

The Impact of the Legacy of Nupe Imperialism in the Auchi Kingdom in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT : *The invasion and occupation of the Auchi Kingdom by the Nupe people in Nigeria is one event that marked a turning point in the history of the Auchi Kingdom. One of the major problems facing most ethnic groups today is the religion and cultural practices of their past before the introduction of innovations in their communities. However, the efforts of some historians in writing the history of Nigerian minority ethnic groups during the pre-colonial and colonial era is far from being complete. A great deal in this aspect, especially that of the minorities that experienced invasions and subjugation in the hands of the larger societies is yet to be achieved to fill the lacuna in our knowledge of minority history. It is against this background that this paper discusses the Nupe invasion of the Auchi Kingdom of present Edo State and its Socio-political impact. The paper looks into the relationship which existed before the invasion, the people's resistance to the invasion, and the eventual defeat. It further looks at the legacies that the Nupe people introduced which have survived in the Auchi Kingdom till the present day.*

KEYWORDS : *Culture, Imperialism, Islam, Kingdom and Religion*

I. INTRODUCTION

It must be said that apart from the scarcity of source materials incapacitating the zeal of some indigenous historians in the writing of Nigerian experience in the pre-colonial and colonial period, the history of Nupe expansionist exploit into the Auchi Kingdom with its Socio-Political impact has been one of such neglected themes in Nigerian history today. Another fact is that even when some historians have cause to discuss Auchi Kingdom history at all, references are often made to Auchi Kingdom as either one of the villages of Benin or an outpost town of Benin Kingdom. The issue of how Islam became one of the deciding and uniting factors in the area is yet another scarcely researched aspect of the people's history. However, in the period prior to the middle of the nineteenth century, oral sources proved that most Auchi people were heavily indulged in idolatry. They adhered to idolatry and regarded idol worship as an indigenous form of worship beside the belief in the supreme God, Oghena, which according to them gave adequate protection, security, guidance and wealth. The minor efforts of early muslim traders, preachers and travellers before this period under review to covert the people to the Islamic faith proved abortive as many of them remained largely unislamized and held tight to their traditional beliefs and practices. In the course of history with the invasion and subjugation by the Nupe, and Islamization of the people. The people of the Auchi Kingdom were forced to accept Islam in the chiefdom. It is this development that this conference paper intends to examine, taking into cognizance the Socio-Political impact on the people (Dawood, 2020).

Meanwhile, the background and materials for this paper were derived from some primary sources particularly oral accounts collected through series of interview from some muslim families in Auchi and some neighbouring villages all in Edo State and beyond. The study also made use of relevant available secondary sources to elaborate on some issues quite central to the topic of this paper.

II. THE ORIGIN, LAND AND PEOPLE OF THE AUCHI AND NUPE KINGDOMS

Auchi is located between latitude 6° 70'00 to 7° 18'00 North of the Equator and longitude 6° 24'00 to 6° 49'00 East of the Greenwich Meridian. Auchi is the headquarters of Etsako - West Local Government Area of Edo State. The area covers a total land area of 94,562 kilometer square (km²) (World Bank, 2015). The Auchi Kingdom was founded by a man called Uchi who migrated from Udo near Benincity at about 14th century. The

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coming of Uchi, his family and followers to this Guinea Savannah belt know today as Etsako land was as a result of internecine wars, acts of brutality, intimidation and dehumanization that they suffered in the hands of the the bini people of the Benin Kingdom (Eharevba, 1968). The town is bounded on the east by South Ibie, on the north-east by Jattu; on the north by Ayua, iyuku and Imeke; on the northwest by Ikpeshi and Ihievbe Ogben; on the south by Ivbiaro and Warrake and on the south by Era and Ayuele-Ugioli (Momodu, 1987). The location of Auchi is hilly with pockets of valleys and flat plains. It is at a meeting-point between the rain forest and guinea savannah.

The settlement was a splendid choice. The town is close to about twenty rivers, rivulets and springs such as Orle, Omemhe, Ofhotsese, Eda Ibariki, Ukpheleghi, Eda Nokhua (Utsogu), Eda Nokhua (Aibotse), Amasomhe, Umhouku, Ayeda, Ayeda-Aminu, Eda Udo, Eda Oke, Eda Ayomhe, Oki, Arhebekpeghie, Edo Ofoli, Ikpaigba. and Eda-Eginis It was a choice settlement of wise and visionary pathfinders after whom most other towns must have taken a cue and settled nearby. Right from ancient times, migrants have always preferred to settle where they are sure of abundant water, flora and fauna. The case of Auchi could not have been an exception (Oseni, 2020). It is due primarily to the indispensability of water that many groups in Africa and elsewhere took to a deification of the prominent river in their localities (Awolalu, 1979). The Auchi people of old worshipped Orle, the river goddess of river Orle, with undivided attention and utmost zeal (Awolalu, 1979).⁷ In the accounts of migration from Benin and its environs to Etsako Land many historians explained how people settled in Auchi while many others moved northwards and eastwards. The lush and verdant vegetation of Auchi, its forest and Savannah belts, and very fertile land had contributed immensely to this reality (Obomeghie, 2020).

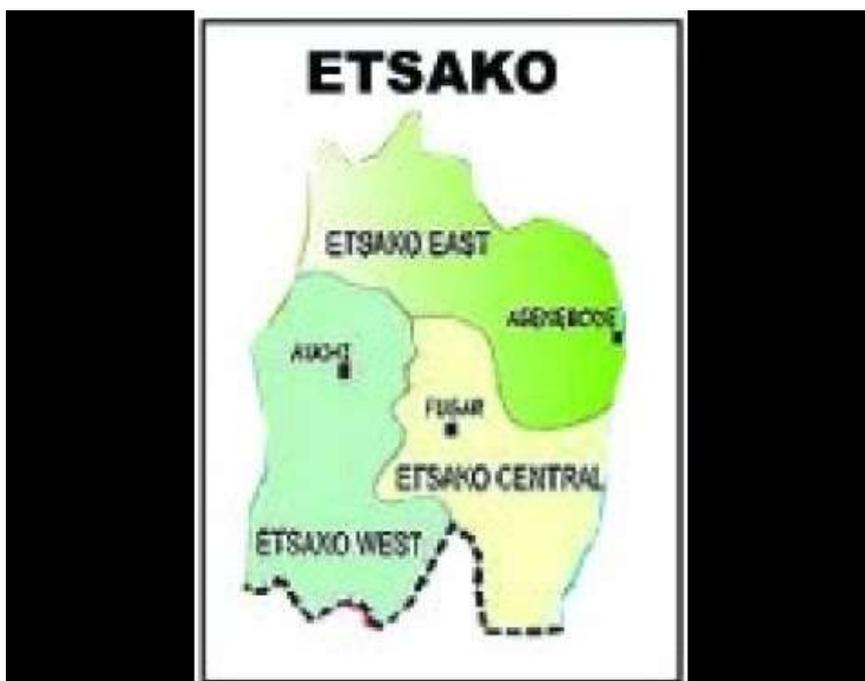
Before Islam, Auchi people, like other unenlightened and unexposed people, worshipped a number of deities which they trusted, worshipped and begged for assistance in an innocent manner. Such deities included Uchi (the spirit of the founder of Auchi), Orle (the River goddess), Amanue, Ogholodio, etc. These deities had shrines where they were worshiped by their devotees. At that time, such worship was the official religion of Auchi people (Oseni, 1998). Even when the Nupe over-ran the area along with Kabba, Epira and other Afenmai territories, the worship of idols was not discarded. The Nupe warriors were primarily interested in collecting tributes from their subjects. Such tributes included slaves and foodstuff. They were not interested in Islamic propagation in the area as that would have defeated their goal of economic exploitation (Odjugo, 1968).

The Nupe people of Nigeria call themselves Nupeci and refer to their language as Nupe. Their neighbors, such as the Hausa, Gbari, Birnin Gwari, Yoruba, and Kakanda, identify them by other names: Nufawa, Abawa, Anupeyi, Anufawhei, Tapa, and Anupecwayi respectively (Kadiri, 1973). Although the Nupe are scattered over several states in west-central and northern Nigeria, the majority resides in Niger State in Nigeria. A sizable population lives in Kwara and Kogi states as well as in the Federal Capital Territory. The main towns are Bida, Minna, Agaie, Lapai, Mokwa, Jebba, Lafiagi, and Pategi. During the creation of states by subsequent Nigerian governments, Minna was made the capital of Niger State, although Bida remains the largest predominantly Nupe town. The Nupe occupy a lowland of about 6,950 square miles (18,000 square kilometers) in the Niger Basin, mostly to the north of the river between the Kontagora and Guara confluents, from Kainji to below Baro. Despite its inland location, most of the area is less than 330 feet (100 meters) above sea level and never rises more than 820 feet (250 meters). The oral traditions of the Nupe credit the foundation of the Nupe state to Tsoede in the fifteenth century (Akomolafe, 1976).

The Nupe people have various traditions. Many practices have changed as a result of the movements started by Usman Dan Fodio jihad of the 19th century, but they still hold on to some of their culture. Many Nupe people often have scarification on their faces (similar to an old Yoruba tradition), some to identify their prestige and the family of which they belong as well as for protection, as well as jewelry adornment. But these traditions are dying out in certain areas. Their art is often abstract. They are well known for their wooden stools with patterns carved onto the surface (Oseni, 2020).

It is interesting to note that towards the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, when the British dislodged the Nupe from the Auchi Kingdom and that was the time the interest in Islam was aroused. The presence of the Nupe people in large numbers in Auchi, Ayuele and other towns sparked off an Islamic revolution with the passage of time.

Map of Etsako land showing Auchi in Edo State, Nigeria



Source: (<https://etsakolanguage.com/etsako.html>)

Map of Nupe land in Nigeria



Source: (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image%3AAfrica_topography_map_with_borders.png)

III. THE AUCHI – NUPE RELATIONS BEFORE THE INVASION OF THE AUCHI KINGDOM

The kind of relationship that existed between the Auchi people and Nupe was more of trading relations. The Auchi Kingdom and other neighbouring communities in Etsako land were engaged in trading relations with the Nupe people before 1800. It was observed that Nupe traders traded from Nupe land to the Auchi Kingdom and the trade routes was established through the Yoruba communities that were in between Nupe land and Etsako land. It was noted that the Nupe people came to Auchi in Etsako land through some parts of Ekiti and Akoko land of the Yoruba region advertising their wares such as potash, glass, sheabutter and copper. These items were exchanged with kolanut, palm oil, palm kernel oil and camwood before 1800. There were some important goods that were seized and stolen by the Nupe people from traders from Auchi and other neighbouring communities that were involved in long distance trading. Some of the goods included ivory tusks, slaves, yams, hoes, cutlasses, hunting traps, livestock (goats, sheeps etc.). Other communities, such as Jattu, Esan, Agbede, Ewu, Ekpoma etc, that traded with the Nupe people used the Auchi Kingdom as a passage way and trading route to carry out their trading activities. The Auchi Kingdom is still used as a passage way for traders in present-day Edo State (Dawood, 2020).

There were many other commodities that were used as articles of trade between the Auchi and Nupe people. Among these were religious/spiritual items and objects, particularly magic, medicine, charms, divination etc. Both the sellers and the utilizers of these items strongly believe that these items helped to stave off and neutralize the effect or activities of witches, witch craft and evil doers before 1800. The role played by these religious/spiritual items as well as other indigenous practices in the resistance of the Nupe invasion cannot be over emphasized. Despite the trading relationship between the Auchi Kingdom and Nupe traders, the Islamic religion was not introduced as a result of the indigenous religion which had a strong hold of the lives of the people of the Auchi Kingdom at that point in time (Mason, 1970). There were some very significant trade items that enhanced the promotion of the socio-cultural and economic relations between the Auchi Kingdom and Nupe people before 1850. Among these were a local kind of woven cloth (calico), red long fez caps (aru-odi), ivory bracelets and anklets (isamha), beads (ikpema) etc. The Nupe traders exchanged these products for the products of the people of the Auchi Kingdom. No doubt, these trade items influenced, encouraged and ensured the growth and development of the indigenous modes of dressing of the Auchi men and women before the invasion of the Auchi Kingdom in 1860 (Denton, 1936).

It is very clear that, unlike the nineteenth century which was a period of war and hostility characterized by the Nupe raids, the pre-1800 period had witnessed peaceful coexistence, mutual understanding and fruitful relations between the Auchi Kingdom and the Nupe people.

IV. NUPE INVASION, RESISTANCE AND DEFEAT OF THE AUCHI KINGDOM

Nupe land was a place where slavery and slave trade thrived and there was always a very high demand for slaves. Slaves, at that time, were used for many purposes. These included domestic purposes, labourers in the farms, soldiers in times of war etc. The demand for slaves became relatively higher after the death of Mallam Dendo, the then king of Nupe land in 1833. There was a fierce struggle for succession among his sons, which were Prince Usman Zaki in Rabbah and Prince Masaba in Lade. These two princes of Nupe land in bid to increase their military strength in order to achieve military victory against one another between 1833 and the early 1940s sponsored and supervised sporadic slave raids in the Etsako land where the Auchi Kingdom was situated capturing and enslaving thousands of Auchi people (Tony, 2020).

The greatest reason for the Nupe's defeat of the Auchi kingdom was their organized army and superior military weapons whereas the Auchi Kingdom had no standing army but made use of their youths (age group) for internal security. The weapons included fire arms, swords, spears, bow and arrows, speed horses etc. These weapons and items they got from British and Africans traders that came to Nupe land through the River Niger. The initial reaction of the Auchi Kingdom consisted of fierce resistance, but since the Nupe were able to suppress this opposition, the Auchi kingdom surrendered to the Nupe representatives. To avoid the Nupe, however, some left their villages in search of more secure locations (Omo-Ananigie, 1946). The people of the Auchi Kingdom tried unsuccessfully to dig trenches round their village to prevent the entry of the Nupe forces. When majority of the inhabitants of the Auchi Kingdom first got wind of an impending Nupe invasion, they fled

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from their homes 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 homes (Mason, 1970).

The Auchi Kingdom put up a very strong resistance but eventually submitted to the Nupe hegemony. The raids carried out by the Nupe forced the people of the Auchi kingdom to develop a warning shout, which was meant to inform people of imminent danger and attack whenever the Nupe army were 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.” There was later a concerted movement by the Etsako to have the name changed during British colonial administration (Stanfield, 1937).

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 (Iluokhauno, 2020). 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 Auchi Kingdom (Mason, 1970). Auchi was used as a base for the raids carried out into other villages. Some groups even raided other villages within their same clan as a result of their new relationship with the Nupe. For example, 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 Auchi got some slaves from the Nupe for the assistance he gave to them (Mason, 1970). The Nupe victory over the Auchi kingdom can therefore be partially ascribed to the disunity among the neighbouring communities. Despite the military superiority of the Nupe, if the Auchi Kingdom and neighbouring communities had been united in self-defense, the story might have ended differently. For example, Ogidi, a neighbouring community defense stood its ground until relief came from the Royal Niger Company’s army, essentially because of their unity. Instead of the unity of the Auchi Kingdom and her neighbouring communities, they all went ahead to face the Nupe individually and this to a great extent spelt their defeat on the battlefield (Balogun, 1972).

V. THE SOCIO-POLITICAL LEGACY OF THE NUPE INVASION ON THE AUCHI KINGDOM

Following the subjugation of the Auchi Kingdom, 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 Kingdom. Agents were appointed for the conquered areas. According to Mason stated once the amana had been accepted, and the amount of tribute agreed upon of which tribute was levied according to the size of the village, the question of administration was simply answered and justified (Denton, 1936). 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.” These appointed agents were called “azeni.” The agents in turn appointed local aides who helped execute the collection of the tribute (Denton, 1936).

Those who were appointed as “azenis” were sometimes Nupe or Hausa clients of one or other of the important title holders of Bida, and in most cases, local notables were appointed. 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. These notables or agents treated their appointed subordinates at the village level the way they were themselves treated by their superior (Balogun, 1972).

The colonial form of administration introduced by the Nupe changed the previous existing political order. The principle of gerontocracy, which had been the bedrock of the Auchi traditional system, was now to a large extent replaced by a system which relegated age to the background. Monarchical principles were introduced in Auchi. Denton noted that headship of village was once vested in its oldest man but that changed when the Nupe established their authority over the Auchi Kingdom. For a more active administration to be achieved the Nupe selected “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 acting as intermediaries with the slave raiders (Denton, 1936).

The heads of the clans of appointed agents who also acted as village heads, and these appointees got the Nupe name “Dawudu”. They first instituted the principle of individual authority, which was not indigenous to the organization of these clans. The Nupe were said to have introduced the post of “Otaru” in the Auchi

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Kingdom (Denton, 1936). After the conquer of the Auchi Kingdom, the Nupe 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.” With effect from that time, he was recognized as the chief agent of the Nupe in the area and the head of all the Auchi villages. In each village, he appointed a “dawudu” who acted as his assistant. Some new Nupe titles were later introduced by the Otaru. 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 (Robson, 2016).

Islam was practiced during the area during the period of Nupe hegemony but only a few people adopted it. With the adoption of Islam as the state religion, the 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 the Auchi Kingdom was based mainly on political and economic considerations. In the Auchi Kingdom, 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.” 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 (Mason, 1970).

The acceptance of Islam by some of the people of the Auchi Kingdom marked a major departure from most of their traditional beliefs and practices and Islamic practices now became entrenched in their everyday lives till the present day. Muslim worship almost phased out other forms of worship and beliefs. The major shrines dedicated to gods and goddesses were destroyed and no longer served. Such practices as sacrifices to the “god of rain” during periods of drought in Auchi became limited. Mosques were established to replace shrines, and “Imams” came to occupy the former position of importance that the traditional priests previously enjoyed (Oseni, 2020).

The influence of Islam also became apparent in the life cycle of the Auchi Kingdom. Muslim festivals now existed with traditional ones. Hence *sailah* (Id el Fitri and Id el Kabir) became the major festivals, and fasting during the month of Ramadan was also observed alongside the Uchi day festival, a traditional festival, is celebrated on the 8th of January every year till the present day. The morning and evening cry of ‘Muezzins’ became a notable feature of worship in Auchi Kingdom, calling believers to prayers in the mosques. While the traditional practice of forming age groups continued, they were now formed during the *sallah* festival 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 wives, provided that they had the means to support the wives. Auchi 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) 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. Auchi Muslims also adopted new Islamic names in place of the traditional ones. In this respect, the basic philosophy that underlay the nomenclature system of the Auchi Kingdom 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

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“Etsako name” was used as the “middle name” As with the later Christians, some of the Muslims retained their traditional names as well (Oseni, 2020).

Their muslim way of dressing, that is, the wearing of long gowns and robes known as kaftan and wearing of Arabian caps, was also introduced in the Auchi Kingdom. This also implies to the women’s mode of dressing. A typical Auchi lady dresses with every part of her body covered with a veil on her head and this has been the mode of dressing in the Auchi Kingdom till date (Abass, 2020).

VI. CONCLUSION

In assessing the extent to which Nupe contact affected the people of the Auchi Kingdom socially and politically, it is important to note that the Nupe were responsible for making the inhabitants of the Auchi Kingdom to modify their customs and beliefs. 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 Auchi Kingdom, 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 tributes that once went to Bida continued to be levied by the people (Robson, 2016). The impact of the innovations of the Nupe on the Auchi Kingdom’s social life was very significant. The origins of some of the characteristic traits of present-day Auchi Kingdom 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 the harassment of the people of the Auchi Kingdom 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 27th January, 1897. Since colonial rule did not result in the obliteration of the socio-cultural practices of the people of the Auchi Kingdom, their present-day society still exhibits quite a number of those traits acquired as a result of the Nupe contacts of the nineteenth century.

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