

The Dynamics of Inter Group Relations in Pre-Colonial Nigeria: Nupe Activities in Etsakoland C. 1860-1897

LA DYNAMIQUE DES INTER-RELATIONS DES GROUPES DANS LE PRE-COLONIALE NIGERIA : LES ACTIVITES DANS LE NUPE ETSAKOLAND C.1860-1897

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Abstract

A point that is not often emphasized in Nigeria's history is the high level of interaction that existed among different groups in the country in pre-colonial times. This study brings to the fore the circumstances that brought the Nupe to Etsakoland and how they greatly influenced the lives of the people, with emphasis on the socio-political sphere. Among other things, the Nupe suzerainty in the area changed the political tenor of the people by introducing centralized monarchical authority, a new title system and taxation. In the social sphere, Islam with its attendant practices got introduced to Etsakoland. Some of the introduced practices now became well entrenched among the Etsako people. Etsakoland was still undergoing transition when the British came and now also influenced the lives of the people. The features of the Etsako society of today reflect the amalgam of both the indigenously evolved ones and those introduced through foreign contacts, starting with the Nupe. The interaction between the Nupe from the Middle Belt part of Nigeria and the Etsako of South-South Nigeria exemplifies the level of interaction among Nigerian peoples in the Pre-British days.

Key words: Jihad; Islam; Etsako; Nupe

Résumé

Un point qui n'est pas souvent souligné dans l'histoire du Nigéria est le niveau élevé d'interaction qui existait entre les différents groupes dans le pays dans la période précoloniale. Cette étude met en évidence les circonstances qui ont amené les Nupe à Etsakoland et

comment ils ont grandement influencé la vie des gens, en mettant l'accent sur la sphère socio-politique. Entre autres choses, la suzeraineté Nupe dans la région a changé la teneur politique du peuple par l'introduction de l'autorité monarchique centralisée, un système nouveau titre et de la fiscalité. Dans le domaine social, l'Islam avec ses pratiques concomitantes a été présenté à Etsakoland. Certaines des pratiques introduites maintenant devenues bien ancrées parmi les gens Etsako. Etsakoland était encore en phase de transition où les Britanniques sont venus et maintenant aussi influencé la vie des gens. Les caractéristiques de la société d'aujourd'hui reflètent Etsako l'amalgame des deux localement évolués et celles introduites par contacts à l'étranger, en commençant par le Nupe. L'interaction entre les Nupe de la partie Middle Belt du Nigeria et le Etsako Sud-Sud du Nigeria illustre bien le niveau de l'interaction entre les peuples nigériens dans les jours pré-britanniques.

Mots clés: Jihad; L'islam; Etsako; Nupe

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INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, before the advent of Europeans, different communities had long interacted with their neighbours. The history of the Etsako clans in the last three decades of the nineteenth century shows how, through the contact with the Nupe, the Etsako acquired new societal features, some of which have remained extant with the people till date.

The Etsako people live in the northern part of Edo State of Nigeria. The various Etsako clans were first

brought under a single administrative umbrella in 1919, when the British colonial administrators established Kukuruku Division in the former Benin Province. Etsakoland constituted one of the three districts that made up the division (Igbafe, 1979). The geographical boundaries of the Etsako district have remained unchanged up to date although it has now been divided into three administrative units, recognized in the 1999 Federal Constitution as Etsako West, East, and Central Local Government Areas. Within the boundaries of Etsakoland, thirteen clans are recognized: Auchi, Aviele, Avianwun, Awain, Ekperi, Jagbe, Okpekepe, South Ibie, South Ineme, Three Ibies, Ukpilla, Uzairue and Weppa Wanno. These clans are connected by common traditions of origin, and they speak closely related dialects, while at the same time their customs exhibit a high degree of similitude that set them apart from their neighbours. They occupy an area of approximately 1,000 square miles, with a population of 265,509 and each of the thirteen clans is comprised of a cluster of villages, with Auchi, Uzairue, and Weppa, Wanno, having the highest population figures of 43,394, 42,876 and 25,412 respectively. Jagbe, Awain and South Ineme have the lowest figures of 2,639, 3,602 and 3,605 respectively as captured by the Nigerian Federal census conducted in 1991.

Essentially, the prevalent traditions of origin among the people of present-day Etsako is that of emigration from the core of the Benin Kingdom at different times and for varied reasons (Bradbury, 1970; Blair, 1935; Denton, 1936 and Egharevba, 1968). Although their society was part of Benin, over time they developed distinctive cultural features that set them apart (Bradbury, 1973; Egharevba, 1968; Ryder, 1969 and Igbafe, 1979). These features are noticeable in their language, system of government, traditional religion, and the title system (Erhagbe, 1982). The most outstanding of these features was the absence of rigid centralization of authority and allegiance to one venerated ruler, which were the hallmark of the Benin traditional polity. Some traditional features of Etsako society underwent considerable alternations as a result of "foreign contact" The main external impetus for change came via the Nupe invasion of their new homeland in the late nineteenth century. What instigated this contact, and its impact on the indigenous Etsako polity, form the subject of this paper. This historical episode will also be explored as an aspect of the nineteenth-century Sokoto Jihad that engulfed the whole of Northern Nigeria, but also extended its effect South-wards.

THE INDIGENOUS ETSAKO POLITY BEFORE 1860

The indigenous system of government was relatively representative and based mainly on the principle of gerontocracy (Erhagbe, 1982). There were established

councils that administered the different administrative units in the community, ranging from the family council to the clan council. A remarkable feature of this political order was that unlike Benin from where they emigrated, the Etsako clans did not develop monarchical traditions. Individual authority devoid of religious responsibilities was practically non-existent. In this regard, however, it has to be pointed out that the Uzairue contend that their monarchy pre-dates the period of Nupe invasion (Erhagbe, 1982).

In addition to politics, the people of the area also evolved social usages and beliefs. Their religious belief was animist and polytheist in nature, with individual environmental features determined the gods and goddesses that were worshipped. For example, the people of Auchi worshipped "Orle", the spirit of a major river that affected their lives; while the people of Weppa Wanno worshipped "Ise", also the spirit of a river in their landscape. Marriage, names, burial practices, and the age-grade system were also given a cultural stamp by the Etsako people (Erhagbe, 1982). While differences existed from one clan to the next, beliefs and practices were quite similar. The nineteenth-century Nupe incursions into the area subjected these political and social features of the clans to strains and changes, a process that was later supplanted by the arrival of the British. The Nupe involvement in Etsako affairs was directly tied to the Islamic upheavals that engulfed a large portion of Northern Nigeria in the form of the Sokoto jihad of the early nineteenth century.

THE NUPE AND THE SOKOTO JIHAD

The Nupe, one of the seven Hausa Bansa Bokwoi states, live around the confluence of the Niger and Kaduna rivers (Obayemi, 1980 and Mabogunje, 1979). Before the fifteenth century the Nupe had no centralized state of their own, but they were vassals of the Igala kingdom. By the mid-sixteenth century, however, they had established their own kingdom with its ruler adopting the title Etsu Nupe. For details on the transformation of the Benin Confederacy to the nucleus of the Nupe Kingdom see (Johnson, 1970; Nedel, 1942 and Obayemi, 1980).

The establishment of the Nupe kingdom with a new ruling dynasty was followed by a period of territorial expansion, which reached a high water mark in the nineteenth century. The original dynasty was overthrown, though temporarily, by the jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio, and this was to bring the Nupe into the mainstream of Sokoto caliphate history.

It is well known that the history of Hausaland in the nineteenth century was marked by Islamic revival and reformation through a jihad based on the theological expositions of Uthman Dan Fodio. Waging war on the Hausa Habe rulers of Hausaland, the leaders of the jihad wanted to rid Islam of its syncretic practices, popular with

the rulers of the Hausa states at this time.

The reasons for the jihad were neither single nor simple. During the jihad, Islamic scholars including El-Kanemi of Bornu had challenged the religious justification of the jihad, since the Fulani attacked some areas which were practicing the "true Islam." For the examination of the reasons for the Jihad see (Hiskett, 1973 & 1984; Willis, 1967; Last, 1985; Ibrahim, 1986 and Balogun, 1975). In these works there is the on-going debate as to whether the religious or political and economic reasons were more important in the Fulani decision to wage a jihad against the Hausa Habe rulers. A common ground that emerges is that since Islam is seen not just as a religion but as a way of life, all the factors are inextricably intertwined. See especially the works of (Hiskett, 1973 and 1984; Ibrahim, 1986 and Willis, 1967). The jihad led to the overthrow of the Hausa Habe rulers and their replacement with Fulani rulers. One of the lasting consequences of the movement was the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate. The ripples from the jihad were felt to the south of the Hausa, and it was the expansion of the Caliphate that brought the Fulani more directly into Nupe politics.

The Fulani involvement in the politics of Nupeland entailed subordination to Gwandu, the headquarters of the eastern half of the caliphate. This connection with the caliphate caused a shift in emphasis in the relationship between the Nupe and their neighbours in the South. As the Nupe were now forced to pay tribute to Gwandu, their militarism became intensified. This was because, the Emirs of outlying emirates were expected to send annual tribute to the headquarters, thus wars were necessary to procure the tributes to be paid. (Adeleye, 1985) In addition, the religion of Islam and the military obligation of the continuing jihad struck firm roots among the Nupe. The combination of these factors explains the increasing Nupe involvement in military conflicts. Internal dissension within the kingdom, resulting from the presence of the Fulani, however, delayed the effective expansion of the Nupe kingdom for a long time. In this regard, from the early eighteenth century, a Fulani named Mallam Dendo established himself as a man of importance in the area. He was able to attain this position of influence as a result of succession disputes that bedeviled the history of the Nupe at this time. There were more palace intrigues and feuds that brought the Fulani to the forefront of the Nupe politics until the 1850s (See, Johnson, 1970). With the suppression of conflicts within the kingdom, the boundaries of the emirate were enlarged, especially during the 1840s. This was largely achieved during Etsu Masaba's reign in the mid-nineteenth century when the emirate was able to impose its suzerainty on other peoples (Nedel, 1942 & Mason, 1970).

Like the other emirs of the caliphate, the Etsu Nupe was expected to pay regular tribute to the caliph, as

mandated by the Shari'a, and he was also to pay "khums", the one-fifth part of booty captured in war (Adeleye, 1985 & Johnson, 1970). It was this obligation to the caliph and Islam that accounted for the intensified southward expansion of the Nupe into Yorubaland, Akoko, and Etsakoland in the nineteenth century (Mason, 1970).

It is difficult to establish the frequency of Nupe military incursions into Etsakoland before the establishment of Bida as the capital of the Nupe kingdom in 1857. From the time of Usman Zika's rule as Etsu at Bida the raids became rampant, since there was a need for tribute and booty to stimulate the state's war-ravaged economy as well as to keep Usman in the good graces of Gwandu (Mason, 1970).

Although inspired by the jihad, the Nupe wars were not geared toward the expansion of the frontiers of Islam; rather they were motivated by the desire to collect tribute and booty. The emirate always attacked areas that were disorganized and militarily weak, and as Nadel points out, those that were "densely populated" for slave raiding (Nadel, 1942). Hence the Nupe now attacked and assumed control over "the politically fragmented regions to the south of the Niger in the Bunu, Yagba, Owo, Ijumu, Akoko, Igbirra, and Afenmai districts" (Adeleye, 1985). The people of these areas, including the Etsako, became victims of annual dry season raids by the Nupe. The Nupe were able to reduce most of the people to the status of vassals from whom they now demanded and collected tribute. The conquered people "became reluctant subjects, terrorized by Nupe mounted hordes and perfunctorily ruled through Residents (Ajeles, whose sole concern seems to have been the collection of tributes, which often meant taking free-born as slaves) (Adeleye, 1985). Through their contact with the Nupe, the various groups acquired some of the practices of their masters. The Etsako communities found themselves in this situation until the intervention of the forces of the Royal Niger Company in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

NUPE IN ETSAKOLAND

Although sporadic raids were made into Etsakoland while Masaba's capital was at Lade (1838-1845), it was during the period of his reign at Bida (1859-1873) that the major, more frequent, and better-organized military attacks were carried out in Etsako. The name Umoru, a possible corruption of the name Umaru, who was one of the war generals of Masaba of this time, is well remembered in Etsako Oral history (Abiri, 1981; Momoh, 1981 & Ozemoya, 1980). While it is difficult to fix the precise stages of Nupe conquest and influence in Etsakoland, the same motives, methods, and results could be discerned in their activities in the area. (Mason, 1970)

Since the Nupe sought booty and tribute in Etsakoland, they engaged in short raids, rather than extended battle

(Abiri, 1981; Momoh, 1981 & Ozemoya, 1980). In most cases, the Nupe were prepared to accept the “amana” (sign of peace) and allow the people to pay nominal tribute. They also collected slaves from the area. In Etsakoland the Nupe were actually noted more for their slave-raiding activities than for actual conquest. (Omo-Ananigie, 1946) The initial reaction of the Etsako clans consisted of armed resistance, but since the Nupe were able to suppress this opposition, the Etsako surrendered to the Bida representatives. To avoid the Nupe, however, some left their villages in search of more secure locations.

A characteristic feature of Etsako resistance to the Nupe was that all the clans “at first attempted to repel the invaders but they did not combine to do so.” (Denton H., 1936). The effectiveness of their resistance was not uniform, and in most cases the resistance was easily put down. The most effective resistance was mounted by Okpekpe clan, and they were not defeated until the Nupe laid waste their villages and starved them into surrender (Denton H., 1936). Some of the clans such as Auchu and Avianwun tried unsuccessfully to dig trenches round their villages to prevent the entry of the Nupe forces. Although the oral history of the people supports this position, there are however, no landmarks indicating where the trenches were dug (Abiri, 1981; Momoh, 1981; Ozemoya, 1980).

When a majority of the inhabitants of Etsakoland first got wind of an impending Nupe invasion, they fled from their villages into the bush with some belongings. While some were able to return to their original residences, in other cases people refused to return to their original villages. For instance, the people of Agbede were permanently displaced from their original homes at Ubiane and Ugioli (Jafaru, 1981 and Braimah, 1981). When the Avianwun first heard of the Nupe attack they ran to Ovaio and other villages of the Weppa Wanno (Oshiobughie, 1981 and Obomeghie, 1981). Some villagers of the Uzairue clan fled to Okpekpe. In the case of Awain, refugee groups moved to settle in Eware and Odame in an area that was thickly forested.

These forms of avoiding Nupe raid proved inadequate in the face of the superior weapons and organization of the Nupe forces. Most of the Etsako clans submitted to Nupe hegemony, while recalcitrant villages and clans remained objects of constant Nupe raids. These raids forced the inhabitants of such villages to develop a warning shout, which was meant to inform people of imminent danger whenever the Nupe army was approaching. The shout was “Uku-ku-ku” in addition to “e ghe bade,” meaning “they are coming again.” It is generally held in Etsako traditions that this was the origin of the word “Kukuruku,” which the Nupe corrupted and “applied this piteous war cry in a contemptuous way to describe the people of the area as “Kukuruku banza.” (Omo-Ananigie, 1946). There was later a concerted movement by the Etsako to have the name changed during British colonial administration (NAI,

1934-1942).

The military success of the Nupe invaders in this area was due not only to their military superiority, but also to the assistance they received from local groups willing to turn against their neighbours (Mason, 1970). After capitulating to the Nupe, some of the Etsako clans helped them invade other clans and villages. The South Ibies, for example, helped the Nupe against the villages of Aviele clan (Stanfield, 1937). And Auchu was used as a base for the raids carried out into Sabongida Ora (in Owan Local Government Area) (Abiri, 1981 and Momoh 1981). Some groups even raided other villages within their same clan as a result of their new relationship with the Nupe. For example, the attack on Ikabigbo and Irekpa was allegedly aided by king Omogbai of Uzairue, and both villages were within Uzairue clan. Some Etsako leaders accompanied the Nupe in their invasion of other territories and shared in the war booty. It is believed that the Otaru of Auchu got some slaves from the Nupe for the assistance he gave to them (Momoh, 1981). The Nupe victory over the Etsako can therefore be partially ascribed to the disunity among the clans. Despite the military superiority of the Nupe, if the Etsako clans had been united in self-defense, the story might have ended differently. For example, the Ogidi defense stood its ground until relief came from the Royal Niger Company’s army, essentially because of their unity (Mason, 1970). Instead of uniting, they were forced to face the Nupe individually and this to a great extent spelt their defeat on the battlefield.

Although the Etsako clans were not under the effective control of the powerful Benin kingdom, they were still within its sphere of influence. This raises an interesting question – to what extent did Benin try to protect the Etsako clans, and thereby the integrity of its regional hegemony? The fact was that unlike the Ishan chiefdoms that were subject to Benin’s effective control, Etsako clans enjoyed local autonomy. Thus, while the Ishan chiefdoms had their Enigie’s (Local rulers) appointments confirmed by the Oba of Benin, paid tribute and participated in his wars, the ties binding the Etsako to Benin were tenuous (Igbafe, 1979 and Bradbury, 1973). There is no account of the kingdom doing anything to arrest the Nupe aggression. Different accounts on the economic and political state of affairs of Benin at this time tend to indicate that it was in no position to help the Etsako. At this point Benin’s fortunes were at a low ebb; according to Bradbury, this was largely due to “the penetration of European commerce through Lagos, on the west, and the Niger on the East [which was] slowly whittling away the Benin trading hinterland and loosening the Oba’s hold over his subject populations.” (Bradbury, 1973). Apart from this, the Benin army was engaged in subduing rebellious villages on the very northwest borders of the kingdom, so it could not afford to be distracted by the sporadic incursions of the Nupe (Igbafe, 1979). More fundamentally, this also

suggests that the Etsako were not under the protective umbrella of Benin. This thesis is supported by Igbafe, who holds that the remoteness of Afenmai-Benin relations enabled the Nupe to invade and annex the area in second half of the nineteenth century (Igbafe, 1979). Benin's peripheral interest in Etsako and its preoccupation with internal problems therefore prevented any attempt to stop the Nupe assault on the Etsako.

The inability of the Etsako to defend themselves led to the conquest of this northern fringe of the Benin kingdom. Thus the Etsako were brought under the suzerainty of the Etsu Nupe of Bida and forced to pay him regular tribute. The Nupe involvement in Etsako history was therefore an off-shoot of the nineteenth-century Sokoto jihad. The Nupe presence in the area ultimately altered the people's customs, and introduced them to new practices. The peoples' old beliefs and practices were now sometimes altered while new ones were introduced to them. In most cases the Etsako people willingly adjusted to and adopted the new beliefs and practices of the Nupe.

THE POLITICAL IMPACT OF NUPE HEGEMONY

Following the subjugation and in some cases the capitulation of the Etsako clans, the Nupe introduced a system of collecting annual tribute from the area. The imposition of this system introduced alien principles into the political life of the vanquished clans. Agents were appointed for the conquered areas. According to Mason, "once the amana had been accepted, and the amount of tribute agreed upon [tribute was levied according to the size of the village], the question of administration was simply answered..." The system they put in place was one in which "resident officials who identified their interests with those of the conqueror were installed or elected to manage the collection and dispatch of annual tribute which they sometimes accompanied to Bida." (Mason, 1970). These appointed agents were known by different names; in Afenmai they were called "azeni"; while in Yorubaland they were called the "ajeles". The agents in turn appointed local aides who helped execute the collection of the tribute.

Those who were appointed as "azenis" were sometimes Nupe or Hausa clients (*barazhi*) of one or other of the important title holders of Bida, and in most cases, local notables were appointed (Mason, 1970). The *azenis* were located in larger towns, and satellite villages paid their contribution to the area levy. The agents were allowed to keep a portion of the tribute collected and occasionally also received gifts from the capital in appreciation of their services. The main gifts they got were potash and salt (Mason, 1970 and Balogun, 1980). These notables or agents treated their appointed subordinates at the village level the way they were themselves treated by their

superiors.

Whereas other territories conquered by the Nupe initially paid tribute in forms other than slaves, "in case of the Kukurku in many villages, slaves were remitted right from the beginning of the period of Nupe over-rule." (Mason, 1970). When a certain tax was imposed on a village, the local agent of the "azeni" in collaboration with the traditional village council went about collecting such tribute. When any village refused to pay such tributes it was attacked by the acting Nupe agent with the military aid of the Nupe, and in most cases such villagers deserted their original locations to settle in less accessible areas (Omo-Ananigie, 1946).

The colonial form of administration introduced by the Nupe challenged the previous existing political order. The principle of gerontocracy, which had been the bedrock of the Etsako traditional system, was now to a large extent replaced by a system which relegated age to the background. Monarchical principles were introduced in most of the clans, and some individuals now exercised authority over areas that had earlier been largely autonomous. The Auchi, Southern Ibies, Ekperi, Aviele all trace the origin of the practice of "merit-based" clan headship in their areas to the period of Nupe invasion. (The exception is the case of Uzairue who claim that theirs, the Ogienuship pre-dates this invasion (Blair, 1935; Denton, 1936 and Stanfield, 1937). Denton notes that in these clans, headship of village was once vested in its oldest man but the demand for a more active administration compelled the Nupe to select "men of character, wealth and ability, from among the people of the clan, to act as their local agents and these men came to be regarded as headmen and tribute was rendered them by the people for the services they gave in acting as intermediaries with the slave raiders." (Denton, 1936).

The heads of the clans mentioned above also appointed agents who now acted as village heads, and these appointees got the Nupe name "Dawudu". Thus the Nupe were responsible for introducing a new form of clan headship to places like Auchi, Ekperi, and Avianwun. They first instituted the principle of individual authority, which was not indigenous to the organization of these clans. The case of Auchi best illustrates this transformation.

The Nupe are said to have introduced the post of "Otaru" among the Auchi (Abiri, 1981; Momoh, 1981; Momoh, 2010; Denton, 1936 and Military Government Office, 1969). When the Nupe arrived at Auchi, they appointed a man of personality and wealth as their local agent. This man was known as Ikelebe and he had earlier been wronged by the Nupe, who had mistakenly killed his mother. Ikelebe was very wealthy and powerful, and according to tradition, he kept his cool despite the murder of his mother. This reportedly impressed the Nupe invaders, who informed the Etsu Nupe of this remarkable

personality. Accordingly, the Etsu dispatched a few gifts to Ikelebe. Among the gifts were a turban, a cap, a sword, a horse, and a staff of office. The gifts were later presented to Ikelebe by “the representatives of the Etsu Nupe at his installation ceremony at Aibotse village when he was declared the Otaru of Auchi.” (Sule, 1978). With effect from that time, he was recognized as the chief agent of the Nupe in the area and the head of the four Auchi villages. In each village, he appointed a “dawudu” who acted as his assistant. Some new Nupe titles were later introduced by the Otaru. A point worthy of note is that, while records point to the fact that the Otaru chieftaincy title in Auchi was first introduced by the Nupe, the political repertoire of the Nupe does not include that title. Considering the unanimity of the accounts on the origin of that position among the Auchi, we can postulate that while the position of individual authority was introduced by the Nupe, the title itself could have been of indigenous origin, especially as other areas had different names for their new rulers. However, the title is also borne by the leaders of Igarra in Akoko-Edo Local Government Area, where the Nupe influence was also felt.

The system of clan headship also arose among the Ekperis during the period of Nupe rule. The Nupe appointed Ugbome of Iyatu-Ugbekpe as their local agent, and since he received the support of the Nupe, the other members of the clan accorded him tribute. He, in turn appointed village agents. But in the settlements established by refugees from the parent Ekperi villages, “the title system persisted and was still governed by title age,” the old system that was applicable to all the villages in the clan in the pre-Nupe era (Denton, 1936).

Besides the clan head and village head, a system of titles on the Nupe pattern was introduced among some of the Etsako clans. These new titles were mainly introduced in those clans where title associations had not previously existed. In other clans in which some titles previously existed, additions were made. Collectively, the new title holders were called “igbanusomi” (turban chiefs), since part of the insignia of their office was a special turban acquired from the Nupe. The new titles introduced could be found in Auchi, Awain, Aviele, Jagbe, South Ibie, South Ineme, North Ibie, and Uzairue. Basically, the titles were non-hereditary and were conferred on influential persons in the clan at the discretion of the clan head. Office-holders retained their posts even when there was a change of leadership. Some of the titles were those of the “Iyama”, “Dania”, “Dezi”, “Sedenu”, “Kasalaki”, and “Kuobo”. In some clans such as Aviele, titles like those of “Dania” and “Iyama” were reserved for members of the “royal family”. (Stanfield, 1937) Although only the clan head could initially confer these Nupe titles, “later, with increasing exploitation of the commercial possibilities of titles, the outside units of villages bought and sold titles on their own account and the titles became so cheapened

that they could be bought by anyone from the Osse to the Niger, and village heads took to bestowing them on their own account.” The fact that these new titles are recent in Etsako partly explains the incessant disputes that have arisen among claimants to fill vacant posts (See Military Governor’s Office, 1969).

The holders of these new titles held positions of importance in their various villages. The titles conferred on their holders privileges similar to those associated with the indigenous Etsako titles. Some of the privileges conferred by membership of a particular title group included exemption from communal labour, a claim to greater respect and authority, and the right to share the admission fees of new members. Title holders were next in the social hierarchy to the clan and village heads. They became members of the village and clan councils whenever they met and some of them even acted as close advisers to their clan heads. In Agbede they became known as “Ikhaimo”, that is councilors.

There was therefore a major departure from the former traditional system of political organization, especially with regard to the recognition given to individual authority. The traditional political structure of the Etsako, as already stated, was anchored on the principle of gerontocracy and the highest administrative unit was identified, with rare exceptions, as the village council. But for the sake of administrative convenience, the Nupe introduced alien offices into Etsako political life. In the first place, the former autonomous villages were forced to join with others to form “new unions and owed allegiance to a single individual”. (Military Governor’s Office, 1969) More importantly, there was a change from the former principle used in the selection of the heads of both the village and clan councils. In this regard, the Nupe threw overboard the main criterion which Etsako clans usually used in according positions of importance to individuals in society – that is, either actual age or titular age.

In this regard, titular age was calculated from when an individual took a title. Clan heads were now appointed not because they were the oldest men of the locality or gatherings but simply because of their strength of character, wealth, and willingness to co-operate with the Nupe or their agents. In certain instances, the clan heads whose functions were primarily religious took charge of secular matters as well. At the village level, individuals were appointed by the clan head to preside over the village councils. As in the case of the clan councils, these appointees were imposed on the councils.

The new title holders now shared the same recognition previously enjoyed by those who held traditional titles. The new title holders were appointed at the discretion of the new clan and village heads. And in making these appointments, the traditional criteria for conferring and acquiring titles were ignored. Instead, the new standards relied heavily on the individual’s wealth and his

willingness to ingratiate himself with the village or clan head.

Since the basis of their authority was sanctioned by Nupe military might, the clan heads and their village deputies now introduced monarchial principles of administration, as opposed to the previous system where members of the councils and the appointed heads acted in a relationship of "primus inter pares". Although the clan heads sometimes till consulted with members of their councils, final decisions depended on the personal volition of the clan heads themselves. A situation therefore arose where individual will could supersede the "representative" one (Military Governor's Office, 1969).

Some of the clan heads created by the Nupe now constituted their families as "royal families". In Agbede, special titles were reserved for members of these royal families. The descendants of the clan head became heirs to his position. And a system of succession based on the principle of primogeniture was introduced in such Etsako clans as Aviele, Auchu, Ekperi, and Uzairue. This innovation ran counter to the previous system of appointing leaders. The rights that came to be enjoyed by the royal families even got to a point where, as in clans like Aviele, "all adult male members of the clan head's [the oba's] family... had the right to demand free service of the population." (Stanfield, 1937). This no doubt was a major departure from the previous situation, when individuals in the society were regarded as citizens of relatively equal rights.

A new element introduced into Etsako political life as a result of their contact with the Nupe was the system of taxation, necessitated by the need to collect tribute. As mentioned earlier, assessment was usually made on a village basis and payments were made in lump sums. Payment was usually made in cash or foodstuffs, while slaves were collected during the early stages of Nupe incursions. The village councils collected this tribute, under the supervision of their council heads. Individuals made their payment to the general village tax. It is interesting to note that this administrative aspect of tribute collection was later to be adopted by British colonial officials in their early taxation policy in Etsakoland. It could be argued that the taxation experience of the Etsako under the Nupe must have conditioned them to be less resistant to taxation during the period of British colonial administration. Available records suggest that the Etsako were not against taxation per se during the period of British colonial rule as it was in some parts of Nigeria, rather, they protested against continued practice of forced labour. One of their petitions to the colonial administrator was, "If there is work to be do in our town now will be force [sic] to do the work without payment, when we are paying taxes," They also protested the way money from them was spent without providing commensurate amenities.

For example, the Agbede community wrote to the

Resident, Benin City, that, "We have to draw your attention of Agbede to you sir [sic]. We wanted [sic] to know what we are paying tax for? We are not getting the benefit that the other places get from the tax they payed [sic]. When the time of paying tax is due, we are asked to pay, and we payed [sic]. But to do or repair our town with the money that payed refused to do so [sic]." Both letters are contained in (NAI, 1951-52 and NAI, 1951). The new contributions individuals now made to the village were quite different from what operated in the indigenous setting, since previous contribution to the well-being of the community took the form of participation in communal jobs and not payment of dues.

A pertinent point to highlight here is the degree to which the Nupe influence affected the "judicial" arm of society. Although novel political practices were introduced by the Nupe, the method of administering justice remained generally constant. While new personnel dispensed justice, the corpus of laws was not altered. Thus the Islamic legal code contained in the Shari'a was not introduced into Etsakoland. Furthermore, the normal practice in Muslim societies of using specialized jurists and adjudicators was not introduced. This judicial continuity explains why taxes mandated in Islamic law were not introduced, apart from the tribute levied by the Nupe state.

Nupe influence in the traditional Etsako political culture was visible in specific areas, but the political culture as a whole was not Islamized. This failure is testimony to the fact that the Nupe, although part of the larger Sokoto Jihad, were not motivated by the desire to convert their victims to Islam; instead secular motives were more important. Some of the practices introduced by the Nupe were quite innovative and later became useful for the British colonial administrators in governing the area. For example, the institution of district headship which the British used in Benin Province until 1935, was anchored on having a strong personality from the ranks of the governed, and in the case of Etsako some of the clan heads created by the Nupe provided such personalities (Erhagbe, 1982). In addition, as a result of their experience under Nupe rule, the people of Etsako were not expressly against taxation when it was introduced by the British, especially as the British also used the lump sum method of taxation, previously used by the Nupe.

THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE NUPE CONTACT

Apart from the political sphere, the Nupe influence was also felt in the social life of Etsako people. The name "Etsako" is almost synonymous with Islam in present-day Edo State. Most people in Nigeria think that all Etsako people are Muslims. Etsako actually has the highest number of Muslims in Edo-State, Nigeria, which

is unique considering in the fact that most “Edolites” are either Christians or practitioners of traditional religion. This is because of the preponderance of Muslims in the population of the area. Islam was first introduced into the area during the period of Nupe hegemony (Abiri, 1981; Ozemoya, 1981; Momoh and Mason, 1970). With the adoption of Islam, some people adopted new social norms in accordance with Islamic prescriptions.

The Sokoto jihad that started in 1804 was allegedly aimed at raising the standard of Islam among the people of Hausaland, but in keeping with the Muslim prescription to extend the frontiers of Islam, proselytizers introduced Islam into the areas of the *Kafiris* (unbelievers). Despite the introduction of Islam, the entry of the jihad into Etsakoland was based mainly on political and economic considerations. In Etsako, the Nupe “were noted not for the propagation of the religion of Islam, but for their slave trading activities”. (Omo-Ananigie, 1946) They did not, therefore, embark on a conscious policy of converting their subjects to Islam. Yet, Islam still followed the sword since, “after the conquest or submission its continued influence was assumed by northern, often Hausa... traders and missionaries, and repatriated slaves, who, while away from home had adopted the religion of their masters.” (Mason, 1970). The agents appointed by the Nupe to assist in the collection of tribute were often Muslim converts, and these converts often forced their subjects to adopt their religion. In some clans, the agents, “began with vehemence to attack the Etsako ‘Household gods’, and mutilated them, and other images and sacred objects devoted to the worship of these gods by the Etsakos were assailed and destroyed by the protagonists of this new religion.” (Omo-Ananigie, 1946). It is important to point out that there is no evidence that these acts were initiated or supported by the Nupe.

The method of introduction of Islam into the Etsako clans was far from uniform. In some clans naked force was used to compel conversion. In Agebde, the headquarters of the Aviele clan, Oba Momodu established Islam and abolished all ‘jujus’ (Stanfield, 1937). The *otaru* of Auchi also outlawed the worship of idols in his clan. In a majority of the clans, however, conversion came about as a result of the interaction between the resident Muslims and the indigenous people. These resident Muslims were usually those Nupe who did not return to Bida but remained in Etsakoland. They founded their own settlements called *Yelwa*, in which they lived together as a body, worshipped together and later started teaching Islam to the young ones sent to their *mukaratah* (Koranic schools). Their Muslim way of dressing – that is, the wearing of long gowns and tying the turban – also attracted many of the Etsako people to the settlers and the religion they represented. It should be stressed that it was mainly in the areas where Nupe agents made Islam compulsory (for example, Auchi and Aviele clans)

that a majority of the people abandoned their religion. It is therefore not surprising that Christian missionaries operating in the area in a later period had to contend with the forces of both Islam and indigenous religion (Erhagbe, 1979). Despite the adoption of Islam, older religious beliefs and practices persisted, while the new religion was mixed with some indigenous practices. Such syncretic practices should have been unthinkable in the “true spirit” of jihad, but there is no evidence of protest by Nupe agents.

The acceptance of Islam by some of the Etsako clans marked a major departure from some of their traditional beliefs and practices. The two major clans in which Islamic practices now became entrenched in society were Auchi and Aviele. In these areas, Muslim worship virtually wiped out other forms of worship and beliefs. The major shrines dedicated to gods and goddesses such as the *Adobi* shrine at Auchi were destroyed and no longer served. Such practices as sacrifices to the “god of rain” during periods of drought in Auchi were discontinued. Mosques were established to replace shrines, and “Imams” came to occupy the former position of importance that the traditional priests previously enjoyed. The Imams also added a new element in the medical treatment, using the *Koran* and *Ano* – a tablet on which they wrote certain verses from the *Koran* and washed, giving the liquid to their patrons to drink.

The influence of Islam also became apparent in the life cycle of the Etsako clans. Muslim festivals now existed with traditional ones. Hence *Isala* (Id el Fitri and Id el Kabir) became the major festivals in such areas, and fasting during the month of Ramadan was also observed. The morning and evening cry of ‘Muezzins’ became a notable feature of worship in such villages and clans, calling believers to prayers in the mosques. While the traditional practice of forming age groups continued, they were now formed during the *Isala* festival, especially at Auchi, since the festival became a notable landmark in the communal computation of time as well as in the social life of the people. The Muslim doctrine in respect to marriage was quite similar to the indigenous Etsako practice. Fundamentally, the two permitted the marriage of more than one wife. The new religion permitted its adherents to marry as many as four to five wives, provided that they had the means to support them. Etsako Muslims also began the practice of giving away their daughters in marriage without taking any bride price; this is considered a Muslim religious charity, *sadaqah*. The practice of keeping women in *purdah*, (that is seclusion) ‘udelare’, was also introduced, mainly by the very wealthy who could afford to dispense with their wives’ farm labour. Such secluded women could only come out at night or wear the veil over their faces. Although no longer involved in farm work, these women were engaged in other productive activities in their secluded

quarters. Etsako muslims also adopted new Islamic names in place of the traditional ones. In this respect, the basic philosophy that under lay the nomenclature system of the Etsako whereby children's names reflected the mood or status of their parents at time of birth was now altered, and Muslim names were now given. In most cases the traditional "Etsako name" was used as the "middle name" As with the later Christians, some of the Muslims retained their traditional names as well.

While Nupe contact did not result in the total obliteration of Etsako beliefs and practices, they clearly made a distinct impact on the society. The coming of the Europeans brought further new social and political elements. The presence of Islam posed an additional obstacle for the later spread of Christianity. Some Etsako clans, including Aviele and Auchi, remained predominantly Muslim, while others had roughly equal proportions of Muslims, Christians, and traditional adherents.

CONCLUSION

In assessing the extent to which Nupe contact affected the people of Etsako socially and politically, it is important to note that while in most clans the new practices did not take root, in others they dictated the conduct of affairs. The Nupe were responsible for causing the inhabitants of Etsakoland to modify their customs and beliefs, and in some places they caused sweeping changes. In the wake of their intrusion they introduced novel principles and ideas, to which the people were still getting accustomed when the British arrived.

Although by 1897 the Nupe no longer had direct control over the Etsako clans, their administrative innovations persisted. The new political positions and titles they introduced survived, while beneficiaries of the titles continued to exploit their positions. For example, even after the Nupe influence had been lost in the area, the tribute from surrounding villages that once went to Bida continued to be levied by Agbede." (Stanfield, 1937). The Nupe impact on Etsako social life also endured, and those Nupe left behind helped to perpetuate the practices and beliefs they had introduced. The origins of some of the characteristic traits of present-day Etsako society can be traced to this period. And this influence came as one of the southern ripples caused by the Sokoto jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio.

The Nupe stopped their harassment of the people of Etsakoland as a result of their own struggle with the Europeans in the last decade of the nineteenth century. As a result of the attack on their capital by the forces of the Royal Niger Company, the Nupe were forced to devote all their resources to its defense. In spite of their heroic resistance, the Nupe succumbed to the superior force of the British on 27 January 1897. This defeat retarded

their activities in all the areas where they had previously exercised suzerainty, including Etsakoland (Mason, 1970). The departure of the Nupe did not mean the end of foreign domination of Etsakoland, for no sooner had they left than the Europeans started making inroads into the area. This marked the beginning of a new phase in the history of the Etsako people.

In the relations between the Nupe and the Etsako, the Etsako were those that were more visibly influenced by the former, since they came into Etsakoland while their people remained insulated in Nupeland. It were those who stayed behind in Etsako that of necessity now learnt the Etsako language. In the final analysis, therefore, groups in Nigeria were dynamic in their inter-group relations long before the advent of European colonialism. The renowned Nigerian History Obare Ikime has at different times emphasized the robustness and diversity in the relations that existed between the people of Nigeria (Ikime, 1985). The existence of such relations, whether political social or economic tends to counter the arguments of those that try to over stress the artificial nature of Nigeria (Erhagbe, 2002). The situation the British found in Etsako was that of a society still undergoing changes as a result of the Nupe presence. The British presence led to even further changes. Since colonial rule did not result in the obliteration of the indigenous practices of the Etsako people, their present-day society still exhibits some of those traits acquired as a result of the Nupe contacts of the late nineteenth century.

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