Akwa Ibom/Opobo Diplomatic Relations in the Niger Delta Region since the Pre-colonial Era

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Abstract

This paper examines the diplomatic intercourse between the people of present- day Akwa Ibom State and Opobo Island in River State. The establishment of Opobo, a thriving Island commercial entrepot in 1869, is linked to King Jaja of Opobo, an ex-slave of Opubo House, in Bonny, who seceded from Bonny with some members of Opubo House. Using immense diplomatic skills such as alliance, persuasion, treaty, gift and oath-taking etc, Jaja secured a strategic settlement in Obolo (Andoni) territory. After settling there, he carved out a sphere of influence in the Imo River and Qua Iboe River territories. He established trading out-post in Ibeno, Eket, Ubium, Iman, Nsit and other hinterland communities in Akwa Ibom, fiercely resisted any direct commercial contact between the hinterland traders and the European middlemen through the use of trade treaties, threat and punitive action. In 1881, he undertook a punitive action in Ibeno to protest the establishment of a trading firm by a European entrepreneur, George Watts. Following increased territorial rivalries, the British Government relocated the headquarters of the consular administration from Fernando Po to Calabar in 1882 and declared a protectorate over the area. In 1887,

missionary enterprise took its roots in the Qua Iboe basin. Eventually, Jaja was deported to the Caribbean in 1887, but the Opobo traders continued to do business in the area. They intermarried, intermingled and assimilated within the host communities; even though some conflicts occasionally occurred in the process of their interaction, deep cultural exchanges however took place resulting in a common bond which lasts till the present time. The paper adopts a historical analytical methodology.

Introduction

The labyrinth of creeks and rivers which constitute the Niger Delta, provided a perfect network of canals, thus, affording easy communication between the Delta city-states. These creeks and rivers were navigable by the Delta trade canoes at all seasons of the year and consequently constituted major highways of commerce. Even before the Bonny Civil War, which resulted in the establishment of Opobo Island, diplomatic relations had already been established between the people of present-day Akwa Ibom and other Niger Delta communities. However, the establishment of Opobo marked a turning point in economic diplomacy in the Niger Delta region. Jaja and his men operated on a scheme of exclusive markets, protecting, by force when necessary, their monopoly over the markets in their immediate hinterland and the waterways leading to them (Ofonagoro, 1979).

The importance of the Opobo monopoly over Qua Iboe markets is sufficiently demonstrated by the fact that in 1899-12 years after the British Government deported King Jaja of Opobo and threw open the Qua Iboe markets to British-traders, the Qua Iboe River trade accounted for one-third of the revenue derived from Opobo. Another one-third of the revenue came from the district lying to the south and east of Azumini Creek. These important trading interests were consequently jealously guarded against Africans or Europeans intruders. Many trading outposts were opened by the Opobo middle men for the purchase of produce from the interior parts

particularly oil palm and kernel which the area was generously endowed. In return, European goods such as cloths, hot drinks, trinkets, tobacco were exchanged. The Opobo traders married from the host communities and became bilingual. The trading beaches included Chief Sam Oko Epelle's beach on the Eket creek, Oko Jaja's market at Itchi, near Obium (sic.), Chief Ogolo's beach at Inong-Ita (sic.) and the considerable trade depot of Essene on the Qua Iboe. Others were established at Awa Iman, Ekpene Obom, Ekpene Ukpa, Ikot Umiang Ede in Onna and Etinan Local Government Area and some parts of Annangland (Ofonagoro, 1979; Akpan, 2017).

The establishment of the Niger Coast Protectorate in 1891 resulted in the creation of Opobo Consulate. Even though in its correct sense the consulate was located in Ikot Abasi, an Ibibio territory in Akwa Ibom State, the name "Opobo" continued to be used till 1979, when Opobo was carved into Rivers State and the area became known as "Ikot Abasi Local Government Area". The introduction of Western education led to the establishment of some schools in Akwa Ibom which many Opobo sons and daughters attended; moreover, the missionary enterprise was another diplomatic instrument that galvanized the people. In the era where interstate conflict is rampant and where ethnic nationalities in the Niger Delta jostle for supremacy because of the influence of crude oil, it is necessary to re-examine issues that point to common bond that pre-dates the Nigeria independence. The essence is to consolidate the Nigerian polity and reposition it for greatness.

The paper is divided into five sections, Section one is the introduction, section two examines the establishment of Opobo, section three looks at Jaja's hegemony in the Qua Iboe River area, section four treats the impacts of the diplomatic relations while section five is the conclusion.

The Establishment of Opobo

The establishment of Opobo, a thriving commercial centre in the Obolo (Andoni) territory, is associated with the exploits of Jaja, regarded universally as an Igbo slave sold to King Opubo of Anna Pepple (Canoe) House in Bonny and later head of that house. Abasiattai, Ekpo and Ezebube (1997), quoting Sir Udo Udoma, (a former Justice of the Supreme Court of Nigeria and an indigene of Ikot Abasi), state that Jaja was probably an Ibibio man. "Sir Udoma asserts that the late Chief Ntuen Ibok of Essene insisted that Jaja was an Ibibio man, born at Minya in Ikot Abasi area to one Etuk Ufi".

At birth, Jaja was given the name, "Akpan", and thus became known as Akpan Etuk Ufi. As he grew up, he became sportive and restless, and people gave him the nickname, "Yoyo". Soon, the name "Yoyo" eclipsed the parental name "Akpan" Since he was also insubordinate, troublesome and aggressive, his father sold him to an Igbo slave trader from Nkwerre who, after experiencing for sometime his mischief, resold him to King Opubo of Bonny. At Bonny, his nickname "Yoyo" was corrupted to "Jojo" and then to Jaja, probably by European traders. Applying his energies to trade, Jaja became a prosperous trader and, subsequently, head of Anna Pepple Canoe House and leader of one of the Bonny War factions. Fleeing from civil war in Bonny in 1869, he founded the town of Opubo, corrupted Opobo (Abasiattai, Ekpo and Ezebube, 1997).

Abasiattai, Ekpo and Ezebube (1997) have pointed out that it is difficult for one to accept or reject Chief Ntuen Ibok's story about Jaja's connection with the Ibibio people. Perhaps, in support of the account, it can be accepted that the name "Jaja" is probably a corruption of Ibibio name "Yoyo". For one thing, the name of his Igbo father is unknown. Again, the fact that Jaja, after leaving Bonny, moved eastwards to establish his settlement in an area later claimed by the Ibibio as their land is an indication that he was very familiar with the place and hoped to gain active support from his Ibibio kinsmen.

The assistance, later given by the Ibibio to the Opobo in their dispute with the Andoni over ownership of the Island in 1927, goes further to uphold Jaja's alleged Ibibio ancestry. Nevertheless, further research is needed to establish the truth of the matter. This is necessary because some sources believe that he hailed from Umuduruoha in Iso clan of present-day Orlu district (Cookey, 1974).

In 1869, a civil war broke out in Bonny in consequence of a dispute between Opubo House under the leadership of Jaja, on the one hand and Manilla House, under the leadership of Fubara, on the other. Members of Manilla House were loyalist and supported the King of Bonny, then King George Perekule, otherwise known as Pepple, but members of the Opubo House acted in defiance of King Perekule. During the war, Jaja and his comrade-in-arms saw that defeat was imminent; hence they retreated and planned to escape from Bonny so as to avoid being completely wiped out by their enemy. In order to make good their escape and, if possible, continue their fight as guerrillas, Jaja and his comrade-in-arms entered into agreement in writing not only to flee from Bonny but also to desert Bonny altogether and to establish a new settlement in Obolo (Andoni) territory far away from Bonny. The agreement was done on the 13th of October 1869, at a village outside Bonny town known as Minima. Hence, the engagement was given the title of Minna Agreement (Udoma, 1987).

Part of the agreement states:

> By virtue of the powers and authority we vested upon Chief Jack Jaja Annie Pepple as successor of Opubo House, we, the undersigned comrade – chiefs comprising the political representatives of the said house, this day declare our voluntary engagement to elude Grand Bonny with a view to settle elsewhere in Andoni territory, and that the said Chief Jack Annie

> Pepple and ourselves, parties hereto, have agreed between us….(Udoma: 1987).

According to Udoma (1987), the three article agreement included clauses which the undersigned expressed their commitment to jointly provide the men with arms, ammunitions, men, money and property towards the execution of the war. In respect of the losses in men and property as a result of the civil war, each of the signatories agreed they and their successors or persons representing their interest, shall have title to share of the revenues from comey, work-bar, custom-bar and such other imports and levies after 25 percent of the whole has been received as income for the Big House. It was also agreed that the executive authority of the government of the settlement shall be solely reserved for each of the signatories and their successors representing their interest, from time to time, as lawfully qualified for election and installation as successors to the Big House. The signatories were Jack Annie pepple, Black Fubara, Jim Wariso, Wogo Dappa, John Africa, Annie Steward, George Darriar, Captain Uranta, Low Strongface, John Tom Brown, Obarney Finebone, Deerie Tulefare, Manilla Jack Tulefare while the witnesses were D. Labour, J. Hamynway and D.C. Williams.

It should be noted that Jaja could not have succeeded in the venture without the support of the European traders in Bonny whose main interest was to establish a foothold in Andoni and needed men like Jaja who could command the respect of both African and European traders in the area. According to Ayandele (1966), Consul Livingstone was in a great measure responsible for the successful rebellion of Jaja. He had done a great harm to Bonny before the Foreign Office noticed his action and dismissed him. He refused to allow Bonny to blockade Jaja at a time the people wanted to do so. He sided with the two firms of McEachean and de Cardi, who supplied the explicit instructions; he allowed Jaja to confiscate about £30,000 worth of palm oil in the interior oil markets, and he sought to divert what

remained of Bonny's trade to New Calabar. Livingstone deliberately misrepresented King George Pepple 1 to the Foreign Office and sowed seeds of discord between the King and his chiefs when the former went to England to represent Bonny's interest to the British Government.

Armed with the 13th of October 1869 agreement, Jaja and 12 other chiefs each in his canoe with personally recruited and loyal fighting men and other followers and dependants, fled with 13 canoes in search of an asylum. The flight took them through the creeks known as Andoni flats towards Ikot Abasi River as they were given hot pursuit in several canoes by heavily armed men from Manilla House and other supporters of King George Pepple of Bonny. After Asaramatoro and entering along the waterway known as Andoni flats, Jaja and his comrade-in-arms were nearly overtaken but this was averted by some Andoni armed canoe men who successfully blocked the creeks by felling trees across the creeks thereby cutting off the Bonny warriors and making it impossible for the pursuit of the fleeing Jaja and his comrade-in-arms to be continued. Thus, it was possible for Jaja and his fellow refugees to make good their escape without any further molestation and they subsequently successfully accessed Andoni territory on the 20th of December 1869 (Cookey, 1974; Udoma, 1987).

On the 21st of December 1869, taking advantage of the protection offered them, Jaja and his fellow adventurers took shelter on some of the islands scattered around including Nkoro, Ekede, Isiodum, Anyangala and other good defensive sites. However, despite the refuge offered by the Andoni people, Jaja and his fellow adventurers were not trusted by the Andoni people. During the debates over Jaja's move, the Andoni leaders noted that such a powerful and ambitious refugee must be made to swear an oath of submission before the national deity of *Yok-Obolo*. Jaja agreed to this and was taken to Agwut Obolo, the home of the deity. He was first made to pledge perpetual loyalty to the Obolo (Andoni) nation. As a token to this pledge, he undertook to make an annual tribute to *Yok Obolo* of one bull, six

pieces of Real India Madras cloth, three crates of gin and one felt hat for the *Obara Yok*, all of these to be given at *Iboracha* (new year around July) set for the festival of the deity. Having received his pledge, the servants of the deity shaved Jaja's head and clipped his finger nails. They then killed a tortoise he had been instructed to bring with him, and sprinkled its blood over the cult objects. Finally, the *Obara Yok* fastened on his neck a special necklace known as *Nfi-Yok-Obolo* (dust of Yok Obolo) with the instruction that he should never remove it (Udoma, 1987; Ejituwu, 1991).

The Obolo (Andoni) looked upon the accomplishment of this ritual with confidence and satisfaction. In the first place, they saw it as bringing Jaja and his people into Obolo nation on an equal footing with other already – established Obolo communities. Second, they saw it as a process of making him an Obolo (Andoni) man. After administering the oath of fidelity, Jaja made a new request for a permanent settlement. He specifically requested that he should be given an Island at the mouth of Otunkon (the Imo River) to facilitate his direct contact with the European traders. Leaders of Obolo (Andoni) granted Jaja's request. But their uneasiness over giving out of such a strategic site might account for an additional episode of oath-swearing. This additional episode took place on the bar at the mouth of the Imo River. It involved invocation of the national ancestral and sea deities as witnesses to the conditions of allegiance under which the site was being given out. The invocation was fortified with libations of rum and by the sacrifice of various animals and of a human being. These oaths symbolized the termination by Jaja of the long animosity between Obolo (Andoni) and Bonny and enforced the subsequent liberal attitude of Andoni to Jaja and his people. With the new oath, Jaja went about the business of building and fortifying his chosen site with great energy. Trade in palm produce began almost immediately. De Cardi, McEachean had been standing by for some time with arrangements to purchase produce and evacuate it by steamship, shortly, they were joined by other merchants such as: Miller brothers, Cooper Company, Johnson Stewart and Douglas (Ejituwu, 1991).

According to Ejituwu (1991), the leaders of Bonny were not pleased with the fact that a defeated fugitive has established a thriving and a rival commercial post and soon embarked on war with the Opobo. In addition, they petitioned the British Government. They complained that the successful escape and establishment of Opobo settlement by Jaja was facilitated by his diplomatic engagements with the European stakeholders. They demanded that the British authorities force the Europeans to return to Bonny and also invoke the "Andoni-Bonny" Treaty of 1846, noting that Andoni was a conquered territory in which Jaja had no right take refuge. The King of Bonny George Pepple, personally went to England to present his position before British Foreign Secretary, Lord Clarendon. Bonny also threatened that if their demand was not acceded to, they would start a war with Andoni, a scenario that would endanger the interest of the lives of the European traders in Andoni.

Eventually, a peace conference was organised by the Consul with the representatives of the parties who met in the presence of Kings Amakri of Kalabari and Ado of Okrika. The parties agreed reluctantly to the terms reached and two treaties were enacted. The first was that of 3rd of January 1873 which addressed the general problem of economic and political co-existence between Bonny and Opobo; while the second, signed on the 4th of January 1873, recognised Jaja as the king of Opobo with rights over the Opobo River. The general treaty of 3rd January, gave Bonny rights in six of the Imo River markets (Akwete, Obunku and four Uranta markets), and Opobo rights to trade in the rest. It gave Opobo rights to trade alongside the other two in all markets of the area. The second treaty banned European traders from taking their ships above Opobo and hence from trying to make independent contact with the island oil suppliers. Any vessel that went beyond the Imo River into hinterland was to pay a penalty of 100 puncheons of palm oil or a seizure of the fleet (Enemugwem, 2006).

Jaja's Hegemony in the Qua Iboe River Territory

The establishment of European commercial influence in the Qua Iboe River was a fall-out of the lineage rivalries between Henshaw and Duke Houses in old Calabar. The end of the war left Henshaw Town in shambles. The economy had been ruined after the pillage and plunder, and there were few goods on hand with which to resume trade. It was at this critical moment in its political and economic history that Henshaw Town began to conceive the idea of venturing into the Qua Iboe area in a bid to reposition their economic fortunes. The architect of this enterprise was Joseph Henshaw, a colonial agent who reputedly was the first person to introduce cocoa into Calabar. Soon after, he had founded the port of Idua, Oron. He opened up Ibeno and Eket to trade and collaborated with a European merchant, George Watts, to develop the trade at the Qua Iboe area which was one of the most thickly populated districts on the coast. The arrangement was that should new firms wish to come in for trading purposes, of each sum paid for the privilege, Henshaw should have two-thirds of the profits since he had "discovered" the place and Watts would receive one-third (Nair, 1972).

The venture began at Ibeno and then expanded towards Eket, where a factory was opened, and finally Okat. In 1880, both Watts and Henshaw visited Qua Iboe and subsequently established a factory with a European agent at the mouth of the river. Holt sent out a large quantity of trade goods. Watt went up the Qua Iboe in search of cheaper produce and concluded agreements with the chiefs he met. On the 7th of February, they handed over to him trading rights in their rivers on behalf of the chiefs of the region (Nair, 1972).

The concept of Jaja's trading empire was a dynamic one. He conceived of a large area in which he and his traders would be sole authorised middlemen and the European middle men effectively schemed out of sphere of influence. Jaja seems to have fixed his eyes on the Imo River and on the creeks leading to the Qua Iboe River, and on the Qua Iboe itself, with its

immensely rich oil and kernel - producing hinterland. He therefore advanced into the Qua Iboe area with promises of great wealth from the Atlantic trade and considerable propaganda about being the authorized representatives of the British Government, defiance of whom would bring down the terrible wrath of the whiteman. The mixture of promise and threat was effective enough at the outset. Unfortunately for Jaja, however, there were powerful British interests in competition with him (Ejituwu, 1991).

After starting the business at Opobo, many of the European firms moved further eastward to get close as possible to the oil and kernel producers of the Ibibio hinterland, and of cutting out Jaja and his traders in the process. In 1871, Robertson, a former agent of Miller Brothers and once a close associate of Jaja, had crossed the Imo River far up the Qua Iboe and negotiated a trade alliance with the people of Ibeno. By 1873, Arthur McEachean, one of the two Europeans involved in Jaja's move to Opobo, had also crossed to the Qua Iboe and entered into a similar alliance. All this was a source of great anxiety to Jaja. For it seemed to him that, only a year or two after he had launched his drive to open up the east to commerce, his drive was in danger of being taken over by others. Worse still, successful defiance by the Ibeno in the easterly creeks and on the Qua Iboe might lead to similar defiance on the Upper Imo. Over the next seven years, Jaja tried hard to counter the opposing forces. He used threats and punitive visitations on Ibeno communities who refused to comply with his demands that they should not trade directly with the British; and he made numerous complaints to the consuls and to sympathetic British traders. These measures, however, yielded no result. Instead, the number of European trading firms in the Qua Iboe area increased to 28 (Ejituwu, 1991; Enemugwem, 2006).

In 1880, the balance tipped further against Jaja with the arrival of a new consul, Edward Hewett, as successor to Livingstone and Hopkins. Hewett,

coming to the post at the height of Jaja's attempts to achieve a firm hold on the reluctant Ibeno, keenly noted his ruthlessness and his consistent misrepresentation of his relations with other people in the area. Apart from the circumstances of the contact between the two men, moreover, there seemed to have been a high degree of mutual antipathy. This combination of factors set the two of them at loggerheads with each other over the territory for the start. At this juncture, an incident occurred which brought matters to a head between Jaja on the one hand, and his competitors including some of his erstwhile friends on the other.

Enemugwem (2006) opines that the immediate cause of what he describes as the Ibeno/Opobo War began with one of Jaja's slaves, Asangikpong, whom Jaja sent to the Qua Iboe estuary for espionage. On his arrival at Okorutip in early 1881, he purported to be a trader going to the Ibibio heartland. But his contact and love with an Ibeno widow made him to confide in her he was from King Jaja of Opobo. The widow, who understood the rift between the Opobo and the Ibeno tied a ball and gave to Asangikpong to deliver to Jaja that it is from the chief of Ibeno. On the receipt of it, Jaja interpreted it as an abuse from the Ibeno ruler that his scrotum is as big as the ball. Jaja reciprocated in like manner and the chief of Ibeno sent a messenger back that he had never sent such a thing.

Unknown to the Ibeno monarch, Asangikpong returned and continued his love-affair with the Okorutip widow. They got to a point that the woman was no longer interested in him because Asangikpong was involved in theft. Fracas ensued between them and led to the death of the woman. The Ibeno, having known that he was Jaja's man and that Jaja wanted to take away their lucrative trade with the Europeans, retaliated and killed him. The news got to Jaja who suggested three things to them: he wanted the Ibeno to accept punishment for killing his man and surrender honouably to him and become a province of his sovereignty. In the alternative, they should dismiss Watts and all European traders on the Qua Iboe. Ibeno

chiefs did not agree to any of these suggestions. Instead, they paid reparation of 4000 manillas to the Jaja for the loss of his man. Although Jaja pretended to have been appeased, he was buying time to prepare for a punitive expedition to Ibeno. The relationship became strained and hastened Jaja's campaigns (Enemugwem, 2006).

In the early hours of Monday 11th April 1881 Jaja's punitive expedition flying British flag took off to Ibeno. His armada of 50 war canoe was fitted with the best firearms of the times. Although Ibeno vigilante group sank two of the Jaja's war-canoes, they were not of equal might. At day break, the Opobo troops had destroyed trading factories as well as the Ibeno villages at the estuary such as Okoroutip, Okoroitak, Iwuochang and Upenikang and Mkpanek. About 400 people died; the chief of Ibeno and his son were captured from their mangrove hideout at Okoroutip and beheaded. Even farm crops were not spared. Some of the people died of hunger while in the woods because of Jaja's army occupation staying for months. Some of the survivors were brought to Opobo Town (Talbot, 1923; Ejituwu, 1991; Enemugwem, 2006).

According to Ejituwu, the Ibeno survivors in Opobo were forced by Jaja to affix their marks to a document which reads:

> We, the undersigned representatives of Qua Iboe people, hereby declare that we are authorized to acknowledge Jaja as our king and to crave his protection and to place ourselves under his authority for all time coming (Cited Ejituwu, 145)

Despite the threats by Britain through the consul, in the night of 16th May 1881, Jaja's war gig attacked one of the villages that the Ibeno were rebuilding. In order to survive, Ibeno took to guerrilla warfare for four years, 1881-1884. The strategy and the more efficient weapons later given

to them by the Liverpool traders as well as the intervention of the British Consul drove the Jaja's army away from the Qua Iboe estuary (Enemugwem, 2006).

However, instead of cowing the Ibeno and impressing the British, as intended, Jaja's action produced the opposite results. In the first place, the Ibeno, far from being cowed, sought the help of their British partners in acquiring arms. The Ikoroutip expedition also provided Jaja's opponents with a fresh opening. Thus, while Ibeno captives were being forced to sign away their sovereignty in Opobo Town, Ibeno at home, were being encouraged by the British traders to draft a letter to them requesting British protection. Hewett, seized the opportunity to go after Jaja, quickly drafted the letter, got the necessary marks and witnesses, and forwarded it to the Foreign Office. He reported that Jaja used emblems such as the British flags to mislead the Ibeno and other neighbouring people into thinking that he had the official backing of the British Government and strongly urged the Foreign Office to decree a protectorate not only over Ibeno, but over the Oil Rivers. Hewett was also of the view that such squabble could endanger the continuity and development of trade. Using the Ibeno letter as justification and without waiting for a reply from the Foreign Office, Hewett formally declared the Ibeno a British protected people in 1881 and asked Jaja to withdraw his forces from the area. Finally, to deal effectively with the matter, he transferred the British Consulate from Fernando Po to Calabar in 1882 (Ejituwu, 1991).

Jaja in his reaction claimed that the people inhabiting the Qua Iboe, including the Obolo (Andoni) and Ibeno were his subjects based on an existing treaty with the British government. However, in the light of their knowledge, many British traders on both the Imo and Qua Iboe Rivers questioned King Jaja's sovereignty. The British Government through the Foreign Office refused to recognise the claims made by Jaja to the Qua Iboe country and warned him against further destruction of lives and property

in the area. Despite the Foreign Office's warning, Jaja persisted in trying to maintain a coercive presence on the Qua Iboe River.

Following the increased incursion of the Germans and the French into the British controlled areas in the West Coast, particularly, the interest in westward expansion from the Cameroon to the Cross River by the French and the rumour that the people of Ibeno were contemplating a request for German protection on the ground that the British were unwilling to help them in the problem with Jaja. The British Government reversed its gradualist policy and declared a protectorate over the Oil Rivers area. After signing the protectorate treaty with the chiefs of the Oil Rivers, Consul Hewett acquired increased powers over the peoples of the area and the palm produce markets were thrown open to all traders, be they Africans or Europeans. Hewett also encouraged the Ibeno chiefs to demand for a Christian mission to operate in the area. Consequently, in late April 1881, a letter requesting for a missionaries was written by a Sierra Leonean, U.A.C. Clerk, Mr. Solomon Theophilus William (Udo, 1983, Ejituwu, 1991; Enemugwem, 2006).

In addition, the imposition placed on Christian missionary activities in Opobo and Andoni was abolished. However, Jaja refused to sign the relevant article relating to the lifting of the ban. This is because the presence of the missionaries in Bonny from 1864 was repulsive to Jaja who was a high priest of *ikuba*. He did everything humanly possible to destroy the Christian faith. The protectorate treaty contained the provisions for the opening-up of the palm produce markets to all comers, Jaja viewed this clause as a threat to himself and his city-state. Despite the international recognition of the new protectorate, Jaja continued to oppose it. From that point, both the majority of British traders in the area and the majority of Foreign Office officials came to regard him as the great obstacle to the establishment of the new order. In the circumstance, it could only be a matter of time before more drastic action was taken against him. On the19th of September 1887,

Jaja was tricked by the Acting Consul Johnston into boarding a British warship anchored off Opobo, and was taken to Accra and finally deported to the Caribbean Island of St. Vincent, never to return alive.

Impact of the Diplomatic Relation

Because of the abundance of oil palm in Ubium territory, the Ubium creek had become one of the commercial territories of the Opobo (Umani). The middlemen in the palm oil trade in Ubium were the Umani (Opobo). They established their buying depots at Nnung Obong and Peterside at Okoyo (Edem Idim Okpot) and Ikot Udo Ide. Canoes carrying puncheons of oil were always on the creek, pushed by men with long poles downstream to Opobo. The Umani built mud-and-wattle houses at the banks to the stream and lived there quite from the owners of the villages. The conditions under which they lived in those days did not initially encourage them to bring their wives and children with them to the trading depots. For one, they were in strange lands, not completely loved by the people among whom they lived. It was therefore possible for them to suffer hostilities at any time from the hosts. Jaja himself was always prepared to wage war on any people who did not allow him to monopolise their trade. Where belligerency was always a possibility, therefore, it was not safe to bring women and children. Secondly, they required time to study the economic prospects of bringing their wives to these places. Those that brought their wives allowed them to engage in petty trading or in farming on land acquired from the indigenes (Okoko, 1988).

However, not all the Umani (Opobo) who came to Ubium were married men, so these men, and those who did not bring their wives resorted to the keeping of houseboys. Even after the demise of Jaja, his men continued to stay at Nnung Obong to carry out trading. These men, however, found their sexual expressions in the twin-mothers whom Ubium people had sent away from their houses. As far as they were concerned, what Ubium people did to these women by ostracising them, had no meaning to them, whatsoever.

Moreover, among the women were very beautiful and attractive ones and their being twin-mothers had practically no effect on their physical appearance and beauty. The twin-mothers, on their part, had every reason to welcome the advances of the Umani traders. Having been rejected by the Ubium men, they were willing to accept whosoever approached and regarded them as human beings. Moreover, these traders had money and other attractive gifts to entice the women. The gifts included such articles as clothing materials, rice, tinned fish, tobacco and so on (Okoko, 1988).

The performance of these "husbands of twin-mothers" was most annoying to Ubium people. To have dealings with a twin-mother was to be contaminated. Such a man could not visit the shrines or pray to the deities. He could not be a chief because he would not visit the shrines and offer sacrifices. He could not continue to be initiated as a member of *idiong* cult. To Ubium people, therefore, the Umani (Opobo) traders were contaminated people. For the same reason, Akai and Ikot Ntung warned them not to come to Urua Obo Ikot and Urua Ntung respectively, but the Umani (Opobo) took no heed. One of the reasons why Ubium people were not happy over the dealings of the Umani (Opobo) with the twin-mothers was that in fact, if not in practice, these women were still their wives. Some of them still loved these women even though society had demanded that they drive the women away from their conjugal homes. The children these women gave birth to while in ostracism still belonged to the "social fathers" and not the "biological fathers". The husbands could still perform some acts of kindness to the women through their children, such as gifts and repairs of the huts (Okoko, 1988).

Another reason still, why Ubium people were not friendly with the Umani (Opobo) was commercial. There had been the practice by which these middlemen exploited and cheated the interior producers of oil palm, not only in Ubium but wherever they went, by fixing fictitious values for English and indigenous currencies (brass, rods, cowries and okpoho). As a

result, the exchange rates varied according to the whims and caprices of these middlemen, and this did not only cause consternation and confusion among the interior producers but also hindered trade. Despite the attempts of the Native Courts in the Eastern Provinces in 1902, 1906 and 1907 to enforce the rates of exchange established by law, the practice continued, and when W. Fosbery, the Commissioner for Eastern Province, visited Abak on the 4th of October 1910, "the natives complained that (Umani) Opobo men still refused to accept English coinage". Ubium people, therefore, had their own share of the bad trade brought about by the cheating propensities of the Umani (Opobo) middlemen.

According to Okoko (1988) because of these reasons, Afaha Ubium people started a plan to attack and loot the Umani (Opobo) depot at Esuk Akpa Inyang, Nnung Obong and also drive away those at Odoro Atasung. The leading Umani (Opobo) man at that time was Ukwatiso, a corruption of Ukunisi. Somehow, however, the plot leaked, two twin-mothers, Etok Adia Okpo from Nnung Obong and Uyaedu Inyang Ese from Mbiokene, informed the Umani (Opobo) of the intention of the Ubium people to attack them in the night and they escaped, some to Mbiokene, some by water to Ikot Ekpene Udo. When Nnung Obong people went there in the night, they could see only one Umani (Opobo) man, whom they killed. Etok Adia Okpo was found returning from Esuk Akpa Inyang and was cut into pieces.

Apart from Ubium, Umani (Opobo) traders also established trading posts on the fringe of tributaries of the Qua Iboe. In Etinan Local Government Area, the Umani settled at Ekpene Obom, Ekpene Ukpa, Mbioto II, Ikot Mfon, Ikot Umiang Ede, and Awa Iman in Onna Local Government Area. They also settled in Mkpat Enin and many parts of Annang land like Oruk Anam, Ukanafun, Etim Ekpo and Abak Local Government Areas. Their items of trade included cloths, strong drinks, gun powder, tobacco, periwinkle etc. They bought oil palm and kernel from the people. Up to the present moment, the traces of their Umani (Opobo) occupation of these

settlements in these areas are still identified with old, tall and lean coconut trees said to have been planted by them many years ago.

According to Udoma (1987), the name "Opubo" was later corrupted by the Europeans to "Opobo" just as the name "Jojo" was corrupted to "Jaja" and since then and for the purpose of trade, the name "Opobo" stuck on the whole of the Island, including even the mainland part of the territory well separated from the island. European traders carried the name "Opobo" wherever they went. The consequence of the 1887 deportation of Jaja gave prominence to the name. With the establishment of the Oil River Protectorate in 1891, a vice-consul was posted to Ikot Abasi River) (then referred to as Opobo River). The first consulate was established at Itak Abasi Inua Akpa Ibom called "Down-Bellow" by the Europeans. Many European firms such as Messrs Charlie de Cardi (French) and McEaohen (Scottish), Miller Brothers, Johnstone and Copper and Company were attracted to the area having received assurances of consular protection.

The fact that the land known as Itak Abasi Ina or Itak Akpa Ibom or "Down Bellow" which the consulate was established belongs to the Ibibio was confirmed in a law suit of 1927-1929. However, the British Consul called the new consulate "Opobo Consulate" for the purpose of identification. "Down-Below", though near the Atlantic Ocean, became unsuitable because it did not extend inland. It was however good in the days of "gun-boat" rule. The location had no hinterland as such and like Opobo Island, was cut off from the mainland. The British Consul decided in 1907 to move inward into Ikot Abasi River in search of land in the coastal area that was linked to the mainland. Consequently, the people of Ikot Abasi granted the consular authorities a piece of land known as Ikot Iwuo for the purpose. In 1912, the lease was executed (Udom, 1987).

When the name "Ikot Abasi" was assigned to the new consulate in 1907, the settlers on Opobo Island, who were middle men traders, protested on the

ground that the use of such name in a highly commercial area would create confusion among the European merchants in the river as the name "Opobo" had already acquired much sanctity the "Opobo River". They insisted that the name "Opobo" should be retained both as to the river and the consulate. However, it was during the administration of Captain M.A.B. Elegbede, as the military administrator of Cross River State, by the Local Government (change of name) Instrument of 29th March 1979, that the name was changed to Ikot Abasi as a result of boundary adjustment which ceded Opobo to be part of Rivers State of Nigeria.

The Missionary Enterprise and the Consolidation of Akwa Ibom Opobo Relations

The Niger Delta region came under missionary influence in 1846 following the establishment of the Church of Scotland Mission, now Presbyterian Church, with Rev. Hope Masterton Waddell as the pioneer missionary. In 1864, the Church Missionary Society (Anglican Communion) was established in Bonny. The Qua Iboe established its presence in Ibeno in Akwa Ibom State in 1887 and Methodism came to the region in 1893. Later, the Catholic Mission penetrated the area. (Akpan, 2016).

One of the impacts of the missionary enterprise was the establishment of schools. The Anglican Mission Primary School and three Methodist schools were well run. They catered for Akwa Ibom and Opobo children in addition to the government school which was established in Ikot Abasi in 1905. The Catholic Mission also established the Regina Coeli College at Esene, Ikot Abasi, which students from Opobo attended. As from the late 1930s, several Opobo youths trained at the Teachers' Training College Uyo and returned to teach in schools and also served as preachers in the Niger Delta. Other youth attended other mission schools like Etinan Institute, (Etinan), Methodist Secondary School, (Ete) etc. According to Ekere (1998), after the establishment of the Qua Iboe Mission Hospital in Etinan, Akwa Ibom State

1927, one of the earliest staff of the hospital was one Saturday Ogolo from Opobo.

Christianity right from its inception in Nigeria became an integrative force in that it provided a trans-tribal bond uniting individuals of different and formerly hostile traditional communities. The missions distributed their evangelising efforts among the various segments and groups in Southern Nigeria. An annual church conference attended by African clergymen and lay agents of diverse cultural backgrounds helped to break down parochialism and awaken a wider and a consciousness of racial identity. Moreover, in the rapidly growing multi tribal urban communities, churches provided a link among converts of different tribes and a new basis of loyalty in which ethnic origin became less relevant (Coleman, 1958).

Conclusion

The people of Akwa Ibom did not live in isolation. Like every other group, they had extensive political, social and economic contacts with other groups within and outside the Niger Delta region. In the process the relations had to be properly managed through the use of requisite diplomatic methods and strategies. In the light of this, they related with the people of Opobo, referred to as Umani by them. The Opobo Island located in Obolo (Andoni) territory, was established in 1869 by Jaja, one of the most remarkable oil palm brokers in the Atlantic trade, following the outbreak of a civil war in Bonny. Jaja's devotion and passion in the trade pushed his intruding eyes into the Qua Iboe River basin (Enemugwem, 2006). He used tact and intelligence in his dealings with the people of the area, monopolised trade in the hinterland and established strategic trading outposts which were controlled by his middlemen. Jaja also opposed the penetration of the hinterland markets by the European traders and used treaties, threats, lobby, gift and punitive expeditions like the 1877 expedition known as Ikot Udo Obong War against the Annang and Ibuno people and those of 1879 and 1881 against the Qua Iboe (Nair, 1972).

In 1887, Jaja was deported to the Caribbean and he died in 1891. Despite his death, trade continued between the people of Akwa Ibom and the Opobo (Umani). Intermarriages, adoption of each other's language among other cultural exchanges were recorded to deepen the relations. The colonial infrastructure established since the days of the Oil Rivers Protectorate in 1885, as well as the advent of Christianity continued to forge the relationship. In 1979, Opobo was ceded to the Rivers State. Yet the relationship established since the pre-colonial era has not ended. One primary reason is the proximity of Opobo to Ikot Abasi. Opobo indigenes (Umani) still trade at Ikot Abasi market, own farmlands and houses in the area. In an era when the unity of the nation has become very fragile owing to extensive centrifugal forces, a re-assessment of the historical variables that could contribute to nation building should be encouraged. This is the thesis of the study.

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