

## OATH -TAKING IN IBIBIO SOCIETY: A MEANS OF SETTLEMENT OF TRADITIONAL DISPUTE

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### **Abstract**

*This research work title: "Oath-taking in Ibibio Traditional Society" critically assesses oath as an indispensable instrument in settling of disputes in Ibibio Traditional Society. An oath is taken to ensure that the parties of an agreement fulfill their assigned roles. In traditional oath taking, deities and ancestors are called to be witnesses to the agreement. Oath -taking is a form of ritual treaty designed to ensure transparency in dealing with one's neighbour and ensure that people live according to the tenets enshrined in the custom of the community. It was one means of establishing truth and guilt and of discouraging lying and other evils in the community. This research work adopts the analytical, historical and descriptive methods. This reesearch maintains that conflicts are sometimes resolved without sustaining peace, especially when resolved using western/modern method of conflict resolution characterized by litigation. Hence the traditional Africans appear to have more confidence in traditional way of conflict resolution than the western method, because the traditional methods insist on the truth, honesty and fairness. Its quest for truth, preventive potency, and reconciliatory values made it very unique, more result oriented, and desirable by the traditional African society. This work recommends that our political leaders, community leaders and other looking for offices should be sworn in into office with the symbols of the gods like cutlass, ayei, red, black and white clothes respectively, these instruments should be adopted for oath taking in place of Bible and Quran and that swearing in of members into public offices should be done by tested and trusted traditional priests of the gods for no society can survive outside its culture.*

**Keywords:** Oath -taking, Ibibio, Settlement, Traditional Dispute

### **Introduction**

The use of traditional oath is not strange in Ibibio traditional society. Many villages and communities in Ibibio use the medium of curses or traditional oaths to deal with criminality in society even till date. However, customary criminal law is not recognized by the courts in the country.

It cannot be overstated that oath-taking is an acceptable practice and a common feature of customary law resolution of dispute in Africa generally and in Ibibio

traditional society in particular. In spite of Western influences, oath-taking has survived as a legitimate judicial method which the Ibibio people vis-à-vis, Ibibio traditional society believe as one of the assured ways of obtaining absolute justice. Oath-taking is an integral part of the Ibibio custom by which the guilty and the innocent with regard to a dispute are exposed in view of maintenance of social equilibrium and cohesion. In Ibibio oath-taking is a common feature of resolving dispute. It is used frequently in crime detection or as a last resort in settling other disputes such as land, adultery and defamation. The Ibibio people believes that oath-taking or swearing to a tutelary deity is usually called for in a protracted case where the intricacies of the matter makes it difficult to discern who is right or wrong in a case. The prevalence of oath-taking among the Ibibio in settlement of dispute is attested to by the chiefs of Ibibio nation, who observes that virtually all the reported cases on juju oaths in the communities concerns the Ibibio litigants.

Beside, oath-taking is a direct submission to the supernatural tribunal for settlement of disputes and whose verdict is final man plays little or no part. Sometimes this appeal to the supernatural is made when human efforts fail or when no confidence is reposed on the human panel. This is practiced in serious cases like murder, witchcraft, and in land matters. This procedure is a legitimate legal action, the injured party may ask the accused to swear on tutelary deities of his (the injured) choice to prove his innocence... on the other hand, the accused may opt to swear on any powerful deity in order to free himself from the accusation. If the plaintiff accepts the accused's offer to swear, he is bound to regard the dispute as closed and to await for the supernatural judgement... The perjurer may die as the result or he may suffer grave misfortune or illness. The more dreadful consequence is that the perjurer's family and sometimes, the entire village may suffer from some obscure illness which may put the lineage in danger of complete extinction.

In the same vein, oath-taking among the Ibibio's, time is normally given within which the offending party is expected to either be killed by the gods or be sick so as to confirm that he is the offending party. Guilt or innocence established depending on whether or not accused dies or falls sick within the given time. Generally, oaths are worded in such a way that the swearer invokes on himself a conditional curse. He tells the juju to punish him if he lies. After then, all the disputing parties wait a year. The Ibibio people believe that anyone who swears falsely will be dead or struck with great misfortune within the time limit. In a land dispute, the person who swears to the oath enters and takes possession of the land.

But if the misfortune befalls him within one year they will revert to the other party. If however, he survives the prescribed time, the swearer retains the property as he is deemed to have told the truth where a party was ordered to proffer a juju for the party to take and he fails, the other party is judged the truthful party. More still, the use of oaths swearing displaces the need to weight oral evidence of the parties and their witnesses.

### **The Concept of Traditional Oath-Taking**

Traditional oath-taking is a distortion of value in politics to the extents that it transfers allegiance from the system to an individual, who for raw ambition or depravity, decides to take the place of God in the life of the oath taker.

Nana, 2020: 208, sees oath-taking in the traditional sense as a situation where absolute loyalty or adherence to certain agreement are conditionality is prescribed and administered in the beneficiaries of the agreement. This expected that whoever has taken such oath will not escape the punishment or sanction of a certain supernatural forces or deity if the oath is floated. Nana, 2020:208, avers that oath-taking as a “statement or assertion made under penalty of divine retribution for intentional falsity”. This, according to Nana, implies that “if gravity of an offence committed is high and defies possible human solution, the accused is presented before the divinized spiritual forces for exoneration or punishment.

Nana, 2020:208, identifies four major reasons why oaths are taken in African land; these are: first, for the establishment of truth of what is said, second for the maintenance of good human relations, thirdly, to maintain the secrecy of an institution or an organization or an organization, fourthly, they are taken when criminals are being sorted out”. The oath is a fearful ritual and most often words that connote calamity and deaths are used to make pledge, stating that a person will keep to one’s part of the agreement. In such rituals, death and well-being are used as guaranty to secure the agreements. Nana, 2020:208, summarized that parties to oath-taking directly submitted to the supernatural tribute to settle disputes brought before the deity. The working of oath-taking rituals are coined to such a way that “time is normally given within which the offending party is expected to either be killed by the gods or be sick so as to confirm that he is established depending on whether or not the accused dies or falls sick within the time given.

Oath-taking was and has continued to be one of these potent and important means of curbing wrong doing and detecting crimes as well as punishing culprits in

society whether in the areas of the underworld practices such as armed robbery, kidnapping, sorcery, witchcraft, cultic, murders, child thefts or in such nefarious activities by lay about, liars and cheats, adulterers/fornicators, etc. In African society, the mere mention of traditional oath sends shivers into the spines of these evil practitioners. Oath is a way of vindication and authentication. (Nana, 2020:209). It is also pertinent to state categorically that, oath strikes great intimidation and fear in the minds and hearts of every African person. It is a potent institution all over the entire south-south state of Nigeria and beyond. There is an aura of secrecy around oath, not all people are conversant with his workings and regulations. All that people know about it is its effects and application and the fear of oath is the beginning of wisdom, among adults and children whether as indigenes or aliens wherever it holds away.

### **Oath taking in Ibibio Traditional Society**

Oath-taking is universal. Though it is believed to serve same proposes, its processes differ from one culture to other. Oviasuyi *et al.*, (2011:16) aver that "Oath from the Anglo Saxon oath, is an explicate pledge invoking a god, spirit, ancestor, place, or sacred object as witness unto the truth of the words sworn, and is among the most ancient forms of ritual solemnity. A much venerated Pagan relic is the Hippocratic Oath, a pledge a medical ethics held in high esteem among healers from the 1<sup>st</sup> century onwards. Its preamble calls forward the gods of curing to bear witness to the oath: "I swear by Apollo Physician and Asclepius and Hygiene and Panacea and all the gods and goddesses, making them my witnesses..." The oath concludes by pronouncing that he who remains true to the oath shall prosper, while he who does not shall attain the opposite lot", inviting the scrutiny of the gods themselves upon his actions". The implication derivable from the nature of oath is that it has to be honoured by the oath taker and the god by whom such oath is taken placed his/her life and possessions in the hands of the gods through whom such oath is sworn. Failure to honour the contents of traditional oath is believed to have a great adverse effect on the violators of such being is bound to face the wrath of the deities in the presence of whom the oath is taken.

Oath-taking in Ibibio traditional society is herculean in nature. It is believed to have a metaphysical back-up. In a matter of necessity, it is held in high esteem. The Ibibio therefore do not play with oath-taking especially when it has to do with duties and responsibilities. The nature and procedure of Oath-taking in Ibibio traditional society is Sacrosanct and a means of codifying the essence of truth in discharging one's duties to the community. It is important to note that the archon

of oath-taking in the Ibibio society are believers to be the gods and deities and any person who takes an oath to perform a task and run contrary to the allegiance of an oath he/she is disposed to stand the wrath of the gods/divinities.

It is pertinent to reiterate that for the Ibibio, invocations of the gods are involved during oath-taking and symbols of these gods are used as instrument of oath-taking. Some of these instruments include thunder stone, god of iron.

The essence of oath-taking in Ibibio traditional society therefore is to enhance the commitment to saying the truth and doing what is supposedly to be done dutifully by the occupant of any post to the betterment of the society and not for personal benefit. The content of the Oath in traditional Ibibio society has to do with the person taking the oath asking some evil things and /or calamities to befall him/her if any attempt is made to act contrary to the course of what such oath is taken for. In a way of clarifying this, Bascom (1965:83) espoused the nitty-gritty of the process and essence of oath taking in Ibibio society. He observe that, “a plaintiff (political office holder) may be made to answer to the gods of iron, touching his tongue on an iron object while asking to die if he is not telling the truth or to drink from the ground at the house while swearing on the earth”.

Oath-taking is a tool of ensuring social order in Ibibio traditional. Society especially when there are misdeeds on the parts of those saddled with the responsibilities of protecting the commonwealth of the society. It is unlike what operates in contemporary oath-taking where allegiance is pleaded to a course and reverse is always the case and yet nothing follows. For instance, the dramatic and heroic suicide committed by Kurumi could not, but be linked with his allegiance to protect his people. This is evidence when he considered not the pains and agonies that could result from him sending his five sons to the war, for his belief that when a leader has led his people to disaster and what is left of him is a shadow of his proud past, then his time to be leader no more.

### **Oath-taking in Yoruba Traditional Society**

In Yoruba traditional society, the place of oath-taking is considered to be sacred, such that, Ogungbemi (2011:23) points out “the efficacy of oath-taking in Yoruba Society is eminent for it affecting presence”. In the same vein, Oladipupo (2012:3b) argued that “the gods sworn to in traditional Yoruba Societies are known for instant justice”. The instantaneous reflection of punishment alluded to oath-taking in Yoruba tradition society, though may want to be considered as draconic

for not giving room for second chance; nevertheless, one is poised to argue that the pragmatic attribute of Oath-taking in Yoruba traditional society makes it more active in curbing abnormality than what is entailed in the constitutional sense of oath-taking. This draconic nature of the effect of oath-taking in Yoruba is taken care of, as part of Yoruba culture. Awolalu as cited by Ogunleye (2013:67) revealed this inevitability. He posits "A person who is given to oath breaking or falsehood is believed not to be prospering in life. It is a strongly believed among the Yoruba that, anybody who swear, falsely or break an oath to which Ogun (The Yoruba god of iron) is a witness cannot escape severe judgement in a ghastly accident".

It is relevant to explain here that the effect of oath-taking in Yoruba traditional society often goes beyond the individual that swore to an oath. Its effects can manifest in the family such that family members share in the consequence associated with oath-taken. Hence, their notion of *egun afogunba*-inherited curse. This suggests that oath-taking in Yoruba traditional society has dual legitimacy. This dual nature of oath-taking in Yoruba traditional society is often achieved by appealing to the supernatural being to intervene when human efforts fail or when trust is not reposed on the human panel. Mbibit (1990:66), explaining this necessity argues that, "it is not the means but the end that matters most. Sometimes that end is sought or attained, but not by the individual alone, but corporately with or on behalf of his wider community of which he is a member or whose religious function is entrusted to him". It is deducible from Mbiti's argument that oath-taking at times is beyond private affairs. Formal oaths in Yoruba traditional society just like any other African Society are used:

As method of establishing and maintaining good human relationship, oath place great moral and mystical obligation upon the parties concerned and any breach of the covenant is feared to bring about misfortunes. The belief behind oath is that God or some power higher than the individual man will punish the person who breaks the requirement of the oath or covenant... thus traditional oath-taking is no respecter of persons, because every person is ontologically equal in the eyes of the gods (Dukor, 2007:66)

In fact, in traditional Yoruba society whenever anybody is placed under oath, the society always remain calm believing that the gods will necessarily visit the wrongdoer. This is not only applicable to the victim but to the society at large, because it is believed that such oath is effective and efficient and cannot but fulfill its mandate.

### **Violation of Taboos and Breaking of Oaths as a Means of Disease Causation**

Many traditional leaders and practitioners among in the African society are of the opinion that violation of taboos is one of the ways people could become sick (Gyekye 1995: 113). Taboos form an important part of African traditional religion. They are things, or ways of living that are forbidden by a community or a group of people. (Isiramen 1998:186). Taboos are also a social or religious customs prohibiting or restricting a particular practice or forbidding association with particular persons, place or things (Westerlund 2006:13a). Taboos exist to make sure that the moral structures of the universe remains undisturbed for the good humanity (Magasa 1997:76,148 - 149). They are food- and meat-related taboos in various communities. Violation of taboos could lead to severe illness for the person or community involved.

Although all these are termed as taboos, they have some moral and ethical connotations. The amazing part of many of these taboos is that, when one violates any of them secretly, the person does not go scot-free. The consequences always manifest either on the persons concerned or the entire community in the forms of diseases, and possibly death. This is what Magesa (1997:51) termed effect of life force. Magesa (1997:51-53) argues that moral behaviour maintains and enhances one's force, but disobedience and disloyal behaviour towards tradition passed on by the ancestors will weaken the life force. This can, therefore lead to punishment from the ancestors or the spirit in the form of diseases and misfortune.

Using oath take as an instrument of securing life and properties in African traditional region, Ugwu (2007:15) recognized the involvement of the two characters, one taking of oath and the terms of the oath as the deity who act as both witness and executor of the terms of the oath, to justify the truth or punish the one telling lies. He stipulated that the gods are behaved to be in the position to punish or testify because they are regarded as impartial judges that means inflict the individual concerned with some mysterious sickness or diseases like swollen legs, stroke e.t.c.

Oath taking in the environment is an act to proof the authenticity of someone's sincerity and honesty as a way of life without any element of doubt. To be candid, when an oath is administered in someone it erases doubt surrounding that particular person. Oath taking helps to establish truth and restore trust. Anyone who is a suspect of environmental crime, he/she would be required to take oath

to prove innocence, but to he/she refuse to take the oath, it is expected that the gods punish those who swear falsely while the community punishes those who decline the oath showing they are guilty. If the person in question later admitted the crime committed, and then a cleansing ritual would be required due to sacrilegious crime. The cleansing could be done in the form of fine, ritual, payment and invocation of the spirit of gods to temper justices with mercy. When an offender or violator hardened his heart, the punitive measures are infliction of diseases of untimely death as the case may be.

The consequences of violation of taboos and breaking of oaths depend largely on the magnitude of the offence committed in the environment (Land). The penalty could be ailment, madness, mystical trauma, malefactors, and finally death. The consequences depend on the area one finds oneself, for there are variations of the spiritual invocation, some gods in a particular environment are silent and harmless while in other environments their gods could be hostile and harmful. In a harmless environment, there are no hard and fast rules in the code of conduct, so they live carefree without anathema.

### **Oath Taking and Conflict Resolution**

Oath taking is the process of conflict resolution in African society which hinges on the recognition of the ancestral powers and authority (Olaoba 2005: 27). It is one of the rituals and a highly respected institution in Africa. Oath is therefore seen as a solemn act to a deity or to witness one's determination to speak the truth or keep promise (Merriam Webster's dictionary 2010). Oath-taking according to Ele (2017:10) "is a ritual practice of making the disputants and their witnesses prove the sincerity of their allegation, assertions, and demands in the process of conflict resolution". The oath is sworn by either the accused to exonerate himself from an accusation, or by the accuser to prove the sincerity of his accusation. Generally, oath is taken to establish the truth, maintain good human relationship, and maintain the secrecy of an institution (Nnadi 2012:16). The oath is usually administered either by verbal utterance, drinking of concoction, touching or crossing over the deity insignia. Oath is usually taken in the presence of a shrine, deity, chief Priest, or ancestors, and their presence is being invoked. It is believed that anyone who swears the oath falsely suffers hardship.

### **Arbitration**

In Ibibio Traditional Society, where the right of an individual is impinged or a dispute over ownership of land or property arose, and the arbitration of the council



of Elders failed, oath-taking before the shrine of one of the powerful divinities became the last resort. Usually, the individual who laid claim to a property in custody of another was the one who called for an oath to be taken. A time frame was given to the individuals who swear to an oath. When the time elapse and nothing happened to the custodian of the property, it was declared that he had the right to own the property. But certain rites were usually celebrated to mark the decision of the gods. Ayei symbol, a sacred symbol of justice was usually used in oath-taking in Ibibio traditional society.

Among the Ibibio people, if two individuals laid claims to the same land, they were made to bring one yam each which was planted in the disputed land in the presence of the priest and the elders. After one year, a particular day was set apart when the two yams were harvested before the priest and the elders. According to Ekeokpara (2011:117), this is usually the same way, the people of Owerri carried out their rituals in trying to detect criminals in their society. He further explains the individual whose yam was bigger in size was declared the owner of the land and the other individual was thus requested to forfeit the land if it was originally in his custody. This type of oath-taking ritual is only related to land dispute only.

Oath-taking was also applied in the detection of a thief in the ibibio traditional society. Where something got wrong in Ibibio traditional society and no one accepted responsibility, the elders usually arranged for everyone in the community to come before the shrine to take an oath. According to Obong Uwe (interview) he opined that the main aim was to detect who the thief was and to clear the suspicion of the innocent citizens of the crime. If anyone refused to appear or take the oath, he was declared to be the thief and appropriate sanctions were applied to the individual. In another development, Chief Etienam (interview) avers that most thieves were known to have confessed their crimes at the shrine to escape the wrath of the gods. Those who felt falsely accused usually took oath to prove their innocence. At the expiration of the oath period, if the individual survived, he performs a ritual to celebrate his survival of the precarious period of the oath. The ritual usually called for great merry-making and feast. Friends, well wishers and distant relatives were invited. This sometimes involved the survivors dancing round the town or community with his well wishers. The obligation of oath fortified by the witness of the divinities and ancestors helped "to create confidence in the minds of the people and provided a sense of security that served to hold the community together" (Effiong Bassey interview). The divinities were called upon to witness the veracity of falsity of an oath and to acquit the

innocent and punish the guilty. The primary aim of oath-taking in Ibibio traditional society is to establish and maintain truth in human relationship and in the society. No wonder, when blood brotherhood is carried out, the two parties concerned are committed to live as brothers and also giving one's life over to the other with an oath to uphold the covenant no matter what it costs. Nana, (2023:237). It is not out of play to emphasize that oath taking and covenant are symbiotically, that is the more reason Nana (2023:232) avers that oath taking and covenant solidifies all honesty, harmony, peace and co-habitation.

### **Administration of Oath in the Shrine**

The shrine is a very important institution in the traditional society of Ibibio. The shrine served as the venue for the expression of the practical aspects of the religious and values of the traditional society. The shrine that is the house of a divinity, was believed to be the abode of the divinities. The shrine has been variously described as "a place of worship and religious life and value of the traditional society. The shrine has been variously described as "a place of worship and religious pilgrimage, sacred spots or a place where sacrifices and offerings are placed. The shrine is "the means by which the divine spirits and man's essential self communicate" (Idowu, 1962:190). Ibibio traditional society conceived of the shrine as a sacred place. It may not necessarily be a building, but a place marked out with a religious object or hedge round with tender palm leaves where sacrifices were offered to the divinities and the ancestral spirits.

Shrines were found in every compound (family shrine) village and community in Ibibio traditional society, for the ancestors and the various divinities worshipped. The most prominent were those dedicated to the worship of the earth divinity in Ibibio nation.

Apart from its religious and cultic importance, the shrine served socio-ethical and cultural functions as well. Hence, Iwe (1991:17) defines the shrine as "the institutional embodiment and custodian of Public morality and order.

The shrine under the watchful eyes of the unseen dwellers (divinities and ancestors) and the guidance of priest and elders, served as a tribunal of justice in the traditional society. In any dispute involving rival claims to land, money or other property or even accusations of theft and wrong doing, the parties involved were required to appear in the shrine where they swore to oath before the shrine and its divinity in support of their claims or allegations. The Priest of the divinity

or any elder appointed to act for the occasion administered such oaths. The claimants were made to swear holding a cultic instrument of the divinity who was regarded as the invisible, witness to the oath. Member of the traditional society of Ibibio knew the implications of swearing falsely before the shrine of a divinity. Thieves, false claimants and other evildoers were known to have confessed their crimes of false claims on the shrine. Solemn occasions such as festivals, installation of chiefs, traditional priests in Ibibio began with rituals and ended in the shrine. Communal thanksgiving ceremonies also took place in the shrine.

Oath taking is one of the most potent methods of purifying and sanitizing the community. It is a mystically designed system by the Chiefs in Ibibio nation to ensure sanctity and truthfulness among the people of Ibibio traditional society. It is a designed communication system by the traditional institution of the Ibibio nation to communicate between the dead and living thereby creating affinity with the ancestors. One of the strongest places of taking-oath is at the Chief's palace with other chiefs and family heads present.

If oath taking rituals can differ in their forms and execution, they general follow common path. First, propitiations are made by the Chief priests to the Gods using Kola nuts and dry gin. Then, prayers are said and oaths are taken either in the standing or kneeling position as required by the priests. When kola nuts in one hand, and dry gin in the other, dry gin in the other, the oath takers make request and pledge while standing or kneeling in the truth box. According to Chief Anietie Effiong (interview on 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2003), he pointed out that, in Ibibio traditional society, most oath taking rituals are accompanied by the killing of animals like goats and fowls and the presentation of some items to the deities. The words that are spoken during the Oath taking, positions assumed, animals, killed, offerings and pledges are the different components that makes oath taking in Ibibio traditional society a complete rituals. The words spoken and actions during oath taking are the things that validate the ritual. One does not just come to meet a deity with closed mouth and empty hands; one must tell the deity what one wants and what he/she will give in return.

### **Administration of Oaths of Fidelity /Oath of Marriage**

This can be an Oath taken by a woman to be loyal to her family and extended family. A man can bring in his wife to take such oath after a marriage ceremony before the shrine of the family ancestor; in contrast, a woman cannot summon her husband to take such an oath. A woman can also come alone to take the oath of

fidelity. Marriage oaths can be taken by several women married to the same man to ensure that they would not kill each other's children or harm one another, that they will love their husband and not kill him.

According to Edem Basse (interview on 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 2023) he opines that marital oaths of fidelity have been used to address the issue of children mortality, usually seen as a result of witchcraft. Effiong Edem (interviews 7<sup>th</sup> April, 2003), said oaths on widowhood are taken by a woman upon the death of her husband, and made to swear that she did not kill him.

Belonging to secret cults is also regulated by oath taking. Both new and old cult member are required to take oaths of allegiance. Although, these may not be carried out in shrines. The role of oath taking rituals is, therefore, not only prevalent in social and private life but also in the social and political structures of the Ibibio traditional society.

### **Oath-taking and Restoration/Sustenance of Peace in Traditional Ibibio Society**

Conflict resolution methods in African society were embedded in the religion, tradition, and culture of the Africans, conflict resolution has its religious dimension as the supernatural, priest, ancestors. Shrines, deities, and the Supreme Being are invoked as witnesses to oath taking. Oath taking are very important religious and extra judicial methods of conflict resolution in Africa. It is important to note the ability of oath taking to restore and sustain peace after conflict resolution is what makes oath unique and different from every other method of conflict resolution. Though the role of oath taking is very sacrosanct, if there is need to ascertain the truth in a conflict, then oath taking is needed. Oath-taking are conflict resolution strategies found in African traditional religion which have both preventive potency and reconciliatory values" (Ele 2017:66). And these strategies in African traditional religion have shown resilience, significance and functionality from the pre-colonial period till this contemporary time.

In Ibibio traditional society, oath-taking play unique roles in restoration and sustenance of peace during conflict resolution, some of such roles will be analyzed one after the other as follows:

- (a) **Ascertaining the truth:** Oath-taking is the surest way of ascertaining the truth in Africa during conflict resolution, because it is a statement or ascertain made under penalty of divine retribution for international falsity (Nwankwo 2017:16). In the words of Oyitso (2013:72), "Oath-taking is ... a

confirmation of the truth by naming something held sacred, a statement or promise confirm by an appeal to a sacred higher being to enforce the attached sanction". Because it established and reveals the truth during conflict resolution, it is therefore, according to Ayisi (1979:22), a significant feature of the administration of justice among the Africans.

- (b) **Genuine Reconciliation:** Oath taking guarantees genuine reconciliation during conflict resolution in Ibibio traditional society since there is often the appeal to a higher power who is believed to be unbiased towards or against any party involved, while at the same time, the higher power serve as a witness or/and as a potential sanction to punish whoever fail to carry out the statement promises on Oath as the case may be. The higher power could be God, a local deity, an ancestor, etc.
- (c) **Elimination of Deep Rooted Enmity:** Oath-taking plays a major role in eliminating deep rooted enmity between the disputants. Any reconciliation involving either oath taking is always purposeful, result oriented, functional and lasting because the oath-taking assuage injured feelings, restore peace, and reach a compromise acceptable to both parties.
- (d) **Promotion of intimacy:** Here, "the parties... Directly submitted to the supernatural tribunal to settle disputes brought before the deity (Ikeora, 2016: 32). By so doing, trust and bond is restored during oath taking, and intimacy is also promoted between the disputants. Speaking about Oath-taking, Mabel (2013:15), pointed out that "it binds two parties together in a mutual confidence that would not be a betrayal of the confidence they repose in one another.
- (e) **Peaceful coexistence/Harmonies Relationship:** When trust and confidence is restored through oath taking, there is bound to be peaceful co-existence/harmonies relationship the disputants for the oath gives enough assurance to the disputants. In summary, James (2000:15) outlined some function of oath taking as follows:

- Fasters unity among communities (as was seen in Ikot offrong and Mbente Community),
- Enhances mutual trust between the parties,
- Enforces loyalty and faithfulness.

All the aforementioned functions result in peaceful and harmonies coexistence and also preservation of lives and property.

### **Summary**

This study has offered a thorough discussion on Oath-taking in Ibibio society, as a means of settlement of traditional dispute. This topic is very apt and sacrosanct especially now that people are interested in taking others' property like land and other valuables. The introduction of Oath-taking system is very necessary to instill discipline and reignite and install fear into the minds of the people. This work has really taken time to deal with Oath-taking in Ibibio society. It is also pertinent to state categorically that the only way we can bring a lasting solution to issues that are under dispute, violence is through the administration of Oath to the disputants, by so doing, we will discover that our society will be sanitized from corrupt practices.

This paper has revealed that Oath-taking is a direct submission to the supernatural tribunal for settlement of disputes and whose verdicts are final. Man plays little or no part. Sometimes this appeal to the supernatural is made when human efforts fail or when no confidence is reposed on the human panel. This is practiced in serious cases like murder, witchcraft, and in land matters.

### **Conclusion**

Instead of new religious (Christianity and Islam) doctrine of consoling ourselves and leaving the criminals into the hand of God because of the sacrosanct belief that Africans are religious, it is therefore arguable that if we want to be religious, we should adopt the tenets of African religion, one of such is Oath-taking. Our current issues in our local setting is summons in vogue and our society cannot be addressed without a moral mindset. Oath-taking is part of the institutions in Ibibio. This paper unravels that Oath-taking is a common feature of the daily lives of the people of Ibibio and it is still used to ensure order and stability. Oath-taking should be introduced into the mainstream of our government, since Oath-taking is very pivotal in our traditional religion. It will go a long way to put to stop the excessive wastage of our resources. They should be administration of Oath-taking to anyone found guilty in our various community, in the government parastatals and agencies, this will bring to bear truth and honesty in our society today and will help forestall discipline and coexistence in our communities.

### **Recommendations**

- They should be re-introduction of traditional Oath taking in our traditional society, even in the government this will help checkmate stealing and makes our society egalitarian in nature.
- Oath taking is the only measure to implement that will bring about respect to our resources control, and should be implemented forth with. Any dealing in our community should be backed up with Oath taking to bring truth and honesty into such deal.
- That active oath taking will engender faith and loyalty in our political system, as the public officer who has been sworn-in will be conscious of the invisible mystical force tele-guiding him/her, the citizens will be taken ones from the actions/inactions of the leaders.
- That, the active potency of traditional oath-taking would make people in authority to keep faith with oath of office and the consequences of violating such an oath.
- That every political office holder and other non-political office holders should be sworn-in: into office with the symbols of the gods. Symbols like cutlass, ayei, red, black and white cloths respectively, these instruments should be adopted for Oath taking in place of Bible and Quran.
- That, occasion of swearing in should be performed and conducted by tested and trusted traditional priests of gods for no society can survive outside its culture.

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