The Dialectics of British and Ibibio Jurisprudence in the Settlement of Disputes in Ibibio Land: 1856-1960

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Abstract

This study examines the Ibibio jurisprudence in the settlement of disputes before the advent of colonialism, which engendered the introduction of British jurisprudence. It notes that every society evolves a set of rules to govern its affairs and her relations with her neighbours. Ibibio land was not without its own rules and mores which by customs and usages formed the basic laws that governed the society. The Ibibio jurisprudence of the time was governed by natural law. This law sees the universe as governed by the divine reason of God and this divine reason is not subject to time but go on eternally. Morality was the main purveyor of this system. The indigenous mode of law making among the Ibibio before the coming of the British courts and the philosophy behind such law became distorted by the introduction of the British court system following the emergence of the Court of Equity in 1856. The "dialectics" of both jurisprudences in settlement of disputes show that the British jurisprudence tended to be predicated on economic benefits and was thus a deviation from the Ibibio ethos, norms and values. The work concludes that the establishment of colonial administration, including the court system unsettled the Ibibio jurisprudential balance and brought about a transition from the reservation of social equilibrium by the community to the impersonal justice of the courts. The discourse terminates in 1960 when Nigeria became an independent nation. The paper adopts a historical analytical method and uses both primary and secondary sources.

Introduction

Before the coming of the Europeans Ibibio land, the Ibibio people had institutions and mechanisms to deal with situation of disputes. These institutions served the people in a combined the political, social and judicial spheres. The rules and mores which formed the backbone of traditional dispute settlement before the advent of the European courts were not codified but were time tested and passed down from one generation to the other.

Traditionally, there were courts of varying levels, making pronouncements on specific cases and thereby making laws. Since the concern of the traditional rulers was the welfare of the community as a whole, it seems natural that they drew no distinction between executive and judicial functions. In most cases, the village council was the same for both judicial and administrative purposes. The corporate view of the society taken by the traditional ruler explains certain features of application of the law. This is why, in Ibibio villages, no one was made a chief, unless such a person was considered to be of sound mind and knowledgeable in the laws and customs of his people, because a considerable amount of the chief's time will be spent settling disputes. Different institutions used different mechanisms to adjudicate and settle different kinds of disputes. The indigenous judicial instruments of traditional dispute settlement were among the strongest means of social control employed in Ibibio land. "This was prefixed on the belief that if human attempts at getting at the truth failed, at least the unseen forces would not err'.

These traditional dispute settlement mechanisms entrenched the principles of fair hearing in case disposal processes. Parties to a dispute are allowed to present their cases and call witness or witnesses where the need arose. Decisions in matters are taken openly and in the presence of the parties, members of their family, village or community. Truth remained the watchword in traditional dispute resolution mechanism. Both the disputants and the arbitrators would be expected to be truthful.

The quest by the Europeans to have direct access to the sources of the raw materials brought the Europeans into closer contact with the Ibibio hinterland, and engendered closer commercial and economic interactions. This new relationship

triggered disputes and setbacks in the transactions between the European supercargoes and the Ibibio middlemen. In a bid to settle the emerging disputes and restore normalcy, the Court of Equity was introduced in the coastal part of Ibibio land. This experiment evolved and resulted in the entrenchment of the permanent European courts.

It is important to note that Ibibio land was a well ordered society in the period before the advent of the Europeans and the subsequent enthronement of the British jurisprudence through the establishment of the colonial courts. The villages and communities were politically organised to run the day to day affairs and settle disputes that arose.

Ibibio Land

The Ibibio are regarded as the oldest ethnic group in Southern Nigeria (Talbot, 2023) and the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria (Jones, 1988). They occupy the geographical region that was described by the colonial administration as the Six Ibibio Districts of Abak, Eket, Ikot Ekpene, Itu, Opobo (Ikot Abasi) and Uyo in the Old Calabar Province (Akpan, 2004; Ina, 2017).

Ibibio is the name given collectively to the indigenous inhabitants of the territory along the South-Eastern part of Nigeria stretching from the right bank of the river formerly called Opobo but which is now, as a result of boundary adjustment, Ikot Abasi River, the estuary of which used to be known as the mouth of the Imo River as it flows into the Atlantic Ocean and now constitutes the Western boundary separating Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria from both Rivers State and Abia State of Nigeria to the Cross River and beyond in the East, and as far as the international boundary separating Nigeria from the Cameroon Republic. The Ibibio are a coastal people; the sea-board including the Bight of Bonny formerly the Bight of Biafra washes the shores of the Ibibio country all along the whole of the Southern coast. In the North, Ibibio territory extends to Arochukwu and beyond to Ekoi in the Old Ogoja Province. More especially, the area lies between Latitudes $4^{0}25'$ and $5^{0}45'$ and Longitudes $7^{0}16'$ and $8^{0}55'$ E (Udo, 1983; Inyang, 1991).

It has generally been agreed that the Ibibio came to their present location – from the area around Nigeria/Cameroon border. Available evidence - oral, written,

structural and conjectural on the subject of Ibibio origin and migrations agree with this thesis (Noah, 1988). With such robust cultural antecedent, the Ibibio had long developed its indigenous institutions including its jurisprudence which facilitated dispute settlement.

Jurisprudence and Dialectics

Jurisprudence is the philosophy and theory of law. It is concerned primarily with both what the law is and what it ought to be. That includes questions of how persons and social relations are understood in legal terms, and of the values in and of law. Ihehiulo (2003) opines that jurisprudence as a philosophy of law is seen by some as a universal and metaphysical approach to the study of law. This metaphysical approach requires a working knowledge of legal facts. Thus, it could be said to be broader in scope since it requires both the knowledge of the facts of law and a deep concentration on the universal understanding of law.

Contemporary philosophy of law which deals with general jurisprudence, addresses problems internal to law and legal systems and problems of law as a social institution that relates to the larger political and social context in which it exists. Ancient natural law is the idea that there are rational objective limits to the power of legislative rulers. The foundations of law are accessible through reason, and it is from these laws of nature that human laws gain whatever force they have (Garner, 2009).

The Ibibio traditional jurisprudence tended to be predicated on eternal law, which refers to divine reason, known only to God. Thomas Aquinas believes it is God's plan for the universe. Man needs this plan, for without it he would totally lack direction. On the other hand, the British jurisprudence in Ibibio land tended to be fashioned after natural laws. Natural law is often contrasted to positive law which asserts law as the product of human activity and human volition. Notions of an objective moral order, external to human legal systems, underlie natural law. Another approach to natural-law jurisprudence generally asserts that human law must be in response to compelling reasons for action (*Golding and Edmundson, 2013).*

Going by this, it can be said that traditional Ibibio jurisprudence followed the line of flexibility and expediency buoyed by cosmology and the social life of the people at its foundation. Indigenous judicial institutions in Ibibio land was predicated on the basis of eternal and natural laws. As defined by St. Thomas Aquinas, eternal law sees the universe as governed by the divine reason of God. This divine reason is not subject to time but go on eternally (Catholic Encyclopedia, 2004). As was also practised in Ibibio land before the advent of the Europeans, natural law is the participation of rational creatures (man) in the eternal law according to Aquinas. He listed the basic precepts of natural laws to include propagation and preservation of life, pursuit of truth and peaceful society, which he maintains are Gods purpose for man (Omoregbe, 1997).

Dialectic on the other hand refers to dialogue on differing points of view about a subject but wishing to arrive at the truth through reasoned argumentation. Dialectic resembles debate, but the concept excludes subjective elements such as emotional appeal and rhetoric (Udoma, 1994).

Origin of Laws and Jurisprudence in Ibibio Land Before 1856

According to Udo (1983), the political organisation of the Ibibio was based on social organisation and consisted of six divisions augmented by clubs follows: *idip* (family), *ufok* (sub-division of an extended family), *ekpuk* (lineage), *idung* (village), *oduk* (group of villages) and *ikpaisong* (clan) was the highest level.

Each village was autonomous and independent. No village legislated for the other and the village was the only political entity which actively affected practically the daily lives of the citizens. Each village was lineage based and the lineage consisted of a number of families. Both the lineage head and heads of families were members of the village council responsible for making all village legislations. The village council made laws to govern all aspects of village life. Traditionally, there were courts of varying levels, making pronouncements on specific cases and thereby making laws. Since the concern of the traditional rulers was the welfare of the community as a whole, it seems natural that they drew no distinction between executive and judicial functions (Udoma, 1994).

In most cases, the village council was the same for both judicial and administrative purposes. For instance, laws were made for the protection of life and property, for safe guarding the source of water supply; the protection and the decency of women as well as the cleanliness of village paths and squares, etc.

At the village level, Akpan *et al* (2012) assert that the *obong idung* (the village) was the head of the village and presided over the meeting of the village council. In this role, he did not take the executive or judicial decisions on matters that were brought before him, but rather, he consulted a lot in order to give justice to all. This office rotated among the *ekpuk* (families) that made up the village. Politically, the *obong idung* (village head) presided over the village council meeting or *esop idung* (village council) and was ably assisted by some chiefs of lower rank in charge of specific spheres of the village needs.

Village headship in Ibibio land was hereditary as obtained in other parts of Nigeria. The post can fall to anyone whom the village elders considered qualified and suitable for such position by virtue of his traditional background. Such a person was expected to be morally upright. He was also expected to be knowledgeable in the customs and tradition of the people. When the *obong dung* (village head) was selected, and coronated, he was to run the affairs of the community with the assistance from established institutions and the village council. The village council exercised legislative, executive and judicial authority. It took decisions on maters brought before it, adjudicate on both civil and criminal cases, made new laws and interprets old ones, as such all adult men and women in the community were members (Ekong, 2001; Ukpong, 2007; Akpan, 2018).

Village laws were not made arbitrarily and steps were taken to ensure that the wishes of the people were ascertained. This often took place in a meeting of the lineage assembly held on a fixed day of the week and on a regular basis. It was during such assemblies that proposed village legislations were placed for discussion and every member of the lineage had the opportunity of expressing his opinion on such impending legislation. Laws in the traditional Ibibio society were rigidly enforced and in this regard there was no specific judicial body which of necessity the injured must refer the matter. Rather, the matter of initiating judicial proceedings depended on the particular individual. When the law was broken and

the culprit known or suspected, the injured party had a number of options open to him. He could report the matter to his lineage head or to the village head or to the person he believed was capable of handling the matter (Noah, 1988).

Ina (2017) claims that among the leading members of the village were the *ntinya* chiefs. Village heads were usually selected from among this class of chiefs but in a situation that the village headship did not go to the any of them, such village heads selected were subordinate in status to the *ntinya* chiefs. Thus, the administrative, executive and judicial powers of the village group and clan councils were primarily in the hands of the *ubong ntinya*.

Apart from these more recognised political institutions in Ibibio land, there were other organisations that acted both as social and political groups within the village. They exercise judicial authority by making laws that governed their members and had mechanisms to enforce such laws. In an era where there were no law enforcement agents and organisations such as the police, and there were no formal employment, the Ibibio people used age grades and secret societies to fulfill the functions of government (Akpan, *et al*, 2012).

The age grade was a very important institution in communities where they existed, the groups were made of the population of same age divided into groups for the discharge of community service. The age grade was divided according to gender, as such, there were groups for boys and groups for girls. These gendered groups were further divided into those for the young and those for the elderly. Forde and Jones (1950) give a colonial analysis into the age grade system as was practiced in Ibibio land. To them, men in the community were formally grouped into *nka* (age grade) and the status of such *nka* (age grade) increased with seniority. They believe the age grade was informally established for boys at about ten years of age, and that such set were formally recognised when its members were about twelve years old. From that time until marriage, the age grade was subject to educational and other authority of its seniors. The adult age grade remained active until the middle age, serving a self-disciplinary institutions and guardians of public morality.

According to Gailey (1971), the age grade represented an important check on the usurpation of power by the village, he agrees with the opinion of Forde and Jones (1950) that the age grades served the main functions of education for both sexes from about ten years of age until the time of marriage. Also, the age sets were considered the guardian of public morality and were accorded the right to punish their members for bad behaviour.

Ukpong (2007) maintains that the age grades formed an essential link in the chain of government and without them the administration could hardly be carried out. All age grades had their own codes of conduct. Offences such as theft, adultery, flippancy and divulging of official secrets constituted breaches of their codes. Age grades settled quarrels among their members, thereby reducing the number of cases that could have gone to the village council. Offenders were fined, and in extreme cases ostracised, while appeals could be made from one junior grade to a higher one.

Apart from the age grades, Gailey (1971) observes that there were other very important groups in the community that provided leadership. These according to him were the titled societies. He mentions four different societies for men and one prominent secret society for women. These were the *ekpo, idiong and ekpe* societies. There were significant difference in the philosophical basis and ritual forms of each of these societies but overall, they all performed necessary functions for the community. Each of the organisation exercised strict control over the community in which they operated. The leader of the secret society needed not to be the village head, although the village head was always a member of the society. In areas where the jurisdiction of the secret societies were the uppermost, the village head was simply a servant of the societies.

Of all the secret societies that was operational in Ibibio land in pre-colonial time, none was as active as the *ekpo* society in the political arrangement. The society was highly decentralised and each village had its own *afe ekpo* (ekpo hall). *Ekpo*, as the name implies connotes the dead ancestors, which the Ibibio believe were revisiting the earth or the land of the living. Oral tradition has it that the 'spirit' of the *ekpo* emerge as smokes from anthills and ant holes to inhabit the masquerade and at the end of display, disappears back from where they came (Etukudo, 2024).

This society was believed to protect the villages in Ibibio land by magical and religious means. Members of the *ekpo* society were in most cases prominent members of the community. As a powerful political institution, the secret society provided the channels through which the decision of the village and clan councils was enforced. They were used in the maintenance of law and order and dispute settlement between people and communities.

Law Enforcement

Apart from the *ekpo* society, another secret society that served as a political institution was the *idiong* society. This was a cult of for diviners, whose priests were believed to hold supernatural powers. The diviners were believed to possess the secret knowledge and power of seeing what the ordinary eyes could not see. According to Akpan (2018), these diviners, known in Ibibio land as *mbia idiong* were reputed to have the ability to foretell the future, the present and the past and to commune with spirits. The *idiong* cult in Ibibio was responsible for checkmating crimes and punishing offenders just like the *ekpo* cult. It operated as the governing council of the villages and was said to be the most revered cult in all of Ibibio land. If the *ekpo* cult was the institution responsible for executing the decision of the village councils, then the *idiong* served as the decision making body. The authority of the *idiong* secret society overshadowed that of the village head.

The society was guarded by strict rules than other secret societies in Ibibio land. Members were bound to take an oath of secrecy upon initiation. The oath concerned the activities and decisions of the secret society. Arising from this strict rules and code of conduct, discipline was upheld and betrayal of trust by members was dealt with seriously and punished accordingly. Members were guided by a range of cultural taboos during the *idiong* season of festivities and these rules and mores were adhered to be the entire community (Akpan, 2004; Akpan, 2018).

Ekpe remains **o**ne of the significant cultural institutions that has promoted historical linkages and relations among the communities in the Cross River region. *Ekpe* has wider scope and spread more than any other secret society. Indeed, the unifying influence of *ekpe* within the Cross River region is no longer debatable (Anwana, 2002).

Indeed, *ekpe* greased the engine of inter-group relations, became the basis of governance for the communities of South Eastern Nigeria and had overwhelming influence over their lives as a whole. In each of these communities, *ekpe* was a widespread, powerful and prestigious institution in the pre-colonial era. Its membership conferred great advantages and immunities on the initiates. For a man to effectively exercise his citizenship rights, he had to be an *ekpe* member and the higher his grade, the greater his authority (Akpan, 2018).

The origin of *ekpe* is still a subject of heated debate and contention among the communities within the geography of *ekpe* influence in South-Eastern Nigeria. One of the prevalent thesis is Ibibio origin. According to Atem:

> *Ekpe*…a cultural society of immense importance. It was an institution with varied functions. It performed political, economic, judicial, social and even religious duties within the community. Politically it was a unifying institution. It brought together into a single disciplined organisation all the leading men in each local community. Communities living apart came to be united under *ekpe*….This was possible because *ekpe* legislated for the entire community and its laws were commonly applied (Atem, 1985: 63).

In the realm of justice, *ekpe* was the supreme judicial authority with its agents acting as the police force in the enforcement of its laws. *Ekpe* could punish by imposing a boycott *Ekpe* maintained peace by settling disputes among its members and between communities. Offenders were duly punished according to *ekpe* laws. Punishment included imposition of fines, arrest and detention and, in serious cases, the culprits could be executed (Aye, 1967; Atem, 1986; Ukpong, 2007).

The women had the *ebre* society which was village based and was open to all adult women and played a significant role. Membership was restricted to married women of proven integrity. The society exercised control and authority over all unmarried girls and all ceremonies relating to girls and women (Gailey, 1971).

Ebre defined proper code of conduct for women and had the power to punish and discipline those that violate such codes. The *ebre* society planned and carried out the various dances and celebrations in which women took part. Also the society

protected women against maltreatment by men and regulated their conduct. The basic law of the society was that women, most especially their members must not steal. In the case that a woman in the village committed theft, she was stripped naked, rubbed with charcoal and paraded along the streets of the village with the stolen item hung around her neck. In some cases, a culprit could be ostracised from the society (Ekong, 2001; Ukpong, 2007).

Akpan (2018) observes that discipline and high moral conduct was expected from members of the *ebre* society because they were expected to correct some of the ill effects of the community. The society had the authority to ban women of doubtful character from attending certain social functions or from buying and selling in the market. It also served as arbitration and dispute settlement institution for women. Once these various organs and institution made the law, the laws were always announced by the town crier who was a man chosen principally because of his ability to keep secrets.

British Courts and Jurisprudence in Ibibio Land

European interaction with Ibibio land began at the onset of the Atlantic slave trade, when the European slave traders visited the coastal areas of Ibibio land such as Ikot Abasi and Itu to buy or capture slaves for shipment to the Americas. This practice continued until the British Parliament abolished in 1807 (Noah, 1984).

When the British Parliament abolished the slave trade, they had to adopt a number of measures, which included signing of treaties with the slave trading nations of Europe and the Americas and the African rulers, naval patrol of the west coast of Africa and the establishment of the an international court known as Court of Mixed Commission in Freetown in Sierra Leone for the trial of captive slavers to effect a permanent end to the slave trade. Since the headquarters of the Court of Mixed Commission was in faraway Freetown, it was difficult for it to adjudicate on cases of slaves in the Bight of Benin and Biafra (Adewoye, 1977). When Britain acquired the Spanish island of Fernando Po from Spain in 1827 for use as a naval base for the suppression of slave trading activities, the headquarters of the Court of Mixed Commission was transferred from Freetown in Sierra Leone to which is few nautical miles from Ibibio land. (Udo, 1983; Udoma, 1984).

Ibibio land area came under British control when the first British Consul, John Beecroft was appointed in 1849 to regulate trade and protect British interests within the Bights of Benin and Biafra. In the wake of this establishment of the British Consulate, there began to develop informal courts of equity at important trading centre. According to Noah (1984), these courts were the outpost of the British Empire and represented the cheapest and the most effective ways to plant the British flag wherever it became possible to do so after military conquest.

Adewoye (1977) agrees that the earliest known English styled court in Southern Nigeria was the so called Court of Equity that was set up in the Niger Delta states in 1856. To him, the courts sprang out of necessity to administer some rough form of justice between the European supercargoes and the African traders.

On 5 June 1885, Britain declared a protectorate formally over what had become the Oil Rivers District. In January 1891, a new British Commissioner and Consul General, Claude MacDonald was appointed for the Oil River. MacDonald who set up a new government with headquarters at Calabar for the direct administration of the area, had some assistants who held judicial warrants which facilitated the establishment of Consular courts in the area. These Consular courts supplanted the Court of Equity. A year after MacDonald appointment, the earliest of the native councils had come into existence. By February 1892, what was called the 'High Court of the Native Council of Old Calabar' of which the Consul was the President and acted as a Court of Appeal for a number of minor courts established on the Cross River was already in existence. Before MacDonald left, the British constituted courts were already functional at Calabar, Degema, Buguma, in cluding Tom Shott, Adiabo and Itu in Ibibio land (Afigbo, 1972).

On 31st of December 1899, when the Charter of the Royal Niger Company was revoked, the portion of the River Niger that was formerly under the control of the company was amalgamated into the Niger Coast Protectorate and became known as the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria on January 1 1900. The incumbent was empowered to legislate by proclamation and establish a Supreme Court with similar jurisdiction to the High Court of England and also establish African courts. On May 1, 1906, the Lagos Colony and Southern Nigeria was amalgamated and on March 31 of 1908, the whole of Southern Nigeria was brought under one judicial

system. But in spite of variations in judicial arrangements in the various parts of Southern Nigeria before 1908, the courts of law so established did not differ in their essential role. The British established courts served the dual purpose of enhancing the relationship between the Africans and the British and extending British influence (Abasiattai, 1990; Noah, 1990).

In 1912, Lord Lugard was assigned to amalgamate the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria with Northern Nigeria as Governor-General. This was designed to enable the two administrations come under a single umbrella bearing the name Nigeria. After the amalgamation in 1914, a Special Ordinance was enacted that established classes of courts – the Supreme Court, the Provincial Courts and the Native Courts (Udoma, 1994).

The British and Ibibio Jurisprudence in the Settlement of Disputes in Ibibio Land

It should be mentioned that at first, the English merchants did not interfere in the government of the indigenous Ibibio system, this system conducted her affairs through the village councils and under the direction of the traditional chiefs. The rule of the traditional chiefs was so firm that British traders could not trade in the rivers without the permission, given orally of in form of a written treaty by the ruler of the area. The system of pilotage ensured that fees were paid to the traditional rulers. According to Afigbo (1972), in traditional African societies, a distinction was drawn between law and customs. Social pressure could make customs more or less obligatory, but they could not be a matter for judicial hearing.

In examining the philosophy behind Ibibio laws or the Ibibio jurisprudence, it is imperative to consider the nature of the laws, the punishment and execution thereof. As already mentioned, the jurisprudence of Ibibio dispute settlement was predicated on eternal laws, which sees the universe as governed by the divine reason of God. This divine reason is not subject to time but go on eternally. As such the cosmology, which played a huge part in stabilising the society permeated all parts of Ibibio laws and customs. It can be said that dispute settlement in Ibibio jurisprudence followed the line of flexibility and expediency buoyed by cosmology and the social life of the people at its foundation. Sociological approach to law and legal systems argues that the law, its implementation and application

should take into account social factors. It insists that laws should be an instrument of social control seeking maximum satisfaction of the need and minimising conflicts. The bottom line is that laws should seek to balance conflicting interests in the society (Eze, 1987).

Indigenous jurisprudence in Ibibio land followed this sociological principle, which presupposes that laws are made because such laws conform to some actual and pretended moral values. On the other hand, Bassey (2020) posits that most of the English jurisprudence introduced to Africa, and imposed on the people including Ibibio people were defective and confusing, as they were filled with uncertainties due to lack of codification, and thus opened room for unjust court decisions and punishment of the innocent. Also, Ibibio jurisprudence was premised on the important value of reconciliation and peacemaking. There was thus an admixture of retributive and consequentialist mode that ushered in the deterrent, rehabilitatory, reformative, expiatory and educative objectives (Iraegbunam, n.d.).

According to Bassey (2020), it does appear that the English jurisprudence in settling disputes in Ibibio area was such that punishment offenders were constructed to safeguard and maximise economic interest of the ruling elite in Britain. Nowhere was the philosophy more observed than in the appointment of Warrant Chiefs and the British established Native Courts. Anene (1956) states that everyone associated with the British court system acquired some new importance. For the instance, the Warrant Chiefs who were primarily illiterates, but whom the people had to depend on for briefing as to what the Colonial Government wanted or did not accept were feared the people. The same scenario applied to the court messengers whose duty was to serve the summons to accused persons. Indeed, the presence of any agent of the British court system was enough to create pandemonium in a community. This was in deference to the Ibibio traditional jurisprudence where every member of the community was expected to contribute in the dispensation of justice. Under the British jurisprudence in Ibibio land, the elder and chiefs could no longer play dominant roles in the dispensation of justice. The courts no longer held in the King's or Chief's Palace as before, and bribery was were no longer rare in indigenous courts.

Conclusion

Ibibio land was a well ordered society in the period before the advent of the Europeans and the subsequent enthronement European political and form of jurisprudence through the establishment of the colonial courts. The villages and communities were politically organised to run the day to day affairs and settle disputes that arose.

Conflict resolution and dispute settlement mechanisms were an integral part of Ibibio socio-political system before the British courts. The absence of a centralized system of government among the Ibibio people did not mean that the people were in a state of anarchy. As obtained in societies all human societies, there were bound to be disputes among individuals and communities, but there also existed traditional methods by which they were resolved to ensure that peace and order were achieved and maintained in the society. Justice has always been the cardinal pillar of Ibibio dispute settlement system (James, 2025).

Ina (2017) states that in Ibibio land, political power started from the lowest unit, the *idip ete* (family) and the highest level was the group of titled chiefs known as *ubong ntinya* and political power revolved around them. Udo (1983) gives more insight into the working of these *ntinya chiefs*. According to him, each of them carried a special responsibility, such as: *obong edong* (the chief in charge of sheep), *obong unen* (the chief in charge of chicken and fowls), *obong urua* (the chief in charge of markets and commerce), *obong enang* (the chief in charge of cattle), *obong ebot* (the chief in charge of goats), *obong eyop* (the chief in charge of palm and palm oil trade), and *obong udia* (the chief in charge of yam and agriculture). These titled men assisted in the political and administrative running of Ibibio societies.

Ibibio jurisprudence was at an advanced stage of development when the Europeans intervened. As can be seen, the area was well organised with laws and mores that governed every day activities. The basic institutions for legislation was not different from those means of political and social living, thus the jurisprudence was intertwined with the cosmology of the people and played a huge part in shaping the life of the people and dispute settlement. The establishment of colonial administration, including the court system unsettled this balance and represented a transition from the reservation of social equilibrium by the community to the

impersonal justice of the courts. This change was evident in terms of methods, procedures, the philosophy and the ultimate aims of law and justice for the two groups.

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