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Slave Factor in the Development of Bida Emirate: 1857-1900

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Abstract

Growth and development in the socio-cultural, political and economic activities in different societies of the world created a considerable gap and stratification among and between people. The societies thus came to be divided between the rich and the poor, the rulers and the ruled or the learned and not which made people to enter into definite relations at different level. This led to the development of institution of slavery to satisfy ones needs across the world. In Nupe land, as in some other societies of the world, the institution predates 19th century emirate period. However, the paper is concerned with the institution of slavery and its impact on the emirate of Bida. The paper using content analysis concluded that slave factor played significant role in the 19th century development of the emirate

Key Words: Slave, Slavery, Development, Bida Emirate.

Introduction

The institution of slavery and slave trade was a global phenomenon that no part of the world was left out. This implies that no society or race at one time or the other did not participate in the institution of slavery. However, the degree of participation differs from one society to the other or from one part of the world to another (Curtain, 1971). In Africa, a part from internal dynamics that brought about slavery, two major phases of international action added impetus into the institution. The first was trans-Saharan trade through which African slave, on a large scale reached Asia and later Europe. The trade was dominated by the Arabs most especially from the Seventh century (Anene,

1966). The second phase was financed and controlled by the Europeans en route the Atlantic Ocean. It was pioneered by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century and by the seventeenth century other western European nations most especially Brittan, France, Italy, and Netherland joined. The two major intercontinental trades were responsible for the settlement of a large number of African people as slaves from African continent to others.

The institution of slavery as a social system in Africa predates the emergence of Trans-Sahara and Atlantic slave trades. Its organization and operations differs from one society to the other, but mostly influenced by the level of economic, political and socio-cultural development. For instance, in the Muslims north of West Africa, the acquisition and use of slave is influenced by sharia that stipulates that a slave should be well-treated by the owners (Curtain, 1971). In other areas, slaves were not badly treated and could be integrated into the family and political system of the society, while in yet some areas they were seen as economic tools for production and wealth creation (Mohammed, 2011).

In Nupe land, before the emirate period, institution of slavery emerged due to expansion in economic and political activities. In the economic field, in an effort to maintain and expand production and wealth creation in agriculture, fishing, crafts, manufacturing and trade, the rich and the noble needed labour beyond household which could easily be obtained through enslavement(Nadel,1942). Similarly, the empire and state builders and nobles engaged in state building also required and acquired slaves to maintain their status and expand the state. The slaves served the state in the military, political, domestic and other social services (Nadel, 1942). For instance, Etsu Jiya was said to have settled slave to build towns and till the land sometimes in the 18th century (Mason, 1980). Other rich men, traders, craftsmen and state officials and even those in the villages obtained and used slaves.

From the above discussion, it is clear that institution of slavery and slave trade is as old as expansion in the economic activities and socio cultural and political development in Africa in general and Nupe land in particular. To this end, the paper examined slavery in Bida emirate in the 19th century; an emirate that occupies central Nupe area, larger in territory and economically stronger than other emirates in the land.

Conceptual Framework

The institution of slavery as a social and economic system of not only Nupe land and communities of Africa but global phenomenon appeared and operated in different forms. The operational form has led to differentiation in description of the various forms of slavery. Before identifying and describing the various forms let us understand the concept of slavery.

Slavery: According to Haruna (2001), slavery is a social and economic institution that encourages the legalisation of forceful acquisition of person for sale. This definition limited the entire system to an economic factor of trade without looking at other variables such as utilization of slaves. Slavery is thus an institution that allows for a person to own another person as a slave. It also connotes a condition of being slave (Fage, 1978). Curtain (1971), in an ordinary dictionary definition, described slave as “a thing that can be bought and sold like any other moveable property”. But, he was not convinced with the definition, hence he argued that as a member of a society, a

slave has both rights and disabilities. Slave could therefore be an individual obtained and utilized as labour force in the production of goods and services of the possessor.

Pawning: Within the slavery institution is pawning. Pawning refers to services rendered by a person as security for debt or to meet certain societal demands while retaining his/her rights and privileges as free born member of the society (Falola, 1984). The pawns were usually members of and served within the community. Some even lived in their own house and commute daily to the masters' house or work place.

Clientageship: Clientageship is not also far from slavery institution. This system tied a person to one chief or another, in which he sacrifices his freedom and by extension that of his family for the sake of political protection and related privileges (Nadel, 1942; Falola, 1984). The clientage system in Bida emirate centred at the capital of the emirate, where people from the country side aligned themselves to senior title holders of the emirate.

Slave Trade: Irrespective of the form of slavery wherever it exists, it goes along with trade where human beings forms the article of trade. Slave trade is thus the buying and selling of human beings which allows for the removal and settlement of man, in a most painful, shocking and horrific manner (Haruna, 2001), from one area to another. Slave being an article of trade may change hand several times till it gets to the final consumer who may use him/her as he wishes.

Slavery in Nupe land before 1857

The strategic location of Nupe land between the forestry and the Savannah North and its economic potentials (rich in human, land and water resources) made her an epitome of regional commerce long before 19th century (Adamu, 1978). This, in the course of time resulted in the production of goods and services to meet the ever-increasing demand of growing trade. Central to the production of goods and services was the labour, which household labour could no longer support most especially for rich people that were engaged in large agriculture, fishing, crafts and trading activities (Mohammed, 2011). This led not only to the institutionalisation of slavery but continuous and progressive use of slave labour for local production. The slaves were obtained within and outside Nupe land.

Most of the slaves were engaged in economic activities that included agriculture, fishing and craft. The use of slave on farms grew from when Etsu Jiya (c. 1760-1785) continuously settled slaves on land to boost local production. The resultant effect was the widespread use of slave in every part of the kingdom. Though agriculture was the main economic stay of Nupe, craft production was also important as slaves were engaged in iron smelting, blacksmithing and cloth weaving (Usman, 2010).

Apart from slaves being engaged in productive activities, they were also used in the service industries. They were employed as trade agents and carrier of goods. Domestically, they were engaged in household activities and security services (Usman, 2010).

Nupe land being hub of regional commerce was adequately linked by a network of trade routes that assigned to her position of middle manship in the north-south bound trade (Adamu, 1978). This made Nupe land and its people very active in both the Trans-Sahara and the Atlantic trades where she exchanged her home made and external goods

across the two divides. Among the articles of trade were slaves. Adamu (1978) described goods involved in trade between Nupe land and Hausa land as to included

horses, natron, salt, leather goods, textiles, peper and many fancy goods of oriental origin (from Hausa land), Nupe embroidered gowns, slaves and some European goods which originally came from the coast probably constituted the main export to Hausa markets (from Nupe land).

The early 19th Century political turn oil in Nupe land notwithstanding, trade continued to expand with slaves as an important item of trade. Though slave trade was on decline across the Sahara and the Atlantic before the emergence of Bida emirate, Laird and Oldfield (1971) from Rabba reported on that as late as 1832 – 1834; “the slaves are disposed of to Arabs and some are sold at towns on the bank of the Niger and eventually reach the seaside, where they are ship on board Spanish slave ships.”

Slavery in Bida Emirate, 1857-1900

The Balkanization of Nupe Kingdom into pocket of emirate in the early 19th Century due to factional crises of the Tsoedean dynasty and the infiltration of jihadist element and emirate builders led to the emergence of Bida emirate in 1857. Earlier on, the foundation of the emirate in central Nupe was laid at Rabba, but the crises that engulfed the emirate builders’ leadership and the resilient nature of the faction Tsoede dynasty made its development shaky and difficult which led to a decissive war in 1857 at Bida(Dupigny,1920).

Bida being the scene of the last battle between the Dendo family (emirate builders) and Mayaki Umar, an erstwhile general of Usman Zaki and Masaba who had emerged strongest among the contenders and usurped the emir’s position during the leadership crises, became the seat of the emirate. The emergence of Dendo’s at the helm of affairs at Bida opened a new chapter of challenges to the emergent emirate and its leadership. The challenges were the issues of consolidation of their authority amidst continuous opposition from the erstwhile Nupe Etsuzhi of Tsoedean dynasty, development of the new emirate capital, maintenance of political structures and liabilities, expansion of the emirate beyond Nupe land and reward and payment of tributes to the sovereign at Gwandu (Salahu, 2010)

In an effort to overcome the challenges from 1857 up to the time of British interference and conquest, the leadership was involved in a number of imperial wars to consolidate, exert their influence and tapped resources within and beyond Nupe to generate funds for the administration. In tapping the resources apart from paying tribute in agricultural products and cowries, slaves were increasingly being demanded as time went on (Somonu, 1976). This shows the importance of slaves in the development of Bida emirate before European conquest.

Acquisition of Slaves from 1857

Slaves in Bida emirate and Nupe land as in other parts of Africa were obtained in so many ways up to the time of British conquest. For instance, Nadel (1942) identified two main sources of acquiring slaves. These were by means of captives in wars and raids and those sold in open market. Those sold in open market could include victims of wars and raids. He also added children born into slavery that Nupe called Mangiizhi. Koeile in Curtain (1971) and Lovejoy (1983) listed wars, captives, judicial process and

purchase made as sources of getting slaves in Africa. Whatever be the sources identified, they can be broadly classified into three; violence, socio-cultural and judicial process.

Violent Sources

The term violence is technically use here to refer to all means rather than peace used in securing slaves for whatever purpose. These means could be wars, raids, or kidnapping often induced by pretext to or ambition to establish, consolidate, exert or advance either political, religion and economic interest or combination of all by an individual or group of persons. Bida emirate that emerged in 1857 after over three decades of leadership crisis, within a short period of time rose to a status of great power whose power was felt beyond Nupe land. This was made possible by her strategic location, human and material resources and presence of certain individuals or group of persons who mobilized and used both human and material resources to her advantage. To achieve this, the leadership and her agents were involved in a number of violence activities from offensive or defensive position as military activities.

The offensive military activities took her beyond Nupe land to Gbagyi land, Kakanda territory, North eastern Yoruba land, Akoko and Afenmai to the south. The urgency, zeal and velocity at which the wars were embarked upon from 1857 to the period of European conquest led to the conquest of several communities in these areas. The wars and conquest were in search of material wealth; slaves and tributes induced according to Mason (1980) by: "Impoverished by dark years of exile and defeat, their former capital in ruins and in debt to Gwandu for military assistance, the ruling elite of the reconstructed state was in urgent need of material wealth." From these wars thousands of slaves were obtained from which many were sold to the north or to the south some were used as tributes while others as farm labour and domestic slaves.

Apart from the organized large military activity by the emirate, feudal lords also undertake raids and military expeditions targeted at certain villages or tribes. These raids were often meant to raise material wellbeing of the feudal lords by acquiring slaves and tributes (Nadel, 1942).

The defensive military activities were mostly undertaken within the emirate and were directed against rebellious provinces or feudal lords. They were mostly military activities of re-conquest to silence the oppositions. Thus between 1867 and 1884 the emirate leadership was involved in three major wars of kpanti, Efabgagba and Ganiga. These wars yielded large number of captives that were moved to Bida as slaves (Salahu, 2010).

In addition to the initial expeditions inside Nupe land by the Bida forces, situation often arises that military actions were taken against rebellious provinces or feudal lords. For instance, the war against Age was in response to the revolt by Owe people (Mason, 1970). Also, in military assistance to Kontagora and Gwandu in 1880 against rebellious group, Bida forces came back home with few war booties that included slaves (Dauda, 2010). In search of slaves and material wealth Bida emirate also invaded neighboring emirates territory such as Agaie and Lapai.

Socio- Cultural Sources

The socio-cultural sources of slaves unlike the violent methods evolved from the established norms or institutions of the Nupe society and the emergent but growing emirate. This involved commitment of a person to another in a more or less servile status either as a client or pawn (Ziri, 1991). The clientage ship is the sacrifice of freedom in other to gain political protection and security of himself and his family. Though not slaves in real sense but treated almost on equal basis with slave, as the relationship requires the client to offer gifts, services and payment of tithe from the produce of his farm. This was an old practice in urban centres most especially the capital, Bida. It was a common practice between peasants from the villages with a title holder or senior prince who lived in Bida (Nadel, 1942). For the pawn which Nupe called Tsofa were individuals pledged as security for loan or expected payment such as dowry. The pawned individuals worked under the same condition as a slave till the debt is settled but could not be sold or exchange for another. The institution became a common practice among all classes of people, trade and occupation.

As a socio-cultural and economic system, people or individuals were sent into slavery as a gift, donation or tributes payment. From 1857, this became prevalent and a major characteristic of Nupe (Bida) and her conquered territories relationship. For instance, Haruna (2001) reported that:

In Etsako communities, oral traditions have it that many of the young male adult, who were donated by certain families to the Nupe slave raiders (in order to avoid the enslavement of the entire Family) were irresponsible and headstrong persons.

Similarly, the southern communities of OkunYoruba, Igbira, Akoko and Afenmai were involved in payment of tribute and Jiziya. The payment which in the course of 19th Century was replace by Bida's demand for slaves than material things.

Judicial Factor

Slaves in Nupe land and Bida Emirate in particular in the course of 19th century came to be source through judicial procedure. This became more important from the 18th century when slaves were continuously being settled on land to work the farms. Thus, instead of killing or sent to exile of convicts of crime like murder and witchcrafts were sold as slaves to generate income while those involved in theft were made to work on Emir's farms called Esozhi to increase production (Amina, 2010).

Slaves and Development in Bida Emirate 1857-1900

Slavery and slave trade as a social institution influenced by peoples' level of socio cultural, economic and political development served as an instrument of development of the society. In Nupe land and indeed Bida emirate the institution most especially in the second half of 19th century which corresponded with the establishment and growth of the emirate impacted on its developments as discussed below.

Slaves and Political Development

Following the emergence of Bida as the seat of the emirate and agreed succession formula on rotational basis among the three leading personalities of Dendo family (Usman Zaki, Masaba and Umar Majigi) effort were made to establish an elaborate and

effective administrative machineries. In the administration of the emirate, slaves came to be involved in the daily running of the state depending on the level of their operation or who their master was.

Though considered as the lowest and down trodden of the social classes in Nupe, there existed among them distinctions, that is, classes within the social status. Among the slaves, some became rich and occupied position of influence, while others did not and remained as household servants doing menial works or farm labour on the farms of their master. These arose due to truthfulness and loyalty of slaves, slaves of princely birth and status, chiefs and distinguished warriors and above all whom and where they served (Nadel, 1942). For instance, those that served in the house of nobles, royal houses or at the court faithfully rose to position of importance in the society and get rewarded. Nadel (1942) wrote;

Able and faithful slaves were rewarded with the position of head slaves, overseas, bailiffs.... Their masters bestowed upon them, above all, special titles, household ranks- the ubiquitous symbol of social rise in Nupe, which in this case obliterated even the last external symbol of slave status, the typical slave names (while those) selected for the court, were given ranks and titles, and could rise high in the services of the king. There was, the specialized services of officials and trusted royal agents.

Among the services rendered by this group include looking after Etsu's vast households, provincial delegates, tax collectors, trusted messengers and liason officers between the king and high-ranking state officials. This group of slaves constituted one of the officers of the state called enawuzhi, Order of slaves with state titles such as Gabi, Ndaturangi, Dzwafu, Ndamaraki, Santali, Swajiya, Ndatodo, Manfada, Sonmaji, Ndadari, Shangbo, Masantali and SarkinDogari.

Slaves and Economic Development

We had noted earlier that expansion in economic activities of the societies of the world contributed to the institutionalization of slavery. Nupe land as part of the world society witnessed such an expansion and growth in her economic activities most especially from the 17th century. The growth and expansion and its sustainability depended much on labour in which slave labour becomes a critical factor. Thus, long before the emirate period, slave labour was increasingly being utilized as farm labour. In fact, this practice competed with the Atlantic slave trade which was as at then at its peak.

However, the continuous and increasing demand for tropical goods in place of slaves most especially from the second half of 19th century when Bida emirate emerged and domestic slavery became an important economic institution in the production of goods and services led to the establishment of slave settlements known on Tungazhi. The importance attached to the slave labour in the production of goods and services led to the founding of 1591 of Tungazhi between 1857 – 1900. These Tungazhi established around the capital, Bida according to Mason (1973) were meant to produce enough food and other products to sustain themselves and; “sustain the large and often unproductive population of the capital, its rules and courtiers and the long-distance traders, as well as the sizeable private armies of the nobles, each with its forces of cavalry.”

Apart from the utilization of slave labour in the farm, they were also engaged in other economic activities such as fishing and water transportation, craft and manufacturing and commerce. Among the riverine Kede, though little number of slaves were used on fishing expedition, they were exclusively in charge of transportation – river canoe traffics (NAK,SNP 17,15849) owned by rich men and nobles (NAK,SNP B1756). In the craft and manufacturing sector, slave labour was established in mining and smelting of iron, pottery, bronze work, gun making, processing of economic trees such as Shea butter, Locost bean, oil palm and cotton industry. For instance, their involvement in collection and processing of sheanut led to the growth in production and export of shea butter in 1871, 1876 and 1879 to the tones of 129, 637 and 1500 valued at ₦4800, ₦25,460 and ₦ 58,500 respectively (Flint,1960). In the cotton industry, slaves from Yagba country most especially Isanlu, Okene, Afenmai and Akoko who were reknown weavers were settled in Tungazhi. Their combined techniques with that of Nupe enhanced the Nupe weaving techniques and increased in productions. The contribution of slaves to production and commerce of the emirate, made Mason (1970) to conclude that slavery became the dominant mode of production that produced not only to capitalist periphery of the new world but to Europe as well.

The settlement of slaves in Nupe land and their involvement in production of goods and services increased the volume of commercial activities in Nupe land. Nupe land and the name Nupe became a trade mark for variations of goods most especially textile products. Their productive capacity might have accounted for their settlements on farms, and hardly sold unless either they have committed grave offence or their masters in need of money to pay tax.

Despite productive contribution to the economy and other services rendered by slaves, throughout the course of 19th century they formed part of trade articles. Many of those sold were either acquired within Nupeland or outside among the raided and conquered people such as Yoruba, Igbirra, Gbagyi and even exchanged Hausa slaves. In the formative period of emirates in 1830s, slaves in Nupe were sold to Arabs to the north and towns on the bank of the Niger that eventually reached the coast where they were sold to European merchants and shipped to the New world. When Bida became the seat of the emirate and wages wars of consolidation and expansion, Baikie (1879) reported that in 1862 between 300 and 400 slaves and could even rise to 800 were arranged for sale in an open market. To sum up the importance of slaves to the economy of Bida, is to described the king's income as captured by Nadel (1942) that;

The king in Nupe derived his income firstly from the taxes and tributes which his officers collected, and of which he received the largest share, and secondly, from the wars and raids, which the king's army carried into foreign lands. The Kings private estates constituted a third importance source of income. These estates were worked by slaves who lived on small hamlets in the royal lands called Esozi.... Other sources of income are...profits from commerce, above all, from slave trade in which an Etsu Nupe, like every Nupe nobleman, might sometimes engaged.

Socio-Cultural Development

Slavery and slave trade in Nupe land and indeed Bida emirate was a two-way traffic of import and export. Import refers to the slaves brought in from elsewhere into the

emirate that ended up as domestic slaves. The exports connote those that became victim of slavery either within or outside the emirate but sold to European or others beyond the emirate enclaves. In whatever way, it affected the demography of the emirate. Areas around the capital, Bida and the Bini enclaves became home to numerous slaves settled to farm the land called tungazhi to the extent that no land was left uncultivated between Bida and Zhima Doko (Mason, 1969). The sources of the slaves settled in this area were from western Nupe and North-east Yoruba. It was reported that in Aworo, an area often raided by Bida that in 1918 there was no single living adult of over 30 (male or female) that had not been in slavery at Bida (NAK,). Bida, the seat of the emirate also had its population increased tremendously in the second half of nineteenth century. For instance, Crowther (1869) gave a population of not less than 110,000 in 1869 while Archdeacon Hamilton in 1886/1887 suggested a population of between 30,000 and 60,000. Whatever be the population much of it would have been slaves.

As the population of Bida and nucleous increases due to slave settlements, areas of raid have theirs depleted. The western Nupe of Mokwa-Zugurma axis that never agreed with emirate builders and often revolted as was the case with Kpanti and Efagbaba wars lost much population to death, exile or slavery. Most of the slaves were settled in areas across River Kaduna or sold into slavery.

Slavery and slave trade as a global phenomenon contributed to cultural and technological diffusion from one area to another. Earlier we have reported Yagba slaves came with textile technology which enhanced Nupe cloth production and also have their Yoruba culture transplanted. Through assimilation into Nupe culture traits of Yoruba and other ethnic group enclaves in Bida emirate do exist and survived over time. Typical examples are the admixture of Nupe and Yoruba or Nupe and Hausa names.

Conclusion

Slavery and slave trade span several centuries before the emergence of Bida emirate in 1857. This period coincided with the time slaves were being settled on land while Atlantic slave was on decline. The institution of slavery and slave trade became part of the success story of the growth and development of Bida emirate before colonial conquest. This could be seen as highlighted in terms of political economics and socio-cultural development.

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