

Historical Demography and Environmental Factors in the Relations of the People of Central Nigeria Area

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Abstract

The paper examines the environmental induced migration of ethnic groups to the present Central Nigeria area and the attendant stresses and strains in the relationship between the later migrants and the first groups that have occupied the area. The constant changes in the Nigeria environment had adverse effect on the population whose sources of livelihood were tied to the land resources. The objective of the paper is to study the nexus between human population, struggle for resources and insecurity in Central Nigeria area. Built on historical method and relying on primary and secondary sources, the paper argues that the changes in the environment resulted in the migration of some ethnic groups into other parts of Nigeria area. The migration of groups to the Central Nigeria area often triggered violent conflicts. The paper further reveals that the issue of 'indigene' and 'settler' started when competition for rights and privileges rose between the hosts and the migrants and the crises that followed were given religious coloration and it pause serious challenge to the security of the nation. The paper concludes that the ethnic groups should work together and find ways that will facilitate their mutual survival because fighting like primitive caveman, slaughtering one another over spurious claims for piece of territory amount to taking a short cut to their demise.

Keywords: *Migration, Environment, National Unity, Demography, Ethnic group*

Introduction

The fact that all ethnic groups in Nigeria have traditions of origin is a historical reality. The migrations are categories into two broad groups. The earlier ethnic groups to have occupied an area are generally known as the autochthonous while the later migrants are in some cases term to be settlers. In this paper we shall dwell on the later migration to be able to find out the nexus between the phenomenon and security challenges. The significance of the paper lies on the fact that the central Nigeria area has traditionally been one of the most agriculturally productive regions of the country, crops such as yam, maize, cassava, rice, guinea corn amongst others which are grown in the rich soils hold the key to Nigeria' s quest for sustainability in food production.

The paper is divided into sections and the ongoing introduction forms the first part. The second section is an analysis of migration, contacts, and interaction of the groups in pre-colonial period highlighting the nature of the challenges experienced and how it was managed. The third section looks at contemporary migration, unity and national security in Nigeria while the fourth section concludes the work.

Migration and Security during Pre-colonial Period

The reasons for the migrations are numerous, but beginning from the 18th century, movement of groups to new abode increased. The scenario was most prevalent in the Lake Chad region as from this period, the whole area between Logone River and Matia was liable to flood at the height of the rainy season and this rendered cattle susceptible to foot-and-mouth disease and foot-rot disease. Thus, the area near the Lake Chad became unsuitable for cattle grazing thereby forcing the Fulani that owned the herds to migrate (Abubakar, 1977). Considerable number of the Fulani that left the Lake Chad area migrated southward into the present Adamawa area.

The migration of the Fulani out of the Lake Chad area into the Adamawa area went on till the nineteenth century. More and more Fulani migrated from the Lake Chad area as they were provoked by the unfavourable political condition of the Borno Empire which controlled the region. The deteriorated political condition of Borno Empire gave room to unhealthy relations between the Fulani and autochthonous of the Southern Borno who were mostly Hausa. Besides the deteriorating political condition, by the end of the 18th century, Borno was also characterized by serious famine which affected the Fulani and their cattle (Abubakar, 1977). These conditions were responsible for the continued migration of the Fulani to a fertile region which contained region of perennial pasture. Another factor in fact a strong one that necessitated the migration of the Fulani was that they ran into westbound movements of the Shuwa Arab herdsmen. The emigration of the Shuwa Arab herdsmen in search of pasture posed threat to the presence of the Fulani in the area.

In Adamawa area, the presence of the Fulani in large number resulted in the dislodgement of autochthonous groups namely the Kilba, Bata, Higi, Chamba among others. These groups entered into different forms of relationship with the Fulani both symbiotic and antagonistic.

The Chamba appears to suffered more dislodgement of their society as a result of the large-scale migration of the Fulani to Adamawa area. It should be noted that the Chamba homeland was the Shibshi Mountains and few other hilly areas. The plains were important to the Chamba as a source of food. The presence of the Fulani was unwelcome and they were subject to pressure and raids from the Chamba. The resultant effect was shortage of food which threatened survival of the Chamba communities. Consequently, some of the Chamba were forced to migrate out of their habitat on the Shibshi Mountains. It should be noted from the onset that there are two different Chamba reactions to the pervasive disruption of normal life that affected Chambaland. Richard Fardon named them as Chamba raiders and Chamba refuges (Fardon, 1988). The Chamba refuges were the communities that broadly adopted a refuge strategy and remained in central Chambaland to contend the Fulani onslaught, while the raiders were groups that migrated out of their original habitat.

The Chamba that found refuge on the Mountains established a centralized political organization that remained in their previous locations around Chambaland inaccessibly to hostile cavalry of the Fulani. They built their settlements on the mountain slopes which provided an effective obstacle to Fulani attacks. This paper is more concern with the migratory movements that occurred from the Chambaland and particularly the exploits of the Chamba raiders. The Chamba that moved out of the original Chambaland formed raiding bands under different Chamba leadership, and recruited from the different people through whom they marauded, established war camps, made local alliances, raided for slaves, and pillaged villages to the south and west of their homeland that is the Bamenda area of present Republic of Cameroun and Benue region of the present Nigeria. The raiding bands split as they pursued their trails of destruction (Fardon, 1988). In the Middle Benue

region, they found their way into the area hitherto dominated by the Jukun. Their activities characterized by the establishment of settlements, fissions, emergence and death of Chiefs and the prosecution of wars between different Chamba communities and between Chamba and other people redefined the political map of the area hitherto under the political control and influence of the Jukun. The manner in which the Chamba organized and carried out their movements was responsible for the appellation ‘Raiders’ as they were unstable in compositions, were deflected by strong opposition and were attracted by the possibilities of successful raiding.

They split into several migratory streams or raiding bands, some moving south-westward of their original habitat straight toward the present Southern Taraba area, others going southwards towards Tibati and also surfaced in the Southern Taraba. Others moved south-eastwards to the Bamenda highlands where they were known as Bali. The fourth group moved eastward to the Cameroun (Hamman, 2007). The paper focuses on the groups that moved into the area at present is known as Southern Taraba. The group was said to be under the leadership of Garduna. They left with their dependents, signifying a definitive migration. They followed the valley of the river Taraba and established temporary camps as they proceed.

In the course of their migration, the Chamba raided the Jukun of Bakundi area and some part of Ngoro people who also constituted the population of their community. They form a settlement called Gankwe As a matter-of-fact Gankwe grew to be a settlement of the Chamba migrants who left their original habitat due primarily to disturbances caused by the intrusion of the area by the Fulani and the various groups of the Jukun clans they met on their way and those living in the surrounding hills. With the kind of co-operation and almost absent of resistance or resentment by the surrounding people, there was relative calmness that led to the stability of the town. However, internal wrangle and discontentment among the Chamba led to abandonment of the settlement.

Following the internal dissention among the leaders of the group, a raiding band under the leadership of Shimbura move to area dominated by the Kuteb and camped near Jenuwa a Kuteb settlement close the present Takum town (Fardon, 1988). Shimbura was later installed the Chief with the title Garkiye. Shimbura raided communities between Takum and Katsina-Ala River. Many Kuteb villages namely Jenuwa, Akente, Akyuma, Bika, Likam, Markam and others were victims of his sporadic raids (Garbosa II, 2001). Consequent upon the devastations and uneasy atmosphere that followed the activities of the Chamba, Dewey (1937) a colonial District Officer asserts that “in those days, it is said, people lived in a state of peace, and it was not necessary to carry arms. It was only with the advent of the Chamba that war and slavery were introduced”.

Another group of Chamba under the leadership of Kumboshi arrived Takum area shortly after Shimbura was in the process of establishing his hegemony over the area. Dispute later broke out between the groups. Kumboshi attacked Shimbura forcing the latter to move out of Takum area. The Shimbura group later founded a town which became known as Donga. The wandering and marauding activities of Shimbura were lay to rest with the establishment of Donga town by the middle of the 19th century. According to the traditions of the Chamba of Donga, the town was established around 1842 and its name was given in 1845 (Garbosa III, 1993). Similarly, by the middle of the 19th century, Chamba settlements have been established in the present Southern Taraba area but their epistles may not be lengthy as that of Donga. Some of them were splinters of the group under Shimbura. Splinter groups from the camp of Shimbura formed their settlements at Chanchanji in Takum Local Government area, Akate in Donga Local Government area, Gaya, Gavyon and Bason. It should be noted that Gaya, Gavyon and Bason later were merged to form a single town called Rafin-Kada in Wukari Local Government area.

By the time European rule was introduced in present Southern Taraba area, there were several independent political communities where the Chamba and other ethnic groups lived. One important feature of these communities is its heterogeneous composition of the ethnic groups that co-existed in them. The point to be reinforced is that as several Chamba leaders seceded from the main group, they recruited more people from other ethnic groups to form a strong raiding band from which they marauded, established camps raided more villages for economic benefit of the group and finally installed as Chiefs of their towns. This explains the ethnic heterogeneity of the Chamba politics. Some people joined the Chamba plunder group in anticipation of the gain that accompanied such campaigns. In the case of Donga, the town grew spontaneously and defensive wall was built round it. The town was populated by many ethnic groups which include Hwaye, Kuteb, Jukun, Tigong Ankwe, Kpwate, Jidu and others (Garbosa II, 2001).

The establishment of Emirates occasioned by Jihad movement led by the Fulani increased the momentum of the migration of the group further south. The Emirates of Wase, Missau, Bauchi and Muri had been on several occasions attacked some groups outside their jurisdiction to expand their territories. Wukari was besieged by forces from Missau with the support of the Emir Ibrahim of Bauchi with the intention of installing Usman of Missau as its Chief if they had succeeded in defeating the Aku Uka. According to Charles Kingsley Meek, Wukari owed its success in this war in some measure to the ruler of Muri who was afraid that if Wukari fell, the people of Wase might encroach on the territory of Muri further east (Meek, 1931).

The activities of the migrants contributed greatly in arousing general hostility and threat to harmonious relations in the area. With the British conquest and the establishment alien rule in Nigeria, the incessant migrant related conflicts were tactically managed administratively. The colonial governments put in different measures to manage the issue of migration to another settlement. It appears throughout the colonial era, cases of migrant posing security challenge or arousing contentious situation were well managed by adopting several administrative policies. The colonial administrative policy stated unequivocally that no unconquered or revolted ethnic group will be included in the jurisdiction any Emirate without the sanction of the High Commissioner in writing (Ballard, 1972).

In 1917, the colonial administrators reasoned that since the Tiv that had migrated into the Wukari area refused to recognize the authority of Aku Uka, thereby becoming a clog in the wheel of peaceful administration they should be asked to quit. A boundary was created between the Jukun people and Tiv. The north side of Wukari- Akwana road was accepted as a boundary, and the Tiv were evicted from their homes said to be in Jukun area (Akombo, 2014). This policy was adopted by the colonial administrators to avoid problems that would jeopardize their commercial activities and restore peace in the area. It was necessary for the British colonialists to evict the Tiv from the Jukun dominated areas for peace because they refused to recognize a constituted authority. According to report of Gunn (1932) a colonial District Officer the scenario of the migration of the Tiv into the Wukari area in the 1920s assumed an unprecedented dimension.

It should be as well noted that colonial activities such as tin mining in Jos and the construction of railway line stimulated the migration of many people to different region. The mining camp became home to many ethnic groups most of them came either as voluntary or forced labourers. To promote trading activities in the mining camps the European expatriate firms encouraged the rise of Nigerian petty traders particularly the Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba and others to come and settle there (Goshit, 2006).

Migrants, National Unity and Security in Nigeria

Nigeria attained or achieved an independent status in 1960 as a federation with well over two hundred and fifty distinct ethnic groups. On the eve of independence, the Federation of Nigeria comprised three regions namely the East, North and West. In each of the three regions there were a number of different groups with a dominant one, which is the Igbo, the Hausa-Fulani and the Yoruba, in the East, North and West respectively. The hopes and expectations for better things and better days ahead for Nigeria that accompanied the pronouncement of independence attracted the influx of migrants to different parts of the country.

The first five years of independence, the presence of migrant particularly in the North was dicey. The political situation in Benue Province culminated in protests in 1960 and 1964 the *Nande Nande* and *Atemityo* (breaking of head) (Wuam, 2007). Migrants in Tiv area were confined to Makurdi as the countryside were cut off for non-Tiv. In the course of the riots thousands of lives, both Tiv and non-Tiv migrants were lost in Tivland as it was unsafe for non-Tiv to travel by road into and through the territory.

The relations between the migrants and groups that have earlier lived in an area in many parts of Nigeria remained dicey. Following the January 15, 1966 bloody change of government and another one on 31st July, migrants Igbo in northern part of Nigeria were killed. The killing and looting of the properties of the Igbo was so horrendous that a called was made for them to return home from all parts of the north (Abubakar, 2011). In this case it is not clear why the migrants' groups who were mainly traders could be subjected to such inhuman treatment. Recent research shows that migrant traders provided tremendous and huge revenue for the government. Their presence was of the economic development of the State they reside (Uji, 2015).

The migration of one Muhammadu Marwa from Cameroun to Nigeria sparked a riot in Kano in 1980. Marwa led the *Maitatsine* riot with disciples from across the West Africa sub-region (Abubakar, 2011). As an Islamic sect they held to the belief that they were true Muslims which members of other sects were regarded as unbelievers to be fought and killed along with all non-Muslims. As an ideological movement, it spread to Borno and Gongola States in 1984 and threatened the peace and stability in Maiduguri and Jemita, lives and properties were lost in both towns following the mayhem brought about by the Maitatsine sect.

In Taraba State, the migratory nature of the Tiv posed periodic conflict resulting in destruction of farms and properties as well as massive loss of lives. As the Tiv pour into the area, they encroached on land and farms that the groups that lived in the area claim as their own. The constant migration of the Tiv into this area posed serious challenge to the wellbeing of the people and the governance of the area.

An area endowed with good climate and rich in tin mining, the present Plateau State attracted migrants as well as immigrants right through the colonial period. The prospect for trade and labour in the tin mines attracted immigrants, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. The Fulani cattle nomads also moved to the area and reared their cattle on the rich pasture around. These groups lived relatively peacefully with their Berom, Afizere and Anaguta hosts. The peace and stability between the hosts and the migrants was short lived. The situation started to change when competition for right and privileges rose between the hosts and the migrants. The major problem between the Berom, Anaguta and Afizere on the one hand and the Hausa on the other hand was over the ownership of Jos – the issue of indigene and settler (Abubakar, 2011). The hosts group strongly stood against

any move to allow the Hausa and Fulani enjoy indigene rights. When in 1994 the Federal government appointed a Hausa man Aminu Mato, as Caretaker Chairman of Jos North Local Government, violent crisis erupted and shattered the peace and serenity of the area. The crisis was given religious coloration and it pause serious challenge to the security of the nation. In an attempt at addressing the security challenge and to address the issue, Honourable Justice Aribitun Fiberisuma Judicial Commission of inquiry was set up in April 12, 1994. Among other things the Commission succinctly states that: An indigene of Jos is one whose ancestors were native of Jos beyond living memory. This does not include any person who may not remember from where his father or grandfather left his native home for Jos as a fixed home, domicile there as a choice for life or who is ignorant of about from where his family moved to Jos permanently in quest for better living or in the process of his business.

There were incessant conflicts mostly in the Central Nigeria area between Fulani herders and farming communities. This was exacerbated by constant migration of herders to the area. The migration of the herders was a phenomenon induced by the natural environment. There are constant changes in the Nigeria environment. In 2008, the National Meteorological Agency reported that over the preceding thirty years the annual rainy season dropped from an average of 150 to 200 days. The report further states that in the last six decades, over 350,000 square kilometer of the arid region turned to desert or desert-like conditions and progressing southward at the rate of 0.6km per year. The Nigeria far north States were worst hit with this environment change, with 50 – 70 percent of land area becoming desert (Ahmed- Gamgum, 2018) The environmental condition which is the deteriorating condition of the land led to desertification which is the word use to describe waterless, treeless, uninhabited or sparsely inhabited land. The amount of arable land lost to desertification annually is at the rate of ten kilometers. Yusuf Dingyadi says the desert encroaches with about 20 to 30 kilometers annually or more than compare to ten years back (Dingyadi, 2022). The Nigeria far north experienced long dry season from October to May and low rainfall (600 to 900mm) from June to September (Koroma, 2010).

The changes in the environment had adverse effect on the population whose sources of livelihood were tied to land resources. The non-stop environmental degradation in the far-north caused many herders to migrate in search of pasture. The movement took them to the central Nigeria area and their presence in large number compounded the overcrowded space. The climates induce degradation of the pasture of the far-north made survival difficult for the herders. In searching for suitable pasture and water, herders moved their cattle mostly on foot across cultivated and not cultivated lands. The movements of the cattle en mass and repeatedly caused degradation to the land. The herders when make camps usually temporary as they seldom have permanent home transverse particular portion of land in search of grazing pasture which were also usually scarce. As ruminant animal, cattle need large amount of grass to adequately feed on.

The overgrazing of the land of the Central Nigeria area led to hash ecological disruption thereby depleting the fertility of the land. An environment that suffered overgrazing experiences shortage of adequate pasture growth. This has a multiplier effect on both the farmers and herders. On the one hand, as the land lost its fertility, farmers tend to increase their farmland which in turn threatened the survival of the herds which made them veer into farmlands and destroyed crops (Tari, 2019).

It is instructive to note that the herds grazed everywhere they like. The movement of herds from place to place in search of water and pasture was only more suitable in the far north than the central Nigeria area because of relatively large land and pasture with sparse population. The partially drier

nature of the environment due to short duration of rainfall makes it suitable to cultivate different types of crops that might not require enough rain. At the end of the short period of the rain and crops harvested, the herders were encouraged to freely move around in search of pasture and water. The expansion of farm space to meet up with their poor yield which was caused by overgrazing of the farmland was adopted by farmers to address the environmental failure. The shortage in the amount of the annual rainfall drastically affected crop production. Therefore, the river flood plains usually called *fadama* were put under intensive cultivation during the dry season. In other words, the dry season farming was employed by the farmers to cushion the inadequacy of the rain during the wet season. As the farmers desire the water bodies in the dry season to cultivate crops to augment what they could not achieve due to short period of rain fall, the herders on the other hand need the pasture around the streams and river for their cattle.

The effect of the crisis is multi-faceted. The violence decimates communities as many communities in the affected areas have emptied out creating refuge situation that has increased the strain on government coffers. Coupled with refugees from the Boko Haram crisis, and the displacement from the English-speaking region of Cameroun Republic, it portends a security risk to the country. It also caused threat to Nigeria's food security. The report of Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of September 2017 stated that twenty percent of the population as insecure (Bako, 2018). The central Nigeria area has traditionally been one of the most agriculturally productive regions of the country. Crops such as yam, maize, cassava, rice, guinea corn amongst others which are grown in the rich soils hold the key to Nigeria's quest for sustainability in food production.

Conclusion

The migration of groups as shown above was bore out of necessity. The environmental degradation and the quest for survival made it imperative for groups to move to a new place. The climate change which resulted in desertification made life unbearable for human and animals a phenomenon that forced many of herders and others to migrate. The determination to better their economic life caused people to migrate during the colonial period.

Social and economic factors continue to provoke violent conflicts among the groups that were forced by natural phenomenon to live together. The Federal government should stem cross-border movement of non-Nigerian armed herders. Nigeria should work with Cameroun, Chad and Niger (the Lake Chad basin countries) to regulate movements across borders, particularly of cattle rustlers, armed herders and others that have been identified as aggravating internal tension and insecurity in Nigeria.

It is clear from this discussion that migration of groups to another place often triggered violent conflict with the earlier settled groups. This is a normal tendency, in the face of increasingly dwindling resources. Failure of the state to maintained equity in guaranteeing access for common users is capable of causing conflict and these fueled by mutual suspicions has continued to generate crises. On the other hand, the ethnic groups should work together and find ways that will facilitate their mutual survival because fighting like primitive caveman, slaughtering one another over spurious claims for piece of territory, they are not capable of putting to use, amount to taking a short cut to their demise.

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