

MAN AND ENVIRONMENT IN BORNO: A HISTORICAL ACCOUNT

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Abstract

This is a study of the intricate relations between man and environment in the habitation of the drying bed of the Lake Chad Basin in a historical perspective. Using primary and secondary sources the study indicates that the peopling of the Chad Basin became possible as a result of the transgressions and regressions of the Lake Chad, a large body of fresh water, which had shrunk from 27,000 square kilometres to as low as 1,500 square kilometres. It was between 5,000 and 2,500 BP that the lake's size stabilized at about 280 M above sea level, after which period continuous human habitation of its shores became possible. The Lake due to its unique location in the heart of this arid zone had supported a large variety of animal and plant life and provided sustenance to fishermen, pastoralists and agriculturalists. It is this rich and fertile land that supported the large civilization that was the Kanem-Borno Empire, which was ethnically and culturally heterogeneous. This strategic location of the lake in the heart of Africa was also its greatest disadvantage as it became a point of attraction to adventurers both local and foreign such as Rabih Fadl Allah, the conqueror of Borno, as well as the British, French and German colonial powers. The study concludes that the environment did shape the course of human development in the Chad Basin as the history of the communities that lived on the shores of the lake was synonymous with the history of the peopling of the drying bed of the lake.

Introduction

Without necessarily conceding much to ecological determinism, we can quite reasonably claim that by influencing the possible choices of occupations, trades and settlement zones, the peculiar ecological history and geographical features and characteristics of the Central Sudan have influenced and even at times determined the course of historical development in the region (Tijani, 1980:117-8).

The relationship between man and environment is a complex one of interdependence. Environment here refers to "the whole of the natural world – from ecosystem to biosphere – within which human beings and all other plant and animal world have their being" (Connelly and Smith, 2001:8). Man's attempt since pre-historic times has been to control, modify or adapt to his environment. The environment has similarly shaped the course of human development in all regions of the world. This is particularly true of the Central Sudan in general and Kanem-Borno in particular, where peopling of the area has been linked to desiccation and drying up of the Lake Chad.

Man's impact on the environment is very minimal especially in relation to environmental degradation. Human activity, however, may have contributed to environmental degradation in Borno especially after the fourteenth century. The scorched earth strategy employed by Idris Alauma (1570-1603) cannot but affect the immediate environment but we have no evidence for this. Similarly, the wars of the nineteenth century beginning with the Fulani rebellion and closing with Rabih Fadl Allah's depredations left in its trail destruction and famine.

The Area

Kanem, the predecessor of Borno, first appeared in the written sources in the ninth century A.D. in the writings of the Arab geographer, al-Yaqubi. Not much is known of the territorial limit of the kingdom as it expanded and contracted through the centuries depending on the relative strength of the state, its rulers, and their imperial ambitions vis-à-vis those of its neighbours. At its apogee under Idris Alauma, its influence was felt as far as Fezzan in the north, the Bauchi-Jos plateau in the south, the Cameroon Mountains in the east and Hausaland in the west. This area represented an ecological, cultural and ethnic diversity. The basic pre-occupation of the rulers of Kanem, and later Borno, was how to manage this plurality with a view to asserting their control over the state (Tijani, 1980:147).

Most of Kanem-Borno is flat, vast featureless plains except for the sand dunes. The terrain is predominantly sandy and increasingly so as one moves from south to north. In areas to the south and south-west are found the lacustrine or lagoonal clays, the black loamy soil known as *firgi*. The water retaining *firgi* is conducive for the cultivation of different varieties of sorghum – the *ngabuli* and the *masakwa*. The *firgi* supports double cultivation within one year.

Borno experiences dry condition for most of the year. The rains start late and finish early – from July to October – usually ranging from 160 to 80 days from south to north. The mean annual rainfall varies from as high as 1125 mm at the foothills of the Mandara mountains in the south to as low as 290 mm at Abadam in the north-east (Connah, 1981:32).

The rainy season is followed by cool dry season which starts late in November and extends to February, referred to as harmattan. This consists of very dry dusty winds which blow in a north-easterly direction from across the Sahara desert. This period ushers in a marked drop in temperature, often falling to as low as 20.0° C while night temperatures can fall to as low as 7.7° C or lower (Connah, 1981:31). In the hot dry months of March to June, the temperature rises for much of Borno to as high as 38.8° C in April. It is not uncommon at this time to have maximum day temperatures of 43.3° C in the north and north-east.

The density of the vegetation is in part a function of the quantity of rainfall. Tuley and de Leeuw (1972:121-55) have shown that there is a close relationship between the climate and non-hydromorphic vegetation in Borno. In the north where the rainfall is low vegetation is sparse. This belt is usually dominated by acacia trees and shrub savanna. Open featureless land stretching for kilometers on end and dominated by seasonal grass cover during the rainy season, drying up during the dry season formed the dominant vegetation of the area (Tijani, 1980:130). In the south where rainfall is generally heavier, can be found woodland forested vegetation.

This savanna dominant vegetation and lack of natural barriers has made mobility relatively easy for traders, pastoralists and warriors alike. This is reflected in the ease with which the German explorer, Gustav Nachtigal (1879-89), was able to travel from Borno to the Nile. Similarly, the Sudanese conqueror, Rabih Fadl Allah also moved along the same route in reverse direction at the close of the nineteenth century. The movement of the Sayfawa rulers from Kanem in the east of the Lake Chad to Borno in the west in the fourteenth century, the accompanying movement of pastoral groups arising from the Sayfawa immigration, has made Graham Connah (1981:17) to view the savanna as a corridor in the heart of Africa. This open savanna grassland allowed for the extensive use of horses in the empire building years of the Sayfawa in the fourteenth century and after. The effective use of the terrain, for offensive and defensive purposes, as part of military strategy has often decided the difference between victory and defeat in the Rabih wars of the nineteenth century (Mohammed, 1995:57).

The Sahara desert and the Lake Chad are the most prominent features of this region. Both have as a result of climatic changes affected the course of human development in Kanem-Borno. It is therefore necessary to briefly sketch their transformation with a view to understanding the historical development of our area of study.

The Sahara Desert

This sea of sand covers most of the northern half of Africa, stretching from the Atlantic coast in the west to the Red Sea in the east. The Sahara is completely arid and waterless except in the oases and river valleys. This made travel and living difficult but not impossible, for the Sahara was not a barrier between North Africa and areas further south as commercial relations went on for centuries along definite trans-Saharan routes (Bovill, 1975). One of these routes had always had a major town of Kanem-Borno as its southern terminus. The management and organization of these routes had been a recurrent theme of the politics and diplomacy of states on its fringes (Lange, 1984:247; Tijani, 1980:119).

The desiccation of the Sahara began c. 2000 B.C., before then the area supported human and animal population in large numbers. The process of human habitation and state formation in its fringes has been attributed to the desiccation (Grove & Warren, 1968; Smith, 1971; Tijani, 1980; Lavers, 1980; Barkindo, 1985). Desiccation can result from either climatic change or human activity and distinguishing the two can be difficult. This is because a temporary or prolonged deterioration of the climate may accentuate the harmful effects of human activity or vice versa (Grove, 1974:137). Thus the widespread assumption that human activity invariably leads to environmental deterioration is difficult to substantiate (Grove, 1974:137; Tiffen, et al, 1994).

The Sahara is not a man-made desert. The desiccation of the Sahara is ascribed to Africa's geographical location 30° of the equator, which means a large part of its surface, is occupied by "dry descending air and receives little rain". In addition, temperatures at low altitudes are usually high all year round, which increases water losses from land and water surfaces, especially in tropical areas of low rainfall and relative humidity (Grove, 1974:138).

The Lake Chad

The history of Kanem and Borno is in part a history of the peopling of the drying bed of the Lake Chad, located on the southern fringes of the desert. This large body of fresh water no doubt had a "considerable influence on the environment and the inhabitants of its immediate area" (Connah, 1981:21). Environmental changes in the Chad basin are linked to transgressions and regressions of the lake. These changes in the lake level can be natural or human (Thiemeyer, 2000:12).

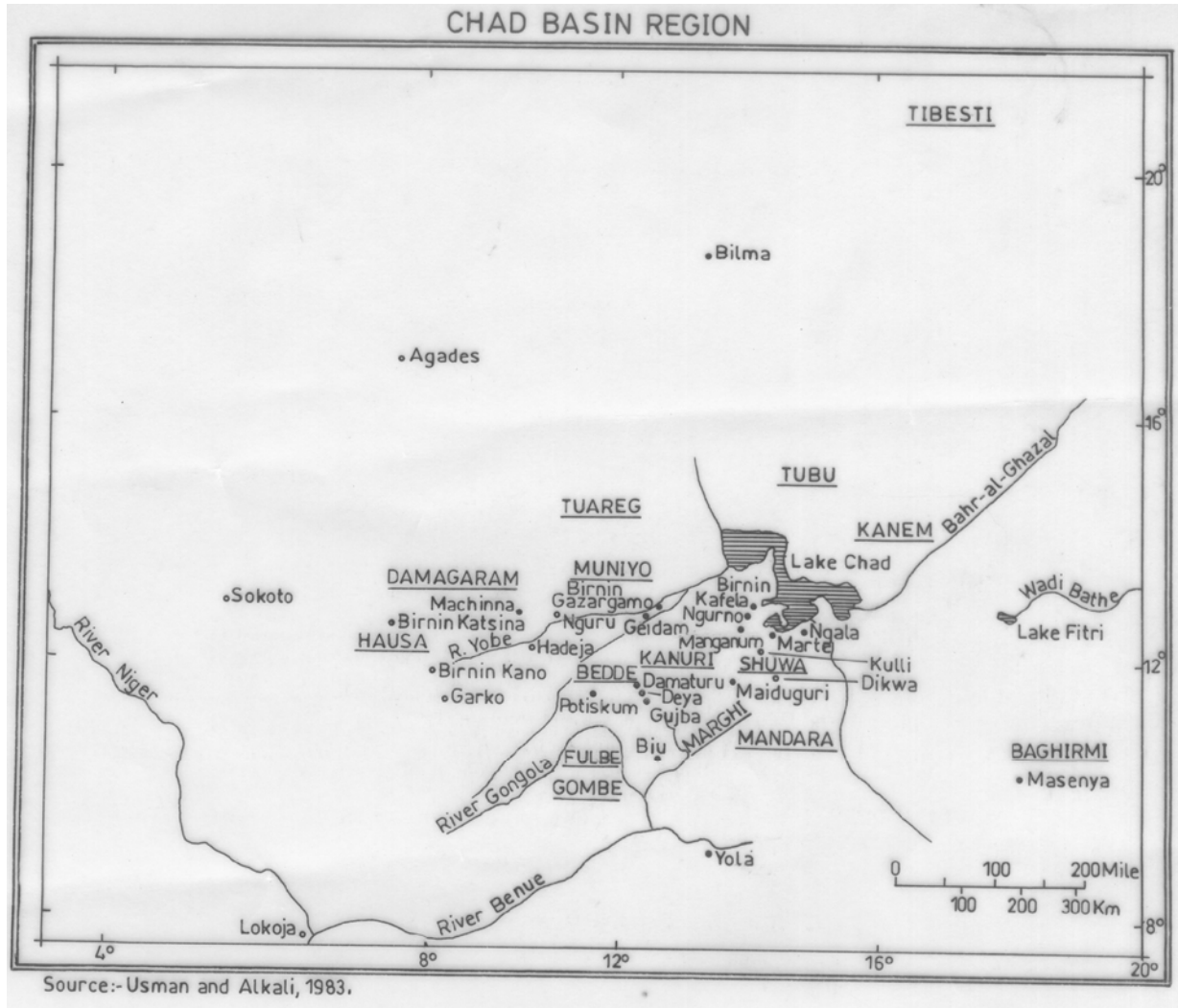
The Lake Chad is the remnant of a far larger lake known to history as Mega-Chad. The size and level of the lake has increased and decreased over time. Currently standing at 1,500 KM² due to environmental degradation, the lake had covered an area of 27, 000 KM² in the past.¹

Primarily fed by the surrounding rivers, the Shari-Logone, its principal source, annually supplies 40.4 milliard M³. Other feeder rivers include El-Beid, Yobe and Yedseram (Connah, 1981:21). An estimated 6.6 milliard M³ is supplied by rain directly falling on its surface (Sikes, 1972:64).

This lake 55,000 years ago stretched from Bama and Gashua in the south and west to the foothills of the Tibesti mountains in the north-east (Grove & Warren, 1968; Smith,

¹ The size of the lake has been affected by environmental factors over the years. Different figures have been given for the surface area of the lake: Abadie (1927:76-7) gives 25, 000 KM²; Puchs (1966:14) says it fluctuated between 10, 000 – 25, 000 KM²; Grove (1970) says in some years it had covered less than 15, 000 KM² but that in 1962 it was almost 30, 000 KM². See Nachtigal (1980:95)

1971). The surface of this sheet of water stood at 380-400 M above sea level, and was believed to have overflowed its banks and drained into the river Benue (Smith, 1971).



MAP: The Chad Basin Region

Between 21,500 and 12,500 B.P. the lake dried up and sand dunes were said to have formed on its surface (Cf. Thiemeyer, 2000:13 who gives this period as 20,000-12,000). This was followed by a humid period when the lake resurfaced and stood at 320 M above sea level. This is followed by the "lagoonal period" when the lake fell to 287 M above sea level. This phase is credited with forming the Ngilewa ridge (Sikes, 1972:63). It was this shoreline that by "ponding back a large lagoon to its south, created the conditions for the creation of the lacustrine and lagoonal clays" that played an important role in human habitation of the area (Connah, 1981:22).

Between 5,000-2,500 B.P. the lake fell to its fairly stable size of 280 M above sea level. It seems it was only after this period that continuous human settlement and occupation of the lake and its shores became possible.

Sayfawa in Kanem

Both Kanem and Borno emerged and lived out their existence on the shores of the Lake Chad. Kanem comprised of numerous groups including the Kanuri and its various ethno-cultural sub-units such as the Ngalaga, Kangu, Kayi, Kuburi, Kaguwa, Tomagra, Tubu, Ngema, etc. After 7,000 B.P. the environmental effects of the climatic change consequent on the desiccation became clearer. Some of these changes according to Smith (1971:161) include: first, the drying up of the Lake Chad to approximately its present size; second, the substitution of heavily forested vegetation by savanna grassland; third, further desertification of areas to the north especially those around Jurab depression and the formation of sand dunes on an area which hitherto had been the deepest part of the Mega-Chad.

The general impact of this process was the bifurcation of the area into two ecozones. First, the Azben – Borku - Chad area which was practically uninhabitable by human beings except along the Chad – Bilma – Jado route and water courses and shores of the Lake Chad. The barrier created by the separate development of these two areas led to the emergence of two different language systems – Teda-Daza and Chadic – and different process of state formation (Smith, 1971:161). This barrier was not breached until the emergence of Sayfawa to pre-eminence.

The desiccation also led to the depopulation of areas to the north thus forcing peoples to move further south to the Chad basin. It is this concentration of peoples in the south that "eventually provided one very important condition for the emergence of state-like forms of government" (Smith, 1971:163). Similarly, it has been suggested that the desiccation and peopling of the Chad basin may have been responsible for the formation of the Kanuri out of the numerous inhabitants of Kanem in the ninth or tenth century (Smith, 1971:165; Tijani, 1980:193). The emergence of the Magumi section of the Sayfawa to dominance is attributed to its military superiority especially the use of cavalry and dynastic inter-marriages to give other members of the community a stake in the polity (Smith, 1971:167).

Tijani (1980:152-3) is cautious of whole sale ascription of causality to the desiccation in the formation of state-like institutions. Rather he argues that the Chad basin may have been peopled by different ethnic and cultural groups who were probably non autochthonous, and suggests "considerable cultural and population admixture", of the various ethno-cultural groups leading to identity change. Similarly, Tijani (1980:158) identifies the dynamic interaction between ecology, occupation and political relations often expressed in mass migration which conceals the ethnic distribution of the region.

In consolidating their hold over Kanem, the Sayfawa used the claim of Yemeni origin through Sayf Ibn Dhi Yazan of Himyar. The details of this tradition of origin are well known as discussed in Smith (1983:16-56). But even this tradition of origin has been shown to be a product of the Chad basin environment, where competition for scarce resources of land

and water forced the inhabitants to organize on "lineage, clan and ethnic bases, presumably as due process of antecedence of the family" in the process of social development (Tijani, 1980:193). This competition led to the emergence of kin-based hierarchical organizations "reflecting both the bases from which they evolved and the mould in which the competition had developed" (Tijani, 1980:193).

The decline of Kanem and the movement to Borno, to the west of the Lake Chad, has in part been attributed to the harsh climatic conditions further north. This is because the territory of Kanem which stretched from Fezzan in the north to the Chad basin in the south had become too large for the scarce and diminishing resources available to sustain that vast state (Barkindo, 1985:240). Second, the impoverishment of the soil compared to the fertile land of Borno, pushed peoples out of Kanem, into the better endowed Borno (Alkali, 1983:61; Barkindo, 1985:241). Third, the trans-Saharan trade route, the major gateway to the outside world had become unviable because of instability in North Africa. The route to Kanem had so declined that by the fourteenth century traders had started bypassing Kanem in favour of Borno. Similarly, Kanem's grip on Borno, the economic base of the state, was threatened by the Bulala wars (Barkindo, 1985:241). These interrelated climatically induced economic factors combined with political factors to push the Sayfawa out of Kanem. Borno therefore provided succour to the Sayfawa in their choice of new place to settle.

The Resource Base of the Lake Chad

The Lake Chad because of its unique location in the heart of this arid zone has provided sustenance to fishermen, pastoralists and agriculturalists living on its shores and remained a "focal point for the intermixture of peoples and cultures for centuries" (Tijani, 1980:122).

The lake and its environs have supported a variety of animal and plant life including man. Human habitation of Borno is therefore centred on the lake. The lake probably supports more zooplankton than any other lake in Africa thus supporting numerous species of fish including the large Nile perch, lung fish, etc. (Connah, 1981:24). The mammalian fauna of the lake was equally large and varied and included domestic and wild animals. The wild animals included hippopotami, gazelles, hyena, leopards, civet, etc. The bird population of the lake was also quite impressive (Sikes, 1972:131; Connah, 1981:25). The lake therefore supported human habitation of its shores, islands and environs.

The shore of the lake was an attractive pasture lands for pastoral groups such as the Yedina, Kanembu, Shuwa-Arabs, Fulani. This accounts for the concentration of these nomadic pastoral groups around the shores of the lake from the fourteenth century down to the present era.

Following the massive influx of different groups into the Chad basin after the fourteenth century, the area became an important centre of commercial activity in cattle and natron. The market towns of western Borno became well known for the cattle trade while places like Kauwa, Moduwari, Yamia and Gudimuni became famous for natron production and trade (Alkali, 1983:65-8). By the nineteenth century the lake had attracted the attention of many adventurers including European explorers and Rabih Fadl Allah as would be shown below.

Impact of Sayfawa Occupation of Borno

Human habitation and exploitation of the Chad basin dates back to 3,000 B.C. (Connah, 1981). The areas of continuous settlement are the *firgi* plains. This area allows for double farming of the *masakwa* in the clays and millet in the sandy plains. The inhabitants of the *firgi* were also hunters, cattle breeders and fishermen. The islands and islets also provided permanent settlement niches and sources of livelihood to fishermen, especially the Yedina (Buduma).

The use of iron dating back to 50 A.D. increased man's attempt to cope with the environment. Better tools led to improved productivity as iron tools replaced stone and bone implements. The ability to produce surplus due to improved tools may have led to the development of trade within the basin. It was probable that this early inhabitants of the Chad basin may have traded across the Sahara through Kanem between 700 - 1150 A.D. (Barkindo, 1985:243; Cf. Posnansky, 1981).

Even though human movement into Borno predated the movement of the Sayfawa, their arrival encouraged an influx of peoples into Borno. Most immigrants settled on the fertile farming and grazing lands either on the shores of the lake or on river banks. The most important immigrant groups were nomadic pastoralists attracted by the fertile grazing lands on the shores of the Lake Chad and the banks of the River Yobe and Komadugu Gana. These groups include the Kanembu, Shuwa-Arabs, Fulani and other nomadic groups. This movement into Borno induced the growth of urban centers. This accounts for the urbanization of places such as Wudi, Yau, Gashegar, Damasak and Birni Gazargamu on the river banks (Alkali, 1983:61).

The large scale movement of peoples into the Chad basin and the subsequent fusion and fission that ensued led to a number of developments. First, the large scale mingling of cultures that the Chad basin engendered is unprecedented in the history of Africa. This ensured that none of the major states that emerged on the shores of the lake including Kanem, Borno, Baghirmi, and Wadai was culturally or ethnically homogenous (Anene, 1970:233-4).

Second, the establishment of Sayfawa power in Borno and the intermixture of the culture of the immigrant groups such as the Kanembu and the autochthonous groups may have given rise to the development of a hybrid culture and broader Borno identity (Smith, 1971:157; Tijani, 1980:168).

Third, the development of Sayfawa power and the occupation of the fertile agricultural lands on the shores of the lake, and the attempts at incorporation of the autochthonous groups through Islamisation and Kanurisation may have displaced more peoples out of the region. Some of these groups include near neighbours such as the Bade, Manga, Ngizim, Bolewa, and Kare-Kare who had moved to their present locations (Tijani, 1980:169). The Sau and other autochthonous peoples were displaced from their ancestral homeland (Abubakar, 1980:167).

Fourth, the expansion of Sayfawa power and their Islamisation campaigns during the reigns of Ali Gaji (1473-1501), Idris Alauma (1570-1603) and Hajj Idris (1654-87) may have pushed more peoples that were not favourably disposed to Islam or Kanurisation out of Borno to areas further south. These include the Chamba, Bata, Bazza, Yergam, Angas, Montol and numerous other groups who had occupied the Chad basin in the pre-Sayfawa period. The traditions of origin of most of these groups still claim Borno or eastern ancestry (Abubakar, 1980:167; James, 1987:59).

Warfare and the environment

The Sayfawa consolidated their hold over Borno primarily by force. This accounts for the many military campaigns credited to the early rulers of Borno. The most destructive effect of human action in Borno has been warfare. The numerous wars fought to establish Sayfawa dominance in Borno by Mai Ali Gaji through Mai Idris Alauma may have significantly contributed to the deforestation of northern and central Borno. For one, Idris Alauma is credited with modernizing warfare by the widespread use of fire arms, effective drill practice, improvements in transport, supply and military strategy (Lavers, 1980:197). His strategy of scorched earth employed in his attempts at subduing the Sau strongholds of Damasak and Amsaka was symptomatic of the Sayfawa war strategy (Lavers, 1980:196). In the siege of Damasak and Amsaka all farmlands and tree crops were destroyed (Tijani, 1980:278, 287). Similarly, the widespread use of firearms in the imperial wars of expansion during Idris Alauma's reign and after may have accentuated man's harmful effects on the environment. The availability and use of fire arms may have led to improved hunting. This would undoubtedly affect the animal and bird population of Borno.

The most destructive wars in the history of Borno were fought in the nineteenth century. For it was in this century that Borno lost two of its capitals, Birni Gazargamu and Kukawa. This period was symptomatic of the effects of war on a people and their environment. This century opened with the collapse of the Sayfawa dynasty and the emergence to power of Shaykh Muhammad al-Amin b. Muhammad al-Kanemi, all in the first two decades, between the fall of Birni Gazargamu in 1808 and the foundation of Kukawa in 1814 (See Brenner, 1973; Tijani, 1980).

The contest for Borno between the Sayfawa and their allies against the Fulani rebels was very destructive. It was the series of wars that ultimately led to the ruin and abandonment of Birni Gazargamu. Similarly, the fight for the domination of Borno between the Sayfawa dynasty and the burgeoning al-Kanemi power characterized the first four decades of the century. This struggle for Borno did not abate until the defeat and execution of Mai Ali B. Ibrahim at the battle of Minarge in 1846.

The period between the battle of Minarge and the Rabih onslaught was itself characterized by struggle for the control of Kukawa between Shehu Umar and Abba Abdurahman and their allies. This struggle continued to divide the Kukawa court into different interest groups until the arrival of Rabih Fadl Allah in 1893. This intra ruling class struggles, declining economic fortunes of the 1880s, and extortionate taxation had produced deleterious consequences for the state. The most obvious was that it introduced a wedge between the rulers and the ruled. Thus by the time Rabih invaded Borno in 1893, the state was seriously lacking in national cohesion.

It is suggested that the wars of the nineteenth century can be compared with the Sayfawa wars of consolidation and imperial expansion of the sixteenth century in terms of its effects on the environment. Both Idris Alauma and Rabih employed scorched earth strategy extensively in their campaigns. In this process all food and tree crops were razed to the ground. While Alauma was dealing with a difficult opposition in the autochthonous peoples, Rabih saw the whole state as a legitimate field of plunder. The effect of Rabih's scorched earth policy was felt by 1898 when Borno was completely denuded of food (Mohammed, 1995:113). The destructive effect of Rabih's wars led to famine in Dar Kuti, Baghirimi and Borno (Cordell, 1985:180).

For Rabih Fadl Allah, even the choice of Dikwa as his capital, was dictated primarily by environmental factors. There were so many things going for Dikwa. It was located adjacent to the *firgi* corn fields of Balge and in the heart of Shuwa-Arab herds. Thus this area was not only abundant of food but was friendly territory, most of the Shuwa-Arabs having joined his following. Dikwa also provided easy access to his garrison on the Shari. Rabih understood that the remoteness of Kukawa contributed to the ease with which he

entered Borno. He had no intention of being surprised from that direction. Militarily, Dikwa was more defensible, located as it was, on the firgi plains so that no enemy can advance unobserved. Unlike Kukawa, Dikwa was strategically located on the eastern route to Shari, Mandara, and beyond. The importance of this strategic location for military purposes was not lost on Rabih (Mohammed, 1995:63).

Lake Chad and the Europeans

The Lake Chad because of its central and advantageous location in the heart of Africa has attracted the attention of adventurers, both European and African. By the nineteenth century Borno had received numerous European explorers. These include: Denham, Clapperton, Oudney, Tyrwhitt and Vogel (1824-6); Barth, Richardson, Overweg and Vogel (1850-55); von Beuermann (1863); Rohlf's (1865-6); Nachtigal (1870-1); Matteucci and Massari (1880); MacIntosh (1891) and Monteil (1891). These explorers mostly came in on "scientific" missions but ultimately became precursors of imperial invasion and occupation of the Chad basin.

Rabih Fadl Allah was another adventurer who succeeded in defeating the al-Kanemi rulers of Borno in 1893. By his occupation of this area in the closing years of the century, he had unwittingly put himself in the contest for the Chad basin, against the imperial ambitions of Britain, France and Germany. The politics for the race to the Chad has been dealt with in detail elsewhere (Mohammed, 1995:152-62).

Rabih's presence complicated matters in the European race for the Chad. Pushed out of the Sudan by the Anglo-Egyptian government, his westward movement was necessitated by economic and political conditions which made his permanent establishment in any one place untenable. He had avoided any direct confrontation with the Europeans. Though the Mahdist uprising had erected a buffer between him and the Europeans to the north, he had avoided venturing further south to avoid a confrontation with the Europeans established on the Congo. Thus Rabih's area of operation was far in the interior and as yet out of menacing European presence.

By the 1880s European imperialism had taken a keen interest in the area he occupied. British companies operating on the Niger had under the influence of George Goldie, amalgamated to form what became the Royal Niger Company, to protect British imperial interest until the British government was ready to take over in 1900 (Adeleye, 1970:400). The French had also made an establishment in the Chad basin an important objective of their imperial policy (Adeleye, 1970:400). German imperial interest in the Chad basin came to the open only after the Berlin West Africa conference of 1884. After 1890 Borno became a point of anxious and acrimonious rivalry between Britain, France and Germany.

Ensnared in an area allotted to themselves at Berlin: Baghirmi to the French, metropolitan Borno to the British, and Rabih's capital of Dikwa to the Germans, it became clear to the Europeans that unless an alliance with Rabih was struck at least one of them would be forced to take to the field against him (Lavers and al-Hajj, 1973:4).

The rivalry between Britain and France and Rabih's vast military capacity made him an important player as well as a target. Each power wanted to extract a treaty from him. Unknown to them, Rabih was not only bent on preserving his independence but believed European powers do not keep promises made to weak parties. Rabih's main policy towards Europeans was one of caution borne out of fear and distrust. Yet he was pragmatic enough to seek to trade with the British established on the Benue.

Between 1897 and April 1900 the French engaged Rabih in numerous pitched battles. He died in one such battle on the banks of the Shari on 22 April 1900.

Conclusions

The history of Kanem and Borno was, to a great extent, determined by forces outside the control of its inhabitants. Thus the environment did determine the course of human development. For it has been shown that the history of this area was synonymous with the history of the peopling of the drying bed of the Lake Chad. The fertile farming and grazing lands around the lake made it attractive to farmers and pastoralists alike. Thus the area became a point of contest between these groups.

The unique location of the Lake Chad in the heart of Africa made it attractive to traders, conquerors and state builders. Rabih Fadl Allah, the nineteenth century conqueror was one such adventurer. Rabih's occupation of Borno in the heat of imperialist race for the Lake put him in direct confrontation with them. Unable to wrest concession from Rabih, France had to come to a military conclusion with Rabih.

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