naara, Nkerefi, Ezzaagu and Agba. It is noteworthy, that it is the customary rites of the community of the bride that is to be strictly used in such inter-marriages. Inter-marriage encourages extension of neighboring community relationship. Due to inter-marriages amongst Isuokoma and her neighbours, it encouraged paying of homage to the in-laws either during festive period or New Year period. This has helped to build healthy inter-group relations between Isuokoma and her neighbours, because as the children grow up, they (children) will also pay homage to their paternal homes depending on the nature of the marriage. Due to this inter-marriage between Isuokoma and her neighbours, it has helped in the avoidance of war amongst both communities (Isuokoma and her neighbours), because nobody will want his or her in-law to be a victim of war. This (inter-marriages) have promoted and facilitated peaceful co-existence amongst Isuokoma and her neighbours.

Furthermore, it is important to note that, the Isuokoma people have a long tradition of general marriage list, (Okorie, 2020). This helped to bring uniformity in marriage list amongst the communities that make up Isuokoma clan. Due to inter-group relations, the Onicha people copied this from Isuokoma. Hence, a more unified marriage list now exists amongst the

communities that make up Onicha clan; this serves as a cultural diplomacy between them

Conclusion and Recommendations

Generally speaking, diplomacy is not alien to Igboland in general and Isuokoma in particular. Unlike the Eurocentric view that what was obtainable in a traditional Igbo society was series of wars, this study, focusing on Isuokoma has proved the forgoing conceived perception false. The study unravels certain cultural practices in Isuokoma that have over the years served as diplomatic tools. It thus stands to posit that the indigenous diplomatic tools of the Isuokoma were skillfully intertwined with their socio-cultural activities such that people of different ages and gender served as envoys in one capacity or the other. It was this configuration that made the relationship between Isuokoma and her neighbours to be a cordial one devoid of conflicts.

Finally, this study therefore made it obvious that diplomatic relations can best be archived when diplomatic tools are inbuilt in people's everyday lives. It therefore recommends that to solve the myriads of conflicts bedeviling the world today, there is need to intertwine modern diplomacy with people's day to day activities. the attainment of this will positively affect the way people and nations react with one another. This will in return guarantee world peace.

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