



## The Ibibio Concept of Peace and Its implication for Building an Egalitarian Society

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**Abstract.** Conflict and violence are phenomena that are common to every human society. It would not be an overstatement to say that conflicts, war and various forms of violence are clear, indications of a lack of Peace in any given society. Many scholars had work closely on various topics related to peace, yet, the attainment of peace in our human society (Ibibio) remains a mirage. On a daily basis, there are indications that, all over the African society, violence is on the increase, sending thousands of innocent people to early graves. In Ibibio society, the story is even worse. Different approaches towards achieving peace have failed to yield the needed positive peace. Yet, little or nothing has been done in terms of searching for peace within the indigenous African context. The aim of this paper is to examine critically the concept and causes of violence and lack of peace in the Ibibio society. The method adopted in this work is theoretical. It is, noted that lack of peace has physical, psychological, economic, social as well as political consequences in people's lives which basically, result in death, suffering, injustice, poverty, and the human person's loss of dignity. Yet, the Ibibio leaders, being mostly Ibibio natives, know what the Ibibio peace is all about. This paper has offered insight on how Ibibio elders should integrate indigenous peace initiatives in order to become more effective in building an egalitarian society.

**Keywords:** Ibibio, Concept, Peace, Egalitarian and Society.

### 1. Introduction

Every time people make mention of the word "peace". It stands as an indication that something had gone wrong hence the need for normalization or a solution using peace as a vehicle of settlement. Peace is a universal language and a universal need. Etymologically it is derived from the Latin *pax* and *pacis* respectively. In French, it is *paix*, pronounced/p/. In Ibibio it is *emem*, in Igbo it is *Udo*, in Hausa, it is *Salama* and in Yoruba, it is *Alafia* to mention just a few, all of which denotes the same basic

thing or concept the absence of conflict or war. The Oxford Advance Dictionary (2009:857) has defined peace as "a situation or a period of time in which there is no war or violence in a country or an area".

Similarly, Francis (2005:5) talks about peace in terms of the absence of war, fear, conflict, anxiety, suffering and violence, and peaceful coexistence. One thing to note about peace is its ubiquitous nature. In other words, peace will be needed everywhere sooner or later by everyone whether the people realize the need for it or not; whether the people realize the need for it or not; whether the people want it or not. That makes peace a compelling and compulsory commodity. As an important commodity, peace has to be worked for, sought after admired and embraced before it can be obtained by any individual, group or persons, institutions, state or nation.

Peace is a popular theme within the three religious and cultural spheres. According to Mbiti (2010:1) peace and reconciliation are not foreign notions, and their intensity has accelerated, be it from secular or religious consideration. Huber (1996: 128: 130) state that, although many religions claim to be in search of peace, putting it into practice has always posed a daunting challenge to humanity. Countless governments and international organizations have focused much attention on peace initiatives. As a Nigerian, we have observed that the growing need for peace and peaceful co-existence has become one of the greatest challenges to our people, the government and civil society, while considering the numbers of people who have lost their lives and /or means of livelihood due to various forms of violent conflicts-Ikelegbe (2003: 356) affirms that Nigeria's greatest challenges as a nation and a democracy is the peaceful and effective management of the conflicts and the protection of our pluralism.

Ibibio people, from the southern part of Nigeria, are predominantly Christians, yet cases of injustices; conflict, violence, poverty, corruption and the abuse of human rights still pose a pronounced challenge.

Charles (1993: 2 – 4) states that, like in other African cultures, a peace-reconciliation practices has been part and parcel of the Ibibios' socio-cultural value and practice even before the advent of colonialism. If Charles' argument is taken to be true, one can ask why then there is so much violence in contemporary Ibibio society, and could the understanding of peace within the Ibibio context help the elders to discover new ways for a peace-reconciliation practice? The traditional African societies sees peace as a not being born but made and that peace is implanted in the child right from birth through proper upbringing and socialization undertaken by the mother and a nut using a variety of activities. In Ibibio society, women are seen as the custodians of the future as a nature has endowed them with the capacity to bear and rear children. When the child is born the mother takes the first responsibility to caring and nurturing at the same time transmitting unto them morals and values at the tender age. The belief is that the African women (Ibibio) at this level can also transmit to the children the issue of peaceful living and co-existence with others.

## 2. Etymology of Peace in the Ibibio Language

In Ibibio thinking, peace (*emem*), originates from the Ibibio word (*meem*), which is interpreted as “to calm situation” or “to soften”/”or make soft” or “to make simple”/ “to make easy.” Other words used to further discuss peace in the Ibibio context include words such as *Ifure* (tranquility and calmness), *eduek/uforo*, (prosperity)”

### 2.1 Peace as absence of Violence

The Ibibio understand peace to be violence free, a state of tranquility calm, well-being happiness, agreement/harmony and the fear of God. “The Ibibio people regard peace as a situation where there is no physical violence such as communal or intertribal war”. Peace is absence of hostilities, if there is any element of violence in the society, there is no peace, therefore peace means absence of violence. “Peace can also be seen as cessation of violent conflict”. Therefore, Peace in the Ibibio world-view can be described as a condition that is trouble. Free, conflict-free, a condition of safety” the Ibibio think of peace as a state of tranquility and comfort, a situation free from disturbances, which could be as a result of violent attacks, like war or the outbreak of an epidemic in the community-anything that threatens the people's peace. Therefore, peace and be likened to a state of calm, a condition free from violence and other vices that threatens communal life. The Ibibio people understand peace to be absence of war, a situation

where there is no violent conflicts”. Parrinda's (1987): 221) argument affirms the above views when he asserts that, in ancient Greece, Peace was basically understood as the absence of violence.

### 2.2 Peace as the fear of God

“Peace is living within the fear of God, it is the fear of God that can help us in the way we treat one another” Peace is an inward experience which humans have as a result of their relationship with their God”. True peace is not man-made and has nothing to do with war; the Bible describes it as the peace that passes all human understanding, because that kind of peace is God's gift, there is no human government that can offer humans that kind of peace”. Real peace comes from, God as a result of regeneration. That is why Jesus said in the Bible, “My peace I give unto you, not as the world gives” Mbiti (2010:7) supports this view when he says: “Peace is grounded in a spiritual dimension since God is the source of lasting Peace”. Taking it further, Idowu (1962:47) describes similar beliefs among the Yourba who identify God as the nodal point of peace, social justice, and harmony. He is the one through whom peace ad interpersonal harmony are affirmed, sustained and nourished.

### 2.3 Peace as happiness

In Ibibio society peace as happiness because there can be no happiness in the home or society if there is no peace, so in Ibibio, peace is happiness and there can be no happiness when there is conflict and violence everywhere. “Peace is also a condition or atmosphere where there is happiness and mutual understanding. In Ibibio, if members of a family or community are not happy, it simply means that there is no peace, as such peace means happiness. Mbiti (2010:7) validates this by putting it the way around: “Where there is no peace, there is no fortune, no happiness, no joy, no freedom, no strength or incentive to work, no motivation to live”.

### 2.4 Peace as tranquility and calmness

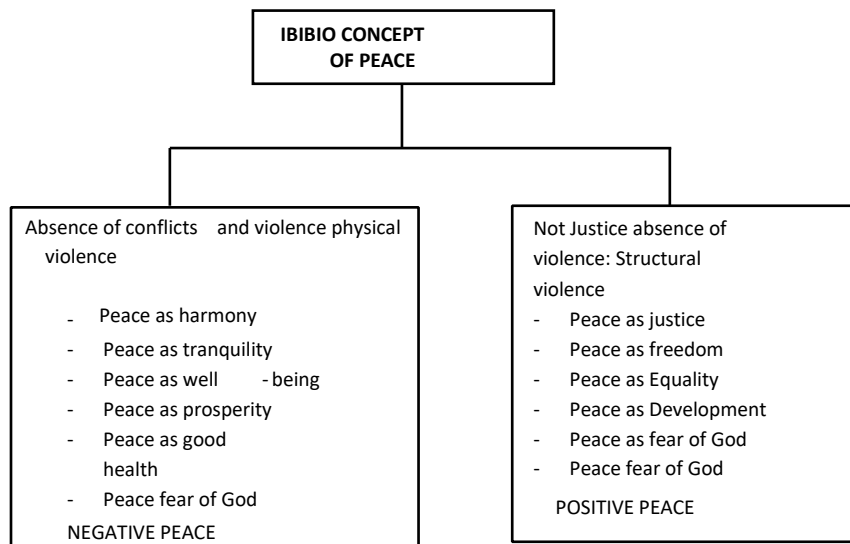
In Ibibio society, when there is calmness, there is peace, people simply understand peace as a state of calm. Peace in Ibibio context include words such as *Ifure* (... and calmness) ...” Peace is comfort, Peace is understood as a state of tranquility where there is no conflict and violence”. The Ibibio think of peace as a state of tranquility...” The above responses agree with Kerr's (2006:422) position that peace is understood to be a state of tranquility. To him, the concept of peace is linked to the idea of obtaining a peace of mind, denoting a degree of mental calm or serenity. To be at

peace with oneself and with others is not only to refrain from violent action, but to cast off a semblance of anger or anxiety. ➤ Peace as harmony: Peace is a state of harmony. It is only when there is unity that we say there is peace, when we have division and fighting here and there that means there is no peace. Ibibio people understand peace to be unity. Peace also means agreement to work or stay together, we find out that when there is mutual agreement among people or parties there is peace”. Peace is like an agreement made to end all forms of hostilities. The Ibibio simply understand peace as being togetherness. To them peace means “agreement and unity”. Peace is genuine agreement to end conflict, violence and war. The above statements agree with

Offiong (1997:423) position that peace in Ibibio is simply a state of harmony. Mbiti (2007: 7) interpretation of African peace supports the above, thus: “Peace means tranquility, good fortune, good health, with the freedom to live and work... where there is no peace there is no future, no happiness, no joy, no freedom, no strength or incentive to work, no motivation to live. Absence of peace means suffering for people and for nature”. ➤ Peace not just absence of violence

“Peace has to do with elimination of exploitative social structure in our society, and restoration of freedom of human rights: No society can be absolutely free from conflict and violence, as the Ibibio proverbs say: “*Abang ye abang odoreke kubium itreke*

*ndutuaya*”(pots that are kept up together can never fail to hit each other). “*Mbara okpok osop se sop iniehe se anam ukim*” (no matter how sharp the lizard’s nails it can do nothing to an Iroko tree). The Ibibio understanding of peace does not mean absence of conflict or violence, as human life cannot be totally free from it. As such, there could be some forms of conflict and violence in the society and, depending on its-degree, if such conflict or violence does not affect the general well-being of the community, it means there is peace. For instance, if an interpersonal or inter-family conflict does not disrupt the well-being of the community, this need not necessarily be regarded as a lack of peace. Peace may be regarded as the absence of violence and war, but this excludes minor conflicts, annoyances or personal quarrels, because people do agree to disagree without such disagreements disturbing the general well-being of the society. Peace goes beyond absence of violence to issues of injustices, gender inequality and corruption which is more serious. Spinoza (in Kerr 2006: 422) supports the above when he says: “Peace is not the absence of war; it is a virtue, a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence, confidence and justice... attainment of positive peace requires the attainment of certain normative goals systems”. Gwama (2007:57) agrees with the view when he succinctly states that “peace is not the absence of war, instead it is a war against evil and injustice”. Esema (2002:35) further explicate: “Positive peace is seen in the light of efforts toward the building of positive peace and non-exploitative structures, with a substantial component of justice and human rights.



**3. Elements of Peace in the Ibibio Culture**

Hurunah et al (2003:17) opine “All African cultures, customs, traditions and civilization emphasize not only the value and significance of peace in society, but

also the necessity of having to ensure that there is peaceful co-existence and harmony among various groups that live in a community are between them and their neighbours". Taking it further, Adedeji (1993:208) Echoes an old saying that culture is the center of existence of a people. Nana (2019: 321) Sees culture as the social forces within a community involving its conventions for behavior, ranging from food preparation techniques, to forms of entertainment that keep the community together like music or dancing, to dating, rituals, and so on.

### 3.1 Indigenous Education

Informal education is identified as part of Ibibio culture that promotes peaceful co-existence. The following are the sources of indigenous peace education: storytelling, proverbs, folk tales and riddles, songs and prayers. To the Ibibio's, our folk-tales, proverbs and riddles of our people is a rich source of peace in our context". "Our indigenous informal methods of educational training were very practical approaches, as the younger generation learnt from their elders the communal ways of peaceful co-existence through story telling ". "To the Ibibios' the wise saying from our elders, our proverbs, our folk-tales, folk- songs and riddles remain the greatest sources of the Ibibio notion of peace" "...through informal education and in informal ways which include moonlight tales, proverbs songs, rituals and prayer to which the young people could easily adapt. Our educational methods and curriculum which trains individuals from infancy, through storytelling, folk tales, proverbs, prayer, music and riddles, effectively trained people to embrace the values of justice, fair play and peace as its consists in many illustrations which demonstrate advantages and disadvantages of peaceful co-existence". The culture norms and value of our (the Ibibio) people itself makes for peaceful co-existence because it was a practical method of educating individuals and people were taught to respect themselves and order as will..."

Okoro (2010: 143) affirms this position his argument is that in human history, education is the main instrument employed by the society to preserve, maintain and grapple with its social equilibrium; hence a society depends largely on the quality of its citizen's education. Nana (2017: 200) Enthuses that in order not to undermine our environment where local culture such as local celebration, festivals, dance and folk lore amongst others could be subsumed. Ekong (2001: 131) state that, in order to induce conformity or forestall commitment of sacrilegious acts, certain social control mechanism devised among the Ibibio include the telling of folk tales, which emphasizes the

enormity of sanctions, indoctrination, and various sanctions to be instituted for acts capable of endangering the peace and stability of the entire community.

### 3.2 Religions Practices

The Ibibio culture and religious values were passed on from one generation to another through informal education and in informal ways which include moonlight tales, proverbs, songs, rituals and prayers to which the young people could easily adapt. Both religious and cultural values facilitate peaceful co-existence on our society in a way very significant. "...in those days when traditional African worship was popular, people of the same community shared a common shrine and spoke the same language. One can see the people live and share their lives together and have a lot of things in common. Then what affects one person affects the other. Then the sense of being our brothers' and sisters' keeper was very strong. All these are much more strengthened peaceful co-existence among our people..." Religious rituals were usually performed when there was any threat to peace in order to appease gods, other deities and ancestors". Our culture places a high moral value on virtues, such as obedience and respect for parents and elders, respect for traditions, laws and taboos, respect for gods and deities. All these trainings help to regulate the behavior of members of the society in ways that promote peaceful co-existence" The Ibibio are so committed to God as the source of peace, that is why they people pray to God for peace before embarking on any project, a journey or before the commencement of important events" Antia (2005:91) that, among the Ibibio, libations were poured and sacrifices made during harvests, new yam festivals and other important functions, as members always prayed for long life, prosperity and an increase in the population; making vows to be of good behavior; to cooperate and to love one another and to be faithful and loyal to both the family and the community, never to do things that will bring shame to the family, ancestors and the community. Furthermore, ancestral spirits were usually invoked to watch out and punish defaulters. In Ibibio society, families, villages, clans and communities have their different time to offer sacrifice to their gods and ancestors. This is done for the protection of their kids and families. (Nana, 2019:85)

The Ibibio cultural symbols and traditional ways of this settlement of disputes promote peaceful co-existence. One such symbol is the *ayai* (palm frond). For instance, if there is a quarrel or conflicts among people, when the *ayei* is raised, the parties were

expected to stop the fight. The Ibibio people have respect for cultural symbols of Peace, such as *aye*(palm frond), *nuuk enen*(elephant tusk), religions covenants and sacrifice. These practices help regulate attitudes and behavior of people in our society. The Ibibio people had high respect for her traditional symbols of peace. For instance, in those days, if there was a conflict or war among parties and someone raised a palm frond, the warring parties had to stop fighting and give peace a chance...”

Ekong (2001:135) affirms the above view thus: the Ibibio also had certain institutionalized elements and symbols which they used in checking or preventing crimes. This includes *eyei* (young-palm frond); *mbritem* (ginger lily or bush cane). These plants as well as animal materials were variously used as *uwang*, or symbols, to warn trespassers that the wrath of the gods or juju has been invoked upon them. The Ibibios agrees that *Nuukenin* (Elephant tusk) and *aye* (palm frond) were used as symbols of peace, as an accused could be asked to swear on it to prove his or her, innocence, or as a notice of no trespass, an instrument of injunction.

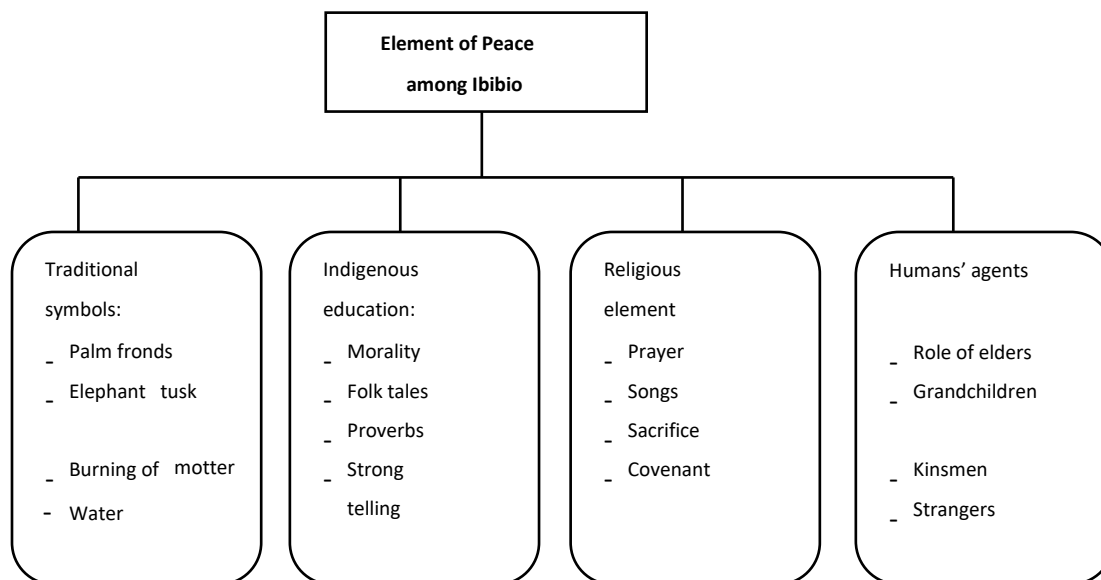
### 3.3 Ibibio communal life

Communal life is one unique aspect of our cultural life that promotes peaceful co-existence as emphasis is not on individuals but on community. The age grade system promoted and facilitates peace and peaceful co-existence. Our strong communal life is one unique aspect of our cultural life that promotes peaceful coexistence. This is reflected in a common Ibibio proverb that says: “*Eto isidaha ikpong ke iko ikaapa akai*” (A tree cannot form a forest), and “*ubok mmum ubok mmum aseatud ukpa*” (many hands will push together a big log of wood). These two sayings affirm that an Ibibio person knows that one need the support of the next person when one is in the difficulties. As such, one would strive to live in peace with one’s neighbours both as individuals, family and community”. Our culture practice of communal life is living in love together as a community, sharing the joy and pain together. When we talk about sharing, in the

African Ibibio context, sharing is very profound. In those days and even up till now, people of the same village or community shared a common shrine and spoke the same language. So, you can see the people lived and shared their lives together and had a lot of things in common. Then, what affected one person affected the other. Then, the sense of being our brother’s and sister’s keeper was very strong. All these and many more strengthened peaceful co-existences among our people.

### 3.4 Human as peace agents

The agents of peace include the chiefs as elders, the age grade, and secret societies such as the *Ekpo*, *Ekpe*, *Obon* societies. “... when there is conflict in the society, family, it is expected that the in-laws are neutral and unbiased particularly on matters of disagreement and conflict affecting the family of the in-laws. This makes in-laws agents of reconciliation and peace.” In Ibibio traditional society, *ayeyin* (material grandchild) was and it still highly regarded in our tradition as such, they play significant role in reconciliation and peace building in our society. The Ibibio tradition recognized and gives her in-laws, kinsmen and grandchildren that accord them the status that can easily facilitates reconciliation and peace among grieving parties. Ibibio people have great respect for their in-law particularly if the son in-law is perceived to be responsible. It is in this case that an in-law could become a vital element in reconciliation and peace building. There are some persons who are agents of peace in Ibibio culture, they play some sacred role. These people intervene when there is disagreement or conflict and they include *ntoiban* (married daughters of the family), *ayeyin* (material of grandchild), *Ukod* (in-law) and *iman* (kinsmen). When any of these persons step into to make peace, the faction parties, must listen to them. It is believed that if one refuse to listens to them one incurs the wrath of the gods upon oneself... These men and women must be people of integrity, who must be impartial I in the handing of cases. Our concern for the well-being of members of the community makes for peace in our society:



*Indigenous elements of peace in the Ibibio society*

**4. Causes of violence and lack of peace in the Ibibio society**

The causes of violence and lack of peace in Ibibio society include poverty, unemployment, inequitable distribution of infrastructures, greed, boundary disputes, land dispute, struggle for political office, Dispute over family inheritance, abuse of power, injustice/oppression.

**4.1 Poverty**

The fundamental problems that cause violence is poverty. Poverty ... and ignorance are the root cause by these problems. Poverty are the root cause of violence and lack of peace. This is because most of these kidnappers are unemployed youths who see the ungodly act of kidnapping people as a means of earning a living. Poverty is the root cause of violence and lack of peace. Whether you look at it from a diversion of public funds, child trafficking, child labour, prostitution, and so on, all these are in human ways of earning income.

**4.2 Unemployment**

Unemployment is one major cause of violence; when youths are not occupied positively, they release their energy through violence. There is a high degree of unemployed people in our communities and politicians and some opinion leaders often instigate them, pay them and use them for violence” If our youths are gainful employed, they will not become

ready instruments in the hand of politicians to use and perpetrate acts of violence.

**4.3 Inequitable distribution of infrastructures**

Another cause of violence and lack of peace in our society today is the inequitable distribution of infrastructures and social amenities. When government engages in an unequal distribution of amenities and infrastructures by developing a particular area, people of the underprivileged area will definitely feel cheated and oppressed. As such, they will want to struggle for power in order to have a fair share of the infrastructures. No community wants to be oppressed by being denied infrastructural development forever. As such, the violence we witness in our society today is a struggle for both economic and political emancipation.

**4.4 Greed**

Greed us another root course of violence and lack of peace: It is common to see individuals in our society today who embezzle public funds in order to enrich themselves and these individual use the influences of their wealth to intimidate and oppress others. Greed is the root of cause of violence, because some individuals and communities who feel they are stronger, would always love to trespass either the farm boundary of others in order to enlarge theirs. Greed and greediness is one of the root causes of violence and lack of peace in our society today, as men and women compete for recognition, based on financial

status, since the society seems to honour people with wealth and riches.

#### 4.5 Boundary disputes

Most of the fighting and wars we witness are always caused by boundary disputes. The reason the communities engage in war is as a result of lingering boundary disputes which are due to count delays in the administration of justice.

#### 4.6 Land disputes

Farm boundary disputes is one of the causes of violence in our society today. Sometimes, Individuals, families or communities claim ownership of a parcel of land for one reason or the other. Such a claim always calls for one disagreement and conflict which is capable of throwing the entire community into confusion or bloodshed. In our society today, it is common to see people struggle over rights inheritance, land for farming, community boundaries. Like in many African cultures, land has held a central place, as it was a hub of economic activities and survival for many local farmers. The Ibibio pre-colonial economy depended to a large extent on land. Udo (1983:194 – 196). Ownership of land was through deforestation of virgin forest. The earliest occupants were the owners of the land so occupied; new occupants had to negotiate for settlement from the original occupants. Other forms of ownership include outright purchases, as settlements for unredeemed pledges, gifts, exchange and victory in wars (Esema 2002:12 – 13). It is an Ibibio belief that land was given to them in trust by their ancestors. No Ibibio man or woman would allow encroachment on his or her piece of land, no matter how small. Some scholars hold that this emanates from land/boundary disputes (Udo 1988: 197; Ekong 2001:77). The significance of land to the Ibibio could be seen in Udo's (1983:195) following statement: "The Ibibio also believe that, without their land, they would be dead men, women and children. Land has become the very centre of their communities. They will do nothing to profane it and if this happens, they immediately expiate the sin by offering sacrifices". Land disputes cut across all strata of the Ibibio society, beginning with individuals, families, villages or clans (Ekong 2001:77). It was, and still is a major source of disagreement, hurts, bitterness, violent conflicts and war among the Ibibio people and their neighbours.

#### 4.7 The struggle for political office

The struggle for political appointment is another cause of violence as people from areas that feel marginalized

always would want to fight for political and other governmental appointments. Some politicians do use their party followers to instigate society for violence. In most cases, those who are politically ambitious, do instigate or manipulate people and in some cases the entire community or clan into conflicts and violence especially when their demands are denied over a period of time.

#### 4.8 Disputes over family inheritance

In Ibibio, struggle over rights of inheritance is a common cause of violence among family members. Most cases interpersonal violence among members of the family stems from disputes over right of inheritance. People struggling over rights of inheritance, land for farming.

#### 4.9 The abuse of Power

It is very common to see individuals in our society today who embezzled public funds in order to enrich themselves and those individuals use the influence of their wealth to intimidate and oppress others. We all know that political office holders are not interested in the plight of the people, all what we see is the open demonstration of unfair treatment, materialism, nepotism and corruption. Over the years, the rich and wealthy politician use their influence of their positions and wealth to buy votes or manipulate political processes in order to perpetrate them in office, thereby depriving others who may even be better qualified for leadership positions, this always leads to violence.

#### 4.10 Injustice/Oppression

The feeling of injustice and oppression as the basic motivation of the oppressed to fight against the dominant power; this always raped the society of peace. "... whether we look at injustice from the individual point of view as in how the individual feels treated in the society, or in his family, or from the collective angle in terms of how a community, clan or area feels marginalized over time. When the people no longer endure injustice, they will definitely want to fight for liberation and in most cases through violence.

### 5. The Ibibio Symbolism of Peace

#### 5.1 *Ayei/eyei* (palm fronds): As an Ibibio symbol of peace.

Ibibio cultural symbols and traditional ways of settlement of disputes promote peaceful coexistence. One such symbol is the *Ayei* (palm frond): for

instance, if there is a quarrel or conflict among people, when the *ayei* is raised, the parties are expected to stop the fight. Our respect for cultural symbols of peace such as *ayei*... these practices help regulate, attitude and behavior of people in our society. The Ibibio had high respect for our traditional symbols of peace. For instance, in those days, if there is conflict or war among parties and some raised a palm frond, the warring parties must stop fighting and give peace a chance. Prominence was given to special days, special places, special seasons, special objects, including special leaves, in the Ibibio pre-colonial society. *Ayei*. *Eyei* (a young palm frond) was a special leaf and played a significant role within the traditional Ibibio context. It was generally used in various ways, each with a symbolic meaning.

Udo (1984:148), Essien (2001:92) and Antia (2005:95) all agree that *Ayei* was a notice of “no trespass” or a symbol of peace. In a situation where two villages engaged in conflict, another village, well disposed towards them, or the clan council, could arbitrate by first sending *ayei/eyei* to them to call for a ceasefire. Looking at the symbolic use of *ayei* in the circumstances above, one can infer that aye served as an injunction in traditional Ibibio society. Antia (2005:96) states: “When *ayei* is tied on the head, hand, legs or bodies, it shows happiness and victory-tied in a special manner it was used for sending special messages, for example when tied across the road or path, it means that non-qualified person should keep off it”. Similarly, when placed on objects or tied on buildings, or fruit trees, it was a warning that people should keep off in other words it was used to place a ban on objects and properties. When carried in the mouth, it implied that the carrier was on a special mission and must not talk to anybody except the person to whom the message was rightly sent. In other words, the carrier must keep all secrets. *Ayei* itself was used as *mbiam* or to grace or solemnized and protect *mbiam* from contamination. Herbalist use *ayei* as an antidote against stubborn ghosts and charms. Today, every vehicle carrying a corpse or corpses is decorated with *ayei* to protect it from the power of ghosts and to protect it from a breakdown.

Apart from the palm frond which has extremely discussed, other materials include noonnung (life free) *mbritem* (ginger lily or bush cane); *mkipatata* (ferns; Selaginella), *Okono* tree (*dracaena fragans*) *oboro* plants, and *nkang* (charcoal). Animal material includes *nkwa unen* (egg) and *mkipok ekwong* (snail shell). Scholars hold that these plants and animal materials were symbolically used to warn trespasses. Consequently, if the above-mentioned materials were placed on any items or property, it implies that the owner has invoked the wrath of gods or juju on

whoever tampers with such property or items (Ekong 2001: 135; Antai 20905:105 – 106). Apart from symbolic instruments of peace, social relations were even more significant as these symbolic elements were useless without intervention of a third party in Ibibio peace arbitrations. In some cases, *ayei* could be used together with *nuuk enin* (elephant tusk) as a symbol of peace.

### 5.2 Nnuk enin (elephant tusk): As an Ibibio symbol of Peace.

Among the Ibibio people, the elephant tusk was another significant symbol of peace. The elephant although it's used was restricted to only village or clan head. In Ibibio tradition, when there is conflict or war between two communities, a neutral village head or clan head send an elephant tusk to the warring community then both communities will stop fighting immediately and peace talks begins thereafter. In Ibibio traditional society, an elephant tusk was recognized and respected by all as a peace symbol. But nowadays such practices are fast disappearing because only the court action has legal backing from government. The precolonial Ibibio used various forms of artefacts as symbols and instruments of peace. Prominent among such artefacts is the elephant tusk (*nuukenin*). Scholars holds that an elephant tusk was used as an instrument of peace in two different ways. Essien (2001:92) and Udo (1983:148) agrees that it was used to stop feuds among warring communities. Antia (2005:97) affirms: “*Nuuk enin* (elephant tusk) was used to call for a ceasefire where and when war raged between one or more communities”. The *nuukenin* not only stopped hostilities, it also provided its messenger, the bearer, with a safe pass throughout the clan and beyond (Udo 1983: 148). Essien (2001:92), and accused person was asked to swear on it to prove his or her innocence. Any disregard of disrespect for the Obong's elephant tusk then amounted to rebellion and the culprit would have to face serious consequences. As far as the Ibibio people are concerned, the use of this instrument, and others, helped in the dispensation of justice, maintain peace and order among the Ibibio in the pre-colonial era.

### 5.3 Ndom (white chalk). As an Ibibio symbol of peace.

The Ibibio people understand *ndom* as a symbolism of peace. From time immemorial and even up till now, *ndom* (white chalk) was, and is still a symbol of peace, happiness, joy, and blessing. When one obtains justice, one could celebrate by rubbing white chalk on parts of the body. When an accused is vindicated,

he/she and close relatives and friends rubs native chalk on the face, neck, or leg to openly communicate their joy, victory and peace. *Ndom* is white clay excavated from the ground, otherwise known as native chalk. In most cases, this substance (*ndom*) is dissolved in water, applied on the face, neck and the entire body as a make-up. In most cases, nursing mothers do not only rub it, but they use it to massage their bodies, as it is generally believed among the Ibibio that the substance makes women's body looks more polished and beautiful. Apart from using it for beautifying purposes, the most significant use of *ndom* (white chalk) is as a symbol of peace. According to Okon (2004:40), the application of this substance (*ndom*) on parts or the whole of the body signifies a happy event. It also symbolizes innocence and peace, anybody accused of any sacrilegious offences such as witchcraft, adultery and later found to be innocent of the allegation was painted with *ndom* and sited on the village square or paraded around the village to signify his or her innocence on the other hand, a theft was painted with *nkang* (charcoal) and was beaten and paraded around the village.

Esen (1982:111) agree that the usual penalty for petty theft was *uyet nkang* (smearing the body with charcoal). When a thief was caught red-handed, he was either stripped naked or most scantily dressed; his body was smeared all over with charcoal and was paraded along the streets of a number of villages while being flogged occasionally. In each village along which he passes, the most ridiculous and ribald songs were hurriedly composed and the thief was forced to dance to the tune of the music, amidst jeers and boos. Sometimes, the stolen article was tied around his neck. For this reason, Esen asserts: "As for the thief himself, his mind could not focus on anything at all, it would probably be on the well-known Ibibio proverb: "*Asanga Isang ibukko mbuk ino ibukko ntim*" (the traveller cannot recount all his experiences, nor can a thief described all the floggings he has received)". Just as *ndom*, in its use among the Ibibio was symbolic of peace, purity, beauty and innocence; *nkang* (charcoal) was symbolic of guilt, shame, fear and woe".

Mmong (water): As an Ibibio symbolic expression of peace in Ibibio. When the warring, parties are finally reconciled, they are given water to drink from the same cup, as a symbol of reconciliation and peace. The Ibibio elders always end peace dialogue by giving water or palm wine to the parties to drink from the same cup; if they accept the drink, it means they have agreed to reconcile and have accepted peace as well.

In the traditional Ibibio world-view, water has a great symbolic meaning. Water is seen as a free gift from God. First and foremost, water represent life; to deny somebody, an animal, or plant water simply means a death wish. In Ibibio, the cheapest yet most significant gift is water. No one buys water, yet no one may drink water from an enemy. Water could be given to anyone a sign of peace. Water symbolized cleansing and purity, the popular Ibibio proverbs says, *moong moong ayet idiok mkpo idiok mkpo iyetke moong* (only water can wash, dirt can never wash water). The real meaning is that, with water, we are purified, refreshed and made whole. At the end of libation, water was poured last to confirmed the libation. Therefore, the shared water of peace is believed to cool anger, soften hearts, refresh and restore broken relationships. To purify fighting men of the blood they had shed during war, sacrifices had to be made to the gods, after which water was thrown to the rooftop and each of the fighting men had to stand under the dripping water. This ritual was meant to purify warriors ceremonially, but this practice is no longer common in contemporary Ibibio society.

## 6. Conclusion

In this article we have discussed extensively the importance, concept of peace as the basic ingredient needed for unity in our traditional Ibibio society. We have defined peace as related to the topic and have shown categorically that peace can be hampered due to conflicts among people of various descriptions including communities, politicians and youths respectively. As already pointed out, any discourse on peace at any time or anywhere presupposes that something had gone wrong somewhere; that there has been a misunderstanding due basically to the absence of peace as a vital ingredient of human existence hence the need to restore it. It also presupposes that something else, viz, unity, which is another vital component of human relationship, has equally been seriously affected. Before talking about peace, and essential element needed for unity and mutual coexistence, there must have been some protracted problems in the form of conflicts between two parties. Such is capable of taking peace away from the society or community and may allow a chaotic situation to set in. What all this means is that even though peace is such a compelling commodity in our collective and individual existence locally and world-wide, it can be hampered by those it is meant to protect if they fail to protect it in turn. This implies that peace is a two-way affair. This works reveals that violent conflicts and war rape the Ibibio society of peace. Peace is sacrosanct in building an egalitarian Ibibio traditional society

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