

DYNAMICS OF PRE-COLONIAL DIPLOMATIC PRACTICES AMONG THE IGBO SPEAKING PEOPLE OF SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIA, 1800-1900: A HISTORICAL EVALUATION

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Abstract

This paper seeks to conduct a historical evaluation on the dynamics of pre-colonial diplomatic relations among the Igbo speaking people of Southeastern Nigerian. This became a necessity owing to the fact that there appear to be a big neglect by scholars of Igbo descent in discussing the mode by which city-states littered across the Southeastern region of Nigeria conducted their own unique form of diplomacy. This implication of this neglect have only given further credence to Eurocentric claims that “Africa has no history”. It is a historical fact that when most societies were invaded by European colonialists, they paid little or no attention to how these societies have conducted indigenous affairs that have for centuries sustained them. Rather, a conclusion was drawn that these pre-colonial societies were devoid of any meaningful aspect of life that should be understudied. Be that as it may, through the concept of African historiography, the fore-going has long been debunked with the help of oral history as enunciated by Jan Vasina. However, what is yet to receive adequate attention is the art of diplomacy across Africa, *vis a vis* the conduct of diplomatic practices among the Igbo speaking people of Southeast Nigeria. Thus, the study reveals base on the much available sources, that in pre-colonial Igboland, the people conducted a unique and sophisticated art of diplomacy. The study also submits that not only did the Igbo speaking people engaged in the art of diplomatic practices, but diplomacy in the area was practiced according to civilized standards. The study draws instances from various Igbo communities and discusses elaborately on how they conducted theirs. Historical analysis was employed as the method for this research.

Keywords: Diplomacy, Igbo, Pre-colonial, Southeastern and Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Diplomacy is an art of negotiation practise across many societies, though in diverse dimensions, with the aim of yielding the same result. Unfortunately, many Euro-centric scholars had over the course of time hold tenaciously to the misconception that the art of diplomacy was only practiced in “civilized societies” such as Europe and the Orient, dismissing, in particular the African continent as one which has no history, talk less of a systematic and a refined pattern of organized diplomacy.

However, it is in a bid to debunk such erroneous views about African societies that scholars of African descent, through various researches had put up a strong resistance on the misconception that Africa is devoid of history. Through these in-depth researches, a historical fact has been established showing the uniqueness of Africa’s very rich and colourful history. The richness of her history cuts across centuries depicting issues bordering on areas such as economic, warfare, diplomacy, political institutions, traditional and religious institutions, cosmology, among others. Some of these areas were mentioned in most of the Islamic chronicles left behind by Arab historians such as *Ibn Battuta*, *Ibn Khadun*, among others.

In light of the foregone, it would be apt to state herein that the art of diplomacy was also very much conducted in the most civilized manners even among the Igbo speaking people presently occupying Southeastern part of Nigeria. In as much as Professor Adiele Afigbo described an attempt to conducting a study on the Igbo history as “trying to tie sand with ropes”, evidences abound that depicts the richness of Igbo history *vis a vis* their diplomatic conducts. A good illustration of the Igbo diplomatic conducts is very much depicted in Chinua Achebe’s novel entitled *Things Fall Apart* in which Achebe gave various illustrations on pre-colonial diplomacy within a typical pre-colonial Igbo setting.

Thus, from the foregone, this study aims at conducting a historical evaluation on the nature and dimensions of diplomatic conducts among the Igbo speaking people from 1800-1900. The essence of this paper is to help reassert that no continent during the period this work covers had monopoly to diplomatic practices. It is

important to state that diplomatic practices during the scope of this work was definitely ubiquitous. As it will be shown that just like diplomatic intercourse were being conducted across Europe and Asia, so was it being conducted across most Igbo speaking societies in a very descent and dignifying manner. The study also shows that since there were series of conflict and warfare among the various Igbo speaking communities, diplomacy, was perhaps, the instrument by which peace was sought after and restored.

1.1 Definition of Terms

Evidently, the term diplomacy enjoys plurality of definitions. This is consequent upon the fact that there has not been any consensus among scholars as to what exact meaning the term should denote. Thus, below are few among the numerous ways diplomacy has been defined.

Epistemologically, the term *diplomacy* is derived via French from the ancient Greek *diplōma*, composed of *diplo*, meaning “folded in two,” and the suffix *-ma*, meaning “an object.” The folded document conferred a privilege—often a permit to travel—on the bearer, and the term came to denote documents through which princes granted such favours. Later it applied to all solemn documents issued by chancelleries, especially those containing agreements between sovereigns (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/diplomacy>).

Firstly, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines diplomacy as “the art and practice of conducting negotiations between nations; skill in handling affairs without arousing hostility through tact (<https://www.merriam-webster-dictionary.com/definition-of-diplomacy>).

Secondly, Ernest Satow (1962) sees diplomacy as “the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between governments of independent states”. The two words “intelligence” and “tact” have been employed in the definition. “Intelligence” refers to the appreciation of issues and “tact” relates to on, how, what and when to say to the party. Timing and occasion of what to say are very important in diplomacy.

In addition, Harold Nicolson (1953) defines Diplomacy as “other conducts of relations between one group of human beings and another group or alien to themselves”. He also elaborated his definition by calling it “the need to be informed of the ambitions, weaknesses and resources of those with whom one needs to deal with”.

2. Origin, Migration and Settlement Patterns among the Igbo Speaking People: A Brief Discourse

The Igbo sometimes referred to as Ibo, are one of the largest single ethnic group in Africa (Miller, 1980). Traditions of origins differs widely amongst the Igbo speaking people of southeastern Nigeria; most towns have traditions of migration from a more or less distant homeland, while others posit that their ancestors never migrated from anywhere (Afigbo,1980). However, for a number of Igbo speaking communities there exist several versions of their traditions of origins and migrations patterns collected at different times.

In spite of these variations, M.D.W Jeffreys who wrote extensively in the ethnography and ethno-history of the Igbo, especially of the Igbo of the Nri-Awka area was of the view that ancient Egypt held the key to Igbo origin and history. He was particularly impressed by the feature of dual division in Igbo social structure, a phenomenon which he said corresponded to the division of ancient Egypt and therefore must have been brought or learnt from there. He attributed many features of the Igbo traditional religion to Egyptian origin or impact (Afigbo, 1981).

In addition to the oriental belief, Rev. G.T Basden (1983), in the early 20th century advanced the view that the Igbo were a branch of the Hebrew nation, or at least that their culture history could satisfactorily be explained in terms of Jewish impact. He cannot help being struck with the similitude between them and some of the ideas and practices of the Levitical Code. Even long before Basden, the Igbo ex-slave Olaudah Equiano, had on similar ethnographic and cultural grounds advanced the thesis of Jewish origin for the Igbo (Afigbo, 1981).

Afigbo (1987) posits that the Igbo origin and migration can be trace from the ancient Benin kingdom. He was of the view that the Igbo speaking people migrated out of Benin at an unspecified time in the past. Afigbo’s elaborate study on the origin and waves of migration on the Igbo speaking people has identified the Nri-Akwa-Orlu complex as the most likely earliest centre of Igbo settlement in Southern Nigeria and it was from there that waves upon waves of migrations set out to occupy the other portions of present day Igbo land (Shokpeka, 2009). More so, Mr. G.I Jones, described the Nri-Akwa and Isuama (Orlu) area as “the Igbo centre or core” from where all waves of Igbo migration took off “mainly to the south and east” (Afigbo, 1980). Undoubtedly, both Elizabeth Isichei and Talbot share same view with Jones. J.E.N Nwaguru, while conducting a research on Ngwa people posit strongly that the Ngwa had their origin and migration linked to Umunneoha in the present Mbaitoli/Ikeduru Local Government Area in Imo state, sometime in the past (Nwaguru, 1973).

Geographically, Igbo land has taken up large part of Southeastern Nigeria, mostly in the eastern part of the Niger River. It extends westward across the Niger to the regions of Aniocha, Ndokwa, Ukwuani, and Ika in present day Delta state and also some parts of Edo state in Nigeria (<https://www.en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/igboland>). Its eastern part is terminated by the Cross River, although micro communities exist over on the other side of the river; its northernmost point enters the Savannah climate around Nsukka (<https://www.en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/igboland>).

In Nigeria today, Igbo land is roughly made up of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and some parts in Delta and Rivers states (Uche, 2001). More than 30 million people inhabit Igbo land and with a population density ranging from 1000 people per sq. mile in low density areas. Altogether, Igbo land has an area of some 15,800 to 16,000 sq. mile (Uchendu, 1965).

3. Practical Instances of Diplomatic Intercourse among the Igbo Speaking People of Southeastern Nigeria in Pre-Colonial Times.

An undisputable historical fact is that, all through history, irrespective of age and climate, no state has ever existed in isolation. Every state has sought to establish external relations with other states. Such relations, which were governed by diplomatic norms or conventions, ensured free movements of peoples and goods across boundaries (Opone, 2012). It is equally noteworthy to assert that the status of those chosen to carry out diplomatic duties in West African States of which the Igbo area is a part of varied, but in every case they must have been among those close to the rulers of the country or sometimes they were the great men of the land; even princes from royal family might be sent on a mission (Smith, 1976).

Robert Smith (1976), in his book entitled *Warfare and Diplomacy in Pre-colonial West Africa* took time to establish the fact that diplomatic activities were also very much rife among the Igbo speaking people in pre-colonial era. Although, Smith submits that diplomatic intercourse in the various communities were far less obvious than that of war.²⁰ In an attempt to depict the nature and structure of diplomatic practices among societies regarded as acephalous in nature, Smith (1976) points out the Aro example when he espouses thus:

Among those whose organization was on too small a scale to be designated statehood, the Aro of Igbo land were renowned for using diplomacy, backed by the manipulation of their powerful oracle at Arochuku, to support their commercial and political ambitions.

From the foregoing quotation, it would be apt to assert that, traditional religion was very much important in the conduct of diplomatic practices among the Igbo speaking people.

In line with the submission of Robert Smith, Chinua Achebe through his classical novel *Things Fall Apart* provided an insight into how diplomatic practices were conducted in a typical Igbo setting. For instance, Achebe (1958) illustrated how a conflict had ensued between two communities namely: Umuofia and Mbaino, but, the brewing war was averted by virtue of diplomatic engagement by the elders of both communities and peace was restored. Achebe puts it more succinctly when he espouses thus:

...those sons of wild animals have dared to murder a daughter of Umuofia...the crowd then shouted with anger and thirst for blood...many others spoke and at the end it was decided to follow the normal course of action. An ultimatum was immediately dispatched to Mbaino asking them to choose between war on the one hand, and on the other the offer of a young man and a virgin as compensation...and so when Okonkwo of Umuofia arrived at Mbaino as the proud and imperious emissary of war, he was treated with great honour and respect, and two days later he returned home with a lad of fifteen and a young virgin...the elders met to hear a report of Okonkwo's mission.

The above quotation is in tandem with Smith's submission of which he states that "the Igbo, Ijo and other people of South-eastern Nigeria gave notice to their enemies of an intention to go to war (Smith, 1976).

Afigbo (1981), in dealing with the eclipse of the Aro slaving oligarchy during the nineteenth century, revealed the richness of diplomatic intercourse that transpired between the Aro and their allies-Abam, Ohafia and Edda. The Aro it was reported engaged in diplomatic negotiations and agreements with the aforementioned peoples in order to have a strong military influence to help them maintain their hegemony across the entire length and breadth of Southeast and south-south regions. Since it has often been said that war itself is the continuation of negotiation (diplomacy) by other means.

Again, the Enuani kingdoms which is an Igbo speaking group established links with the neighbouring kingdom of Benin. For instance, it was reported that the obi of Ogwashi –Uku visited Benin in about 1836 on a diplomatic mission. This practice was not peculiar to the kingdoms of Enuani (Opone, 2012). As it was the case in many other Igbo speaking communities scattered across Igboland.

A study by Alagoa (1976) on Niger-Delta states and their Neighbours has demonstrated this in respect of the Western Niger Delta kingdoms of Ughelli, Iyede, Ozoro and Agbon.²⁶ Similarly, a more recent study by Godwin Okotie notes the exchange of gifts and greetings between the Abraka, Aboh and Onitsha kingdoms in pre-colonial times. This practice was encouraged and sustained by the need to maintain close and cordial diplomatic relationship between kingdoms, and by disparities in natural resources endowments.

It is instructive to note that Ubulu-Ukwu kingdom was not considered too small to partake in the installation of the Oba of Benin. An Ubulu-Ukwu tradition claims that Benin for long relied on the potency of the Ubulu-Ukwu charms and the proficiency of Ubulu-Ukwu medicine men to put an end to the premature deaths and the insecurity of the coronations of the early Benin royal house. Ubulu –Ukwu medicine men from Onicha Okpe quarters visited Benin on the invitation of the royal house to perform rituals that ensured the peaceful coronation of the new Oba and for his long reign. It is persuasive to argue that such interventions by Ubulu-Ukwu medicine men were a form of ritual assistance in moments of needs. This cannot be indicative of political/military imposition by Benin on Ubulu-Ukwu (Mordi, 2002).

Also, a study conducted by Henderson (1972) reveals the extent to which diplomatic activities were conducted among communities along the River Niger. He described it thus:

...as a Web-like social order... with the ideological convention held in common by the rulers of both Igala and Aboh that they shared ultimate descent from Ado/Idu peoples through Benin.

Such ideologies were designed to maintain cordial diplomatic relations which guaranteed peaceful economic activities among states and kingdoms. It was also encouraged by the fact that they viewed themselves as one and thus frequently exchanged visits and, by extension, ideas too. Through this means, the Obi of Enuani kingdoms and their titled men have for long, “copied the style of clothing of the Oba of Benin and their important chiefs” (ASA DIV 31350, National Archives).

3.1.1 Status, Symbols and Credentials of Diplomats among the Igbo Speaking People in Pre-Colonial Times

The status of diplomats among the Igbo speaking people varied. In some Igbo speaking communities they were among those close to the rulers of such communities, often members of the royal household. In other areas within Igbo land, they were great men of the land, and sometimes, princes from the royal family were sent on missions abroad. Also priests (*dibia*) were equally appointed as ambassadors in negotiations to help bring to an end the small-scale-inter-communal wars among the Igbo speaking peopling (Meek, 1931).

A memorable conflict in which priests intervened as diplomats was the war between Obibi, a village group in Owerri and two of her neighbours: Iheagwa and Nekede in the 1880s which was as a result of dispute over territorial boundary. The name by which the conflict is remembered is *Ogu Mkpuru Oka* (the war of the grains of corn). However, it should be noted that it is the responsibility of the village council to resolve any dispute between kinsmen or other persons from the same village, but those between two villages were either resolved by the combined meetings of the village councils of the affected villages. It is when the efforts of the combined village councils to resolve any such disputes failed that the *okenne* or *nwa-dibia* (priest) stepped in (Isichei, 1976).

Achebe (1958) through his novel *Things Fall Apart* shows that great men in pre-colonial Igbo societies were equally used as emissaries in the negotiation of truce. This he did when he states that Umuofia immediately dispatched emissaries including the main character in the book, Okonkwo, to Mbaino with demands of a boy and girl as reparation and an ultimatum of when the demand should be met. War between Umuofia and Mbaino was averted as Mbaino acceded to the demands of Umuofia.

Again, it was reported that the battle of Ukpabi-Eziudo which occurred in 1802 around Ezinihitte, one of the communities in Mbaise division of present Imo State was brought to an end when Ezuido sued for peace through the instrumentality of Chief Abii of Ezuido, an *Okenne* to Onicha. In pre-colonial Igbo society, *Nwa-diala* or

Okenne enjoyed diplomatic immunity and was held in high esteem. Thus Chief Abii, used his status to appeal to warring parties to sheath their swords. It is said that Chief Abii volunteered to be killed if that would bring the war to end and that he abandoned his homestead to build a house at the boundary between the two warring communities (Obgalu & Emenanjo, 1982). Oracles were also used during the period under discourse. Such oracles would include but not limited to *Ibini Ukpabi*, the Aro oracle whose coverage went far beyond the region of the North, East and West, and the *Igwe-ka-ala* whose range was limited to Igbo land and the Niger delta. There were other oracles such as *Ojukwu*, *Diobu*, *Abgala* of *Akwa*, *Onojo Oboni* of *Ogrugru*, each with sub-region reach (Falola & Heaton, 2005). Suffice it to say that the appointment of such ‘great men’ were confirmed only after favourable consultations with the various oracles depending on which is most potent in that locality. Isichei (1976), in her book entitled *A History of the Igbo People* posits that in a typical pre-colonial Igbo society, wars between village groups were regulated by many conventions. These wars were preceded by negotiations (diplomacy), which endeavored to prevent conflict, and by a formal declaration of war. Any side could send a delegation made up of either priests of a cult, or an important personality, for a truce whenever the occasion called for it.

In pre-colonial Igbo land, the concept of diplomatic symbols varies across the many communities that made up the land. One prominent symbol among diplomats across pre-colonial Igbo land would be the *omu* a tender palm frond, used to sacralize, and restrain. It was also used as protection for diplomats when they engage in long distance travels, also to safeguard certain objects. The Nri diplomats were said to have engaged in the use of *omu* in pre-colonial times, since it was generally believed that one who bears an *omu* twig was considered protected (Ogbu, 2013). Other symbols which were found among emissaries in pre-colonial Igbo society would include but not limited to the “*ofo*”, “*alo*” and “*Otonsi*” which symbolizes truth and justices, ritual staff and the staff for the cleansing of abomination in that order in Igbo land. These staffs retrace the validity of deeper spiritual values that underline stable moral leadership as well as providing indices of power and authority in both negotiation and good governance. “This is because everything about the motifs is of great value, power and morality” (Ogbu, 2013). However, it must be pointed out that the influence of this symbol extended well beyond Nri, and it proved to be a useful device in the conduct of diplomacy among the Igbo speaking people. While discussing the essence of *Omu* in times of war and peace across Igbo speaking area, Isichei (1976) reports that “when a community desired to make peace, it sent a delegation carrying the palm fronds which symbolize peace and innocence”.

It was no exaggeration when Robert Smith (1976) states that pre-colonial West African diplomats often carried credentials or badges of office. According to Smith, “these credentials could be in form of a fan, a cane, a baton, a whistle or a sword”. Indeed, pre-colonial diplomacy among the Igbo speaking people was not devoid of these credentials. Across Igbo land, in pre-colonial times, those who have been appointed as emissaries were given unique items to distinguish them from the ordinary man in the community. Specifically, the ambassadors of Okigwe were often covered in special dress decorated with the *Omu* (young palm frond) and decorated with symbolic emblems made with cowries (Ibeachu, 2016). It is believed that such objects, by extending the power of the ruler or the council of elders beyond their normal reach, were intended to ensure the safe passage of these envoys through alien territory, some wore specially made diplomatic uniform, such as black caps, which according to Bosman, ensured ‘an effectual free pass everywhere’. The ambassadors of Enuani, an Igbo speaking area, were said to have been given a special diplomatic robe by the ancient Benin Empire in order to appear more magnificently before the king of Benin (Agwashi, 2016).

Undoubtedly, another important aspect of diplomacy among Igbo speaking people in pre-colonial times was the immunity which the diplomats enjoyed in the course of discharging their duties. In fact, immunity seems to have been an integral part of diplomatic interplay among the Igbo speaking people in pre-colonial times and it was well recognized. This was so, particularly when the diplomats carried credentials which identified them as state officials representing their communities (Adegbulu, 2011). Ajisafe’s (1946) accounts on diplomatic immunity within pre-colonial West Africa makes our point clear. Ajisafe posits that ‘Embassy between two hostile countries, government or communities is permissible in native law and the ambassador’s (be it a priest, prince, great man or titled man) safety is assured; but he must not act as a spy or in a hostile way.’

More so, apart from hospitality to stranger which was a natural phenomenon among the Igbo speaking people in pre-colonial times, the Igbo speaking people had a way of accommodating those who otherwise would have been personal-non-grata in the society (Ibeachu, 2016). For instance, criminals and others who incurred the wrath of the authority in recognized sanctuaries, such as the oracles. Closely associated with the foregone, perhaps, was the important role of protocol and etiquette in pre-colonial Igbo society. However, etiquette varies among the Igbo speaking people. Notwithstanding, there were a few instances where ambassadors among the Igbo speaking people were cruelly treated.

3.1.2 Diplomatic Tools among the Igbo Speaking People in Pre-Colonial Times

A very powerful diplomatic tool among the Igbo speaking people in pre-colonial times was the concept known as *Igba Ndu*. The concept of *Igba ndu* literally means “to bond life” *igba* stands for bond or tie, while *ndu* means life in Igbo language. However, the concept is best understood as a covenant between individuals or groups. Through this diplomatic tool, which was very much predominant across Igbo land, wars and alarm were more easily brought under control and full restoration achieved through the performance of the appropriate ritual. Indeed, *igba ndu* was reported to have been a very pivotal aspect for statecraft and also a reliable diplomatic tool by which negotiations and agreement were sealed. The process usually involved the drawing and mixing of blood from the veins of either the contestants and having them drink the resultant mixture with specially consecrated kola nuts. When performed, this ritual achieved the mending or rejoining process of a broken blood line. The triumph of diplomatic statecraft over a situation was marked with a special evergreen tree that was planted to remind all concerned of this “eternal” covenant which transformed the communities involved, who were now duty bound to shelter, honour and promote life and interest of each other (Falola & Heaton, 2005).

Still on the concept of *igba ndu*, where two strangers or diplomats met and decided to conduct negotiations, they would construct a blood union between themselves and their associates by undergoing a similar ritual that would give them a blood line. With that, violence between them would be outlawed. So also would dishonesty, treachery and other be nipped in the bud. Hence, the institution of *igba ndu* and practices associated with it played a major part in the management of the relations of neighbouring states. More so, the operation of this diplomatic tool (*Igba ndu*) in the relationship of states was one of the forces that helped to transform Southeastern Nigeria in the pre-colonial period into a kind of socio-economic commonwealth with enough free flow of goods and services to even out any gaps between areas of lack and areas of abundance. A clear case of this among the Igbo speaking people was that of the Nike clan of Enugu division and the so-called clans of the Nsukka division (Ironzu, 1977).

Another diplomatic tool among the Igbo speaking people was espionage. Espionage, simply can be defined as “the things that are done to find out secrets from enemies or competitors: the activity of spying” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/espionage>). For instance, while commenting on the battle which took place in the 1880s between the people of *Eziudo* and *Umuawada*, Irozu (1977) espouses thus:

In the course of the battle fought between *Eziudo* and *Umuawada*, *Eziudo* recorded the highest casualties. As a result of this, *Eziudo* constructed ‘*Mkpaelu*’, a sort of stand post from where they spied the movement of *Onicha* troop (an ally to *Umuawada*). *Onicha* fighters eventually discovered this spying post and raided it in the night and captured the chief spy whom they took to their village square and displayed before their people before executing him.

In addition to the above, it was reported that among the Igbo speaking people, the *Nkwerre* and the *Awka*, for instance, became professional spies and informers as well as negotiators and go betweens (McFarlan, 1946).

Further, marriage was also another efficient diplomatic tool among the Igbo speaking people in pre-colonial times, especially marriages which involved the crossing of state frontiers. In European history, when such a marriage linked one principality and another, it was known as a dynastic marriage and considered as a major instrument of diplomacy or international relations. Among the Igbo speaking people, every marriage linking families across state boundaries carried far-reaching diplomatic implications. By marrying outside one’s home of birth, one would be extending his overall reach and thus be sent as an emissary to another state or be called upon to use his long diplomatic reach to intervene when relationships break down between his state of birth and the state into which he married. With such a marriage, a man created or constructed an “eternal” path for, as the Igbo say, the path that links in-laws is the path to the stream from which a people draw water. It never closes nor is it ever allowed to be overgrown with bush. Notably, businessmen whose business took them beyond the borders of their communities of birth went out deliberately to construct many such diplomatic paths. (Goldie & Dean, 1901) Still on the aspect of marriage, Green (1964) made a detailed study of a kind of diplomatic marriage among the Igbo. She described it as exogamy (marriage to a person outside one’s group other than your own as required by custom) and found that the institution was one of those tools, which made it possible for the tiny Igbo states to survive as a coherent purposefully interlocked social formation. The links created by such marriage encouraged communication for business and pleasure, moderated the deployment of force in the settlement of inter-group relations as well as the percolation of knowledge and culture in all directions.

Moreover, war served as a diplomatic tool in pre-colonial Igbo land as had been noted in other areas. It has been strongly argued that war itself is an instrument of diplomatic intercourse. Again, since the aim of diplomacy is to

carry out the policy of a government by means of negotiation, (not ruling out the possibility of war though; since this has been regarded as a continuation of policy (diplomacy) by other means. Carl Von Clausewitz posits that “War is simply the continuation of political intercourse with the addition of other means” (Howard & Paret, 1967). The resistance of certain sections of Igbo land to the British threat conformed to this witty dictum. A. E Afigbo (1981), while commenting on Igbo land under colonial rule, submits that:

The Afikpo and Ikwo people were in no way disposed to entertain the messages and messengers of the Protectorate Government. These people had a warlike tradition (as their preferred diplomatic tool) in which they gloried and the institution- fairly well-integrated age grade organizations-with which to prosecute wars.

Still on the subject matter, Afigbo (1981) went on to illustrate the essence of war as a diplomatic tool among the Ezza people which turned deaf ears to the messages of the British administrations through several emissaries. In Afigbo words:

Our other example comes from the large and warlike Ezza group of the North-Eastern Igbo...the Ezza would not hear of the white man or go into any negotiations with his messengers... the Ezza and their Achara allies, ambushed and killed some members of the British escorts. Exploiting their ancient warlike reputation and the fact that they outnumbered most of the communities lying between them and Obubra, they either persuaded them or bullied these to go into an alliance with them against the British. When the administration of Cross River Division sent emissaries asking their representatives to come to a parley and state Ezza’s grievances against the British they chased the emissaries out. They boasted, the Ezza were more powerful and more warlike than the Aro. The result was that the British administration sent a military expedition against the Ezza who met force with force.

Nevertheless, the Aro were another set among the Igbo speaking people whom during the period of 1880s used warfare as a diplomatic tool in their relationship with neighbouring communities during British encroachment across Southeastern region. Afigbo (1981) espouses thus:

Among the Igbo, the Aro are noted for sweet, tortuous and double talk, a trait which could be useful in diplomacy...on every occasion, the Aro showed themselves prepared to talk...but at the same time, the Aro took other measures to instigate different communities to resist British advance. Where these methods failed they threatened the people with visitation from their Abam and Ohaffia allies.

From the above quotations, it would be apt to assert that the art of warfare was used as an instrument of diplomatic intercourse among the Igbo speaking people in pre-colonial times, just as it has been reported to have been used in other regions across the globe.

4. Dimensions of Diplomatic Resistance of the Igbo against Colonial Intrusion, from 19th to 20th Centuries.

It has been observed that, even though Igbo resistance to British conquest lacked epic events like those that marked the Asante campaign and others that is not to say that it was lacking in heroism, resourcefulness and doggedness. In fact, on this matter, the picture of the Igbo which emerges from available records is that of a heroic and determined people. Peradventure, more than any other aspect of diplomatic history *vis a vis* the Igbo speaking people under the time of our study, that of resistance seems to be the most available to historians.

For example, various resistances put up by traditional nationalists such as King Jaja of Opobo, and Nana of Itsekiri, was well known and has been well documented by historians. Much of it is contained in the records of the European powers, even if falsified in the process of recording. However, there are several accounts of these struggles against the imperialists, from all part of West Africa (Adegbulu, 2011), and particularly across Igbo land.

Attempts in the 19th and 20th centuries by the British to impose imperialistic and hegemonic measures that would subjugate the Anioma people for their own economic gains triggered-off the *Ekwumekwu* war. Resistance was strong in western Igbo land with series of wars waged to resist the British who had strong economic interest in the region and “Ekumeku” with well-organized leaders joined in oath-taking secrecy to forestall the activities of the British in the region. Guerrilla warfare was the effective weapon if this was to be achieved. The Ekumeku

became the greatest of the Igbo nationalism that instilled fear and discipline in the minds of the British on how and how not to deal with the Igbo people generally (Egwu, 2008). Similar story of resistance against imperialism ran through most Igbo communities. Afigbo (1981) makes our point clearer when he espouses thus:

The oral traditions reveal that each village state, until it actually came face to face with the might of the imperial power remained very confident in its military might and rather contemptuous of the white man...the fragmentation of authority and society meant that each autonomous unit fought its own war of independence on its own and lost in its own way too...every bit of territory, therefore had to be fought, or bargained for, separately. This took time and more energy and was very exasperating to the British...

In line with the above quotation, it would be apt to state that, just like it was recorded in other pre-colonial societies across the globe, that war was an instrument of diplomat intercourse, so has it been established beyond reasonable doubts that among the Igbo speaking people, the art of war was also used as a diplomatic tool in the conduct of state affairs across Igbo land.

5. Conclusion

Having established that pre-colonial Igbo speaking people did practice diplomacy contemporaneously with other part of the world; and having shown that their own kind of diplomacy was not only of the highest civilized standard, but was also more humane and decent than what was practiced in some parts of the world during the same period; it is important, perhaps pertinent to draw some lessons from the above.

It would be noted that diplomacy as a concept has been branded a Eurocentric value, absent in African historiography; more specifically to Igbo historiography due to the paucity of written document. However, scholars such as A.E Afigbo, Elizabeth Isichei, Chinua Achebe, among others have through their numerous literatures established the fact that among the Igbo speaking people, diplomacy was properly conducted through a well refined and systematic structure.

Finally, going by the findings of this paper, it is evident that diplomatic practices among the Igbo speaking people have certain vital lessons which could be of help to present day diplomats. Indeed, while diplomatic practices were being carried out across other lands, it was also practiced with diligence and orderliness across Igboland in pre-colonial times.

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