



The Dynamics of Intergroup Relations in Pre-Colonial Nigeria up to 1800: A Reappraisal of a Lopsided Historiography

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ABSTRACT

Since the inception of intergroup relations as a recent theme in African and Nigerian historiography, most pioneer scholars who stimulated interest in the field would appear to have circumvented its political angle. In the study of inter-group relations, thus far historians have been extremely wary about venturing into direct discussion of political relations between groups, in the period before 1800. They rather concentrate their focus on the analysis of its form, pattern and content as well as the ways and manner it manifests between groups, creating thereby the impression that it is in the economic sphere that inter-group relations can be most meaningfully studied. The aim of this essay therefore is to reappraise the dynamics of intergroup relations within the context of political relations as against the preponderant economic theme that had hitherto held sway to balance the historiography of Nigerian precolonial intergroup relations.

INTRODUCTION

As the world faces an array of increasingly pervasive and dangerous social conflicts, race riots, ethnic cleansing, religious crises, the threats of terrorism, labour disputes, and violence against women, children and the elderly, to name a few, the study of how groups relate to and with one another has taken on a role of vital importance. To this end, the social and political psychology of Inter-group Relations in any setting cannot be overemphasized.¹

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Arising from the above, it is apparent that the ends to be achieved in inter-group relations, are universal – or nearly to raise no substantial question for the historian. They are above all, the questions of peace and war, and then such practical matters as the conclusion of treaties, the establishment of frontiers, the development and protection of trade, and the payment of tributes. The means by which these relations are conducted and regulated, on the other hand, has to be adjusted to changing circumstances².

The theme of inter-group relations is a cardinal aspect of Nigerian history. Ajayi convincingly demonstrates that Nigeria was not a mere geographical expression, or a creation of the British.³ He demonstrated that Nigerian history did not begin in 1914 or 1960, or with the British conquest or with the coming of the Portuguese. Rather, Nigerian history is the history of Nigerian peoples from the earliest times to the present.⁴

The history of these peoples were linked at many points and over several periods of time in myths of origin, exchange of people, trade, crafts, religious and other ideas linked not into one but into a network of interlocking relationships⁵. Much of these characterised the socio-political dimensions of pre-colonial inter-group relations. No doubt, the history and study of a people is an ongoing process. People review their past in the light of contemporary experience and they ask which of the relics of the past, have any significance for the present and the future? They modify the past in order to make it meaningful for the present and functional in preparing for a better and more positive future. Likewise, past ideas are modified in the light of new evidence and in the process, we ask new questions. Given the series of inter- ethnic conflicts in the western Niger Delta in the recent years, it is important to examine the patterns and forms of relationship among the inhabitants before the invention of Nigeria and the advent of petroleum products that seem to have exacerbated and transformed old rivalries into permanent tension and very violent conflicts.⁶

Pre-colonial Nigeria was an array of single nationalities of culturally related ethnic groups - large and small - that had functional indigenous social, economic and political institutions, which served their governance, trading and community needs. From earliest times a variety of links existed between the various states and peoples who were the predecessors of modern Nigeria⁷. Since the inception of intergroup relations as a recent theme in African historiography, most pioneer scholars who stimulated interest in the field would appear to have circumvented the political aspect of pre-colonial intergroup relations. They rather concentrate their focus on the analysis of its form, pattern and content as well as the ways and manner it manifests between groups⁸.

Inter-group relations, has been conceptualised by Sheriff and Sheriff as the state(s) of friendship or hospitality, cooperation or competition, dominance or subordination, alliance or enmity, peace or war between two or more groups and their respective members.⁹. They view groups as social units different from others in the relationship and each group has distinct

norms that guide their behaviour towards other groups. A conceptual definition of Inter-group relations has been given by Nwabueze thus:

the simple or complex, conflicting or accommodating, cooperating, consensual, peaceful or acrimonious; intense, dense or indifference way that one group is connected or associated with another in the course of their interaction with each other.¹⁰

In addition to the above definition, the author further illuminates the scope of inter-group relation as that which focuses essentially on the series of methods, strategies or approaches to the understanding of separate dynamics. And secondly, of diffusing tension between different groups and creating or building bridges across potential or actual conflict relationships, or directly promoting harmony.¹¹

Nwabueze's analysis of the scope of Inter-group relations study is imperative here. He asserts that "a comprehensive approach to intergroup relation study should embrace seven areas of interest". One of these is Inter-ethnic Relations as Inter-group Relations. Here it is meant the interaction of one ethnic group and another which cooperates and compete with one another in economic, political and social fronts sometimes under well organised group contexts with leaders playing prominent roles and at other times under less defined organisation in which the sense of group is sustained by common interest and territoriality.¹²

By and large, Inter-group relations as a theme in Nigerian history, is sufficiently familiar. It was an important feature of our pre-colonial socio-political history. However, recent Nigerian historiography revolutionised the study of inter-group relations by giving more emphasis to it. Its investigations have varied from epoch to epoch. Different Nigerian ethnic groups have always sought to preserve, among other things their perceptions of the relationships, which existed between them and their neighbours. This they do through their richly varied traditions of origin and migrations and through accounts of the rise and expansion of their socio-political systems.¹³ No doubt, such traditions and accounts constitute our main source of evidence for reconstructing the patterns and dynamics of inter-group relations in pre-colonial Nigeria. As Afigbo puts it, there is the need to recognize the fact,

...that inter-group relationship is a multifaceted and dynamic concept. Among its more common facets are the political (which might be war-like or peaceful), the economic and technological, the cultural (which later include art, dance and music, marriage customs, modes of dress etc). Other facets include interaction between legal and judicial systems, language and folklore, religion, philosophy and cosmology.¹⁴

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Arising from the above, one could dare say that what should be of interest to the scholar of inter-group relations between and among the different ethnic composition that make up modern Nigeria is to recognise the fact of how closely in contact they were with each neighbours. One ethnic group giving out its best and worst, and also taking from the other some of the best and worst through war, diplomacy, trade, marriage and other forms of inter-group contact. It was never unidirectional.

An attempt at a more penetrating analysis of political relations among the peoples of pre-colonial Nigeria in the period, 1500 - 1800 constitutes a useful and important contribution to the search for a deeper understanding of how things have come to be, that understanding which we historians believe should influence and condition our peoples' attitudes to one another. By implication, the political history of Nigerian has not been so well and fully studied that the political historian must necessarily move into other areas of history in order to maintain a degree of respectability and acceptability. If anything, the undeniable link between trade and politics must call for more holistic historical studies: which have to be the end products of our varying specializations.

"Inter-group relationship", writes A.E. Afigbo, "is multi-faceted and dynamic. Among its more common facets are the political ..., the economic and technological, the cultural ... so far the tendency has been to concentrate on the military and political aspects of the relationship to the neglect of all the others."¹⁵ It is not clear what Afigbo had in mind when he used the word 'political' in this context. In an objective judgement, merely stating that B migrated from A or that C conquered D, or that E borrowed certain socio-political institutions from F does not constitute any real study of political relations between our diverse peoples. In fact, it is the contention of scholars like Obaro Ikime that in the study of inter-group relations thus far historians have been extremely wary about venturing into direct discussion of political relations between groups, in the period before 1800.

Comments about inter-group relations were first made in terms of Nigerian historiography in the attempt to assail the concept that Nigeria is an artificial creation of the British. Thus, we have been quick to point out that long before the British arrived on our shores, our peoples traded together, inter-married became aware of the presence of neighbours around them. Nevertheless, a reading of *Groundwork of Nigerian History*¹⁶ does, in the strict sense, provide material for a discussion, including but also going beyond the arguments about economic relations and conquests, etc.

In deciding to engage in this discussion, one is fully aware that the subject is explosive and that he who dares to throw out postulates on political relations among our peoples is likely to find himself assailed by historians and non-historians alike. This is because political relations touch on a most sensitive chord and are often seen erroneously. Again, the fear goes beyond not only providing a junction between the past and the present but also capable of influencing current politics. So that the assault, when it begins,

may have some focus. It is germane here to have another look at the role of kingdoms and empire in inter-group relations in Nigeria. Some scholars have drawn attention to the fact that there is an over-concentration on these kingdoms and empires.¹⁷ It is against that background that Afigbo contends and accuses some scholars of a belief in “the myth that essential African history, which must be written around, and in terms of, the achievements and at times the equally grand failures of large political agglomerations usually known as empires and kingdoms.”¹⁸

This accusation no doubt is misconceived. To see the history of say the Isoko people in terms of the history of Benin is also to see the history of Benin in terms of the history of the Isoko: the thrust must cut both ways. Certainly, in the context of inter-group relations this is the only acceptable interpretation, for, the evidence abounds that the initiative in terms of relations did not always lie with the kingdoms and empires.¹⁹ The discussion, which follows, will, make it clear for another look at certain aspects of our study of these kingdoms and empires.

Origins of Dynasties - The Benin and Igala Examples.

One area that needs to be considered necessary as to raise some questions in the history of Nigeria between 1500 and 1800 is that which deals with the origins of dynasties. In this regard, perhaps the most rewarding is ‘that which deals with Benin-Ife dynastic links. The traditions, which speak of Oranmiyan, an Ife prince, being sent to Benin at the request of the latter (or at least some group from the latter), are well known. We will, of course, never know exactly what transpired at the end of the Ogiso period of Benin history. However, the Oranmiyan tradition appears to have gained acceptance albeit in varied forms in both Ife and Benin. However, there is argument as ‘to the real founder of the Benin dynasty. A.F.C. Ryder while recounting the tradition of how a number of Benin chiefs sent for “a sovereign from the Yoruba dynasty ruling in Ife”, warns that this could be no more than a piece of culture capture designed to relate the Benin dynasty to the prestigious Ife royal line.²⁰

R.E. Bradbury” states that Oranmiyan on arrival in Benin found that it was difficult for foreigners to rule Benin. “He therefore returned to Ife, having first impregnated the daughter of a village chief who, he said, would bear a son that would become king.”²¹ That son eventually became Eweka I. Goes on Bradbury, “That this dynasty was derived from Ife is beyond reasonable doubt”, and proceeds to justify this claim in terms of Benin royal insignia being sent from Ife and the Ooni having to approve the succession. Then Bradbury concludes, “the essential point of this foundation legend is that, while the kingship was from Ife, its first incumbent was a native-born Edo.”²²

P.A. Igbafe also comments on the Oranmiyan tradition. He recalls the division in Benin, following the rejection of *Ogiamwen*’s rule, and how while

a group sought to uphold the succession, another supported sending for a prince from Ife. "Benin traditions are not unanimous on whether Oranmiyan or Eweka, his son by a Benin woman, first ruled in Benin, as Oba of the new dynasty. The balance of evidence favours Eweka. The new dynasty therefore had Ife antecedents though rooted on Benin soil."²³

There is, additionally, the Ekaladerhan tradition. A version of this tradition claims that Ekaladerhan was a Benin prince who was barred from the palace as a consequence of some palace turmoil. He eventually found his way to Ife and settled there. When the political crisis in Benin later led to a request for an Ife prince, this version goes on, Ekaladerhan was sent to his own people by the Ooni. The Ekaladerhan tradition has received a new twist from the present Oba of Benin who on a public occasion in 1982 claimed:

There is no doubt that both the Ife Royal House and the Benin Royal House have a common ancestor. The point of disagreement is who that ancestor was and where he came from. To the Yoruba who call him Oduduwa, he came to Ife from the earth. To us in Edo that person was no other than Ekaladerhan who was exiled by his father, the last Ogiso of Benin.²⁴

Later in the same address, the Oba said, "Now, after Oranmiyan there were four Obas before Oguola, starting with *Eweka I, the founder of the present dynasty*".²⁵ All of our Benin experts thus pointedly or by implication accept the Oranmiyan tradition. Yet there is, consciously or unconsciously, some pre-occupation with ensuring that nothing is said that would create the impression that an Ife dynasty was established in Benin. The kingship was from - Ife, but the first incumbent was a native-born Edo (Bradbury); the dynasty had Ife, antecedents but it was rooted on Benin soil (Igbafe); Oraninyan fathered Eweka but it is not Oranmiyan who founded the Benin dynasty but Eweka I (Oba of Benin).

What is the significance of the attitude of these experts? Because we are in the realm of oral tradition, it is understandable that the historians of Benin should be cautious. But one is not sure that their caution does not derive from a fear that they may be accused of saying that Benin was at some point in its history dependent on Ife, however minimal the degree of dependence. While one cannot say that we should unnecessarily accept the traditions as history, we should not, by the way we present our history, create the impression that dependence by one group on another for a period of time, because of prevailing circumstances - is a phenomenon - that is not to be entertained in early Nigerian history. Such a phenomenon is a commonplace of the history of the rest of the world. Are we to reject it for Nigeria just because we have no written documents to fall back on? Let us be cautious, certainly. But let us also leave all the options open.

Moreover, attention should be drawn to an even more significant element. It is noteworthy that none of the experts quoted saw fit to ask the question, what was the relationship between Benin and Ife that led to Ife being chosen as the place sent to for a prince. Was it a random choice? In seeking to answer this question let us borrow the ideas of Afigbo who, in

discussing the phenomenon of one group going elsewhere to be invested with particular offices, proffered this explanation:

In the kind of environment that engendered the belief in the “brotherhood” of neighbouring monarchs, it would be nothing unusual for one crowned head to go to an elder or more powerful brother for the settlement of a dispute that seemed to threaten the integrity of the realm, or to procure from his court those of the symbols of his own office for which his “brother’s” craftsmen were widely famed. Nor would it be anything unusual to obtain the “brother’s” blessing during his accession and coronation.²⁶

Afigbo’s Hypothesis, that of a “brotherhood” deliberately contrived as a charter for determining relations between neighbouring groups is widespread in the Nigerian geographical area. How were these “brotherly” relations maintained? How was the relative age and influence of the “brothers” determined? Did the “brotherhood” become operative only in times of crises? Did Benin send to Ife for a prince because Ife was the closest of the forest kingdoms? Was Ife indeed the closest kingdom? Would one send to a hostile neighbour for the kind of assistance Benin was seeking at this particular point in her history? To this end, we must postulate on-going relations between Benin and Ife prior to the Oranmiyan episode. Today, we would call those relations diplomatic. It would seem that because we are over-preoccupied with the issue of sovereign-vassal relationship, which relationship is seen as being politically provocative in our present circumstances, we shy away from discussing other possible political relationships. To do so is clearly to limit the range of the analysis of intergroup relations.

From Benin let us move on to Igala which kingdom, it has been claimed, was firmly established in the 16th century or a little earlier. The emergence of this kingdom, Ade Obayemi has claimed, followed a “transfer of sovereignty from an aboriginal population - (the Okpoto of some accounts) to a foreigner, usually identified as Abutu Eje ... or as a prince from Ado (Benin) or Apa (Wukari Jukun), or Yorubaland.”²⁷ Then there “was the emergence of Achadu, a foreigner from Igbo whose personal qualities led to his marriage to the female Atta and who became the patron (as ritual husband) of the Atta, and the leader of the traditional king-makers – the *Igala Mella*”²⁸. The traditions it would seem represent an expression of certain types of political relationship between the emerging Igala state and their neighbours. Obayemi tells us that at a later stage of development the Igala waged a war of independence against the Jukun and successfully rejected a tribute-paying status.²⁹ This pre-supposes a period of Jukun overlordship. The nature of this overlordship is unclear. It may well be that the ‘foreigner’ who is alleged to have played a role in the evolution of the Igala state was Jukun and that he had tied the Igala to the Jukun state system. Or it may be that the Jukun sought to maintain a continuing hold on one of themselves who had gone on to Igala and so precipitated a crisis in Jukun-Igala relations. The *Achadu* tradition may well be seeking to explain a certain level

of Igala-Igbo relations sufficiently crucial to have led to a degree of accommodation, which made people of Igbo descent play an important part in the state system of Igala. The suggestion being made here is that the traditions, which relate to the evolution of dynasties and state structures, may well be encapsulating certain complex aspects of political relations between different Nigerian peoples, and that research must direct attention to this possibility and not just to the issue of sovereign-vassal relationship.

The Issue of Socio - Political Institutions and Titles and Investiture of Offices.

A common phenomenon of Nigerian history is that certain groups have adopted or adapted the political institutions and/or title systems of others. Also we have instances in which certain groups went outside their groups to take titles or to conduct investiture ceremonies. Thus, those normally referred to as the western Igbo have adopted Benin-style political institutions and title systems. The Urhobo and Isoko claim that certain aspects of their socio-political institutions were of Benin origin, some of their *Ivie* used to go to Benin for investiture. The northern Igbo of the Nsukka area took Igala titles and went there for investiture. S.A. Akintoye has shown that among the Ekiti, Akoko, and Owo, many chieftaincies have titles found in Benin.³⁰ The staff of office of the chief of Panda used to be given to him by the Atta of Idah.³¹ For quite a while, the *Ohimigi* of Igu had to be recognised by the Atta of Idi before he could exercise the powers of his office.³² The Idoma used to obtain titles first from Wukari then from Idah.³³

The above phenomenon has given rise to certain arguments in Nigerian historiography. What was the significance of the phenomenon in terms of inter-group relations? Afigbo and P.A. Oguagha as well as a number of other scholars who have worked on the Igbo have been quick to point out that adoption of the socio-political institutions of Benin or Igala by the Igbo must not be seen as evidence of conquest or political domination of the Igbo by the Bini or Igala.³⁴ The point is well taken. Geographical proximity, migrations, social and commercial intercourse on a regular basis could and did lead to mutual borrowings. But so could conquest and political domination over a period of time. Akintoye's study of relations between Benin and the north-eastern Yoruba already referred to makes it quite clear that in the case of Owo, Akoko and Ekiti, Benin military and political dominance did play a part in determining the nature of the political institutions and chieftaincy titles which developed in those areas.³⁵ And in this instance, the issue was not between an empire or kingdom and a non-centralized political system; it was a matter of relations between one kingdom and other kingdoms. Indeed, the dichotomy between kingdoms and segmentary societies particularly explicit in Afigbo's handling of Igbo-Benin relations³⁶ may well be a false dichotomy.

Or let us take the issue of Benin-Lagos relations. Professor A.B. Aderibigbe's study of early Lagos history reveals that Lagos, then under the Olofin, was conquered by Benin probably in the 16th century.³⁷ The traditions speak of a heroic resistance by the soldiers of the Olofin, led by the ruler himself. In the upshot, the Olofin was captured and taken to Benin. He returned to Lagos a vassal of the Oba of Benin. In fact Aderibigbe suggests that the present line of Lagos Obas descended from a Yoruba man by the name of Ashipa who conveyed to Benin the corpse of a Bini warrior-chief, Aseru. In gratitude for this noble act, the Oba of Benin, according to Aderibigbe, conferred the title of Olorogun of Lagos on him and also gave to him "a state sword and the royal Gbedu drum".³⁸ Ashipa, so the story goes, returned to Lagos with other persons sent by the Oba to assist him in the governance of Lagos. From the time of Ashipa's return, tribute was paid by Lagos to Benin with some breaks; till the British occupation.

If the above account represents anything like what actually happened, it is easy to see that the new ruling class would have contained Benin elements, but also that with time the Benin elements would have been assimilated into Lagos society and their descendants would increasingly become Yoruba till little of Benin blood remained. Even so, however, as Aderibigbe has pointed out, the Lagos chieftaincy system has been affected by the Benin period. Writes Aderibigbe, "There was the nucleus of the *Akarigbere* made up of the *Eletu* Odibo and the *Eleru* Iwase who originally came with the Oba from Benin."³⁹ Note the distinctly Edo sound of *Eletu* Odibo. Clearly, the Lagos political system was affected by the Benin conquest, and here again we are concerned with political relations between two kingdoms.

Let us then return to "the problem of Benin and Igbo-Igala relations, and the preoccupation with excluding conquest as a determinant of these relations." In a sense, the issue is not that important. The presence of Benin and Igala titles is evidence of relations between some of the Igbo groups and these kingdoms. Admittedly, these titles, etc could have been adopted as a consequence of prolonged contact of a social and economic nature. But why are we anxious to rule out the possibility of conquest? That Benin entered into an expansionist period in the 16th and 17th centuries is not doubted. If Benin could and did conquer certain parts of Yorubaland, including Lagos, why should we be unwilling to accept the possibility of conquest for some of the Igbo? Clearly, the problem of logistics would be less than in the case of Lagos. The argument by Afigbo that Benin did not, as of the time, have a superiority in arms or a larger population to provide the manpower needed for the conquest⁴⁰ is untenable once we remind ourselves that speaking of Igbo-Benin relations makes no real sense unless we mean Aboh-Benin relations, Ogwashi-Uku-Benin relations, Agbor-Benin relations and so on. The Igbo groups were not acting as one large ethnic group; they were acting as so many sub-ethnic groups. It is therefore unlikely that the population of any of these sub-ethnic groups would have been so much more than that of Benin in its expansionist period as to rule out the possibility of Benin

conquest. No one is saying that all the claims to conquest are to be accepted. What one is saying is that it is just as objectionable to reject the conquest theory off hand on the ground, among others. To accept it is to present "the history, of the West Niger Igbo ... (as) a kind of footnote, to the history of the Benin empire."⁴¹ Afigbo and Oguagha could be right when they argue that a great deal of research is needed in this area of Igbo-Benin relations. But to say that is to say that we must keep all the options open.

Finally, the basic issue here is, what do groups seek to gain when they seek investiture from other groups or go to other groups for titles? Part of the answer is obvious: prestige and legitimization. Benin, Igala, Nri, Wukari-all of these were important ritual centres as they were strong political entities. To be linked with them was to partake of their glory and prestige. And there is evidence that decline in glory resulted in a fall in the number of groups that maintained the association. Additionally, there may well have been another consideration – that of security. Some of the smaller groups may well have sought to be linked however tenuously with some of the kingdoms and empires in the hope that knowledge of such a link would pre-empt attacks by their other neighbours. Such a consideration would be part of realpolitik. We also need to remind ourselves that groups that deliberately took titles or sought investiture from others would seek to maintain friendly relations with same. Would it be too farfetched to argue that here again we are considering aspects of diplomatic relations, deliberately cultivated for the purpose of satisfying certain needs of state?

On the role of Kingdoms and Empires in the Nigerian Geographical Area

In what has been said above, reference has been made to works which claim that Nigerian history has been written by some of us in a manner which creates the impression that the larger political entities, the kingdoms and empires, dominated the history of the smaller, non-centralized groups. Evidence of this trait, Afigbo claims, can be found in the traditions of origin of groups like the Isoko, Urhobo, some of the Igbo groups - those traditions that link these groups to Benin.⁴² Further evidence has to do with the conquest theory already discussed. Some of the criticism is fully justified. On the issue of origins, as this affects Benin, the state of knowledge, and the evidence from linguistics are such that many of the claims need revision. Often what the claim to Benin origin means really is no more than that at some stage in Benin history groups moved out and settled among other 'Nigerian' groups already settled elsewhere.⁴³ The reference to Benin as a place of origin in such circumstances may be due to the fact that the migration from Benin was the last of the migrations and so the most remembered. Or the tradition may have been deliberately built up for the selfish reason of the particular group itself not in glorification of Benin but in self-glorification. More fundamentally, how does a claim to origin from a

centralized political system-Benin, Idah, Ife or whatever, provide evidence of the dominance of our history by certain groups who themselves must have migrated or received migrants from other groups? Admittedly in the Yoruba country, the alleged role of Ile-Ife as a centre of dispersal for the Yoruba people (a theory that has, been exploded by Obayemi and others) has in recent times led to all sorts of complications in relations between the Obas of Yorubaland. But observe that, that alleged role did not stop the race of the Old Oyo Empire which in terms of over-all impact Nigerian history can be said to have dwarfed Ife. Note that in the changed circumstances of the 19th century, the alleged place of Ife in Yoruba history did not stop Ife falling. It fell before the onslaught of Modakeke and became a tributary state to Ibadan for a period.⁴⁴ clearly, it would be wrong to claim that because certain traditions of origin say that certain Yoruba groups migrated from Ife, therefore the history of the former is but a footnote to the history of the latter. To make that kind of claim is clearly to over-react. Our conclusions must be based on the totality of the evidence, not on chosen strands thereof. With that comment, it is therefore pertinent to proceed to some re-interpretation of the role of kingdoms and empires in our history in the context of intergroup relations.

Perhaps the first point that should be made is that which has to do with the state formation and empire building process. Wherever one looks, that process necessarily involved the widening of the area of activity. If we take Old Oyo, for example, and assume that Oranmiyan and his followers went on one long trek from Benin to Ife and then on to their new home, the very wanderings would have resulted in a thorough mixing of peoples. Then would come the actual settling down process in an area in which both Nupe and Borgu elements already had or were soon to have interests. The accompanying struggle for supremacy (and land?) in the area accounts for the Oyo-Nupe and Oyo-Borgu wars with which we are all familiar. These wars, while they lasted, were, admittedly, disruptive of economic and other peaceful pursuits. As has been argued by Akinjogbin and Ayandele, they undoubtedly had the result of forcing all parties concerned to strengthen their fighting forces. This to enable them to become more cohesive in the process.⁴⁵ A strengthening of fighting forces was a major prerequisite to the expansionist phase of Old Oyo which ended with the establishment of her power and influence over the Egba, Egbado, Dahomey, etc., a definite widening of Old Oyo's area of activity and of influence.

In the case of Hausaland,⁴⁶ the state formation process in the area can be said to have involved the migration of groups from surrounding areas. Thus, whether we take the example of the Bagauda dynasty or of 'the stranger from Turunku' in the case of Zazzau, we are dealing with a process of social and political accommodation of various groups. But perhaps even more important for our purpose is the inconclusiveness of empire building efforts in Hausaland in the period up to 1800. The many wars which feature in the history of Hausaland in this period represent the effort by the various states

(each of which in the context of this article represents a separate, independent, distinct unit) to expand their economic, political and military might at the expense of the neighbouring peoples. Sometimes, the rise of new states like Kebbi or the consolidation of others like Gobir, was only possible at the expense of already established ones. The 'empires' of Queen Amina of Zaria and Kebbi about which Adeleye speaks must have represented wide ranging contact and influence involving the reduction of certain other states to tribute paying status for varying lengths of time. The struggle for economic political supremacy between Kano and Katsina is well known. That struggle was only brought to an end by the menace of the Kwararafa, which forced Kano and Katsina into treaty of amity, the better to be able to withstand the Kwararafa threat. The Gobir-Zamfara conflicts were marked by shifting loyalties and varying fortunes, which had a marked effect on the geopolitics of the area. Taken together, these wars of the period from the 16th to the 18th century including the wars between the Kwararafa and Hausaland and Borno as well as those between Borno and Hausaland would have involved considerable population shifts in the form of war captives. Such captives were forced to make new homes for themselves; some became important members of the *masu sarauta* in their new homes. Indeed, one can claim that the wars would have played an important role in the emergence of a common Hausa culture.

Nor was that all. The Hausa states also waged wars in the middle belt area. Not all the soldiers and the traders who accompanied them to minister to their needs returned to Hausaland. Some stayed back and fused with peoples of the area into which they had moved. Mahdi Adamu tells us that this kind of fusion was responsible for the emergence of certain new ethnic groups like the Gwandara, Dakarawa, Dukawa and Muryam.⁴⁷ In other instances, Hausa settlers succeeded in establishing new dynasties in the areas into which they had moved. Adamu gives the examples of Yawuri, Kumbashi, Gwari and Kanem.⁴⁸ In other words, the state formation process and the struggle for survival and mastery followed that process in Hausaland. It invariably produced important and lasting geo-political results in the area, involving a delicate balancing of interests among quite a number of groups, as well as producing a permanent impact on the demography of the entire area north of the Niger-Benue confluence.

There is perhaps no need to take the case of Borno at any length in this article, for that is one of the better-known cases of our history. Even within what one might describe as metropolitan Borno, the emergence first of the kingdom and then of the empire represented not just an on-going process of fusion and accommodation. It also saw series of migrations from the Borno area which migration are reflected in the traditions of many groups in the 'Middle Belt'.⁴⁹ It also saw various Hausa states becoming tributary for varying lengths of time to Borno. The stalemate between Borno and the Kwararafa was testimony to a balance of military might between them. In fact, Adamu has argued that the military might of the Kwararafa was one of

the factors that checkmated Hausa and Borno empire building efforts in the 'Middle belt'⁵⁰ in this period – a fact of lasting political significance for Nigerian politics.

The activities, which have been summarised in the immediately preceding pages to which one must add similar activities involving the Delta States, Benin, Igala, etc., were clearly wide ranging. To them we must add the trading activities of these states and empires, which necessarily were just as wide ranging. Robin Norton has argued that one phenomenon of the non-centralized polities was the absence of a class, the full time business of which was to govern.³⁴ Conversely, in every kingdom and empire, there did exist a class that needed to be provided for because it was concerned with the business of governing. Providing for this class called forth additional economic activity. Also once an empire gets under way new demands arise – including the maintenance of the military machine – which necessitate greater economic activity. In sheer volume, complexity and range, therefore, the economic activities of a kingdom or empire are likely to outstrip those of a smaller polity. In this context, it is not necessary to detail the trading activities of Borno, the Hausa states, Nupe, Igala, Benin, Old Oyo, the Delta States, etc. These are all known in terms of their extent, range and many-sidedness. In terms of what could be regarded as the needless dichotomy between kingdoms and empires and non-kingdoms, it must be clear that the initiative in terms of trade was dictated not by the size of the polity but by the needs of each polity. Therefore, there can be no question of one group constantly dictating how the economy shall be ordered, except where one is vassal to the other. A good example of a small polity taking a leading initiative in trade is that of the Aro. Aro commercial activities are well known. Those activities have given the Aro a predominant position in the history of southeastern Nigeria in the period up to 1800 and even in the 19th century. The point, which has been made that the Aro did not establish a "political empire" over Igboland can detract nothing from that predominance. In terms of inter-group relations, Aro trading activities were an important determinant even in political terms in certain areas of southeastern Nigeria. It is, for example, difficult to argue that a group that provided a final court of appeal for others had no political impact on these others. That debate can be taken up elsewhere.

On Conquests and Tribute Paying

It is perhaps necessary here to say a few words about conquests and the payment of tribute in pre-colonial Nigeria. First we need to remind ourselves that in the African setting, before the coming of Shaka, conquests were hardly ever total, nor was the payment of tribute always permanent. Perhaps the best example of the latter fact can be found in relations between Borno and Hausaland and between the different Hausa states. The evidence from these places is that payment of tribute was an acceptance of temporary defeat

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or incapacitation. Thus, Kano, or Katsina paid tribute to Borno as a means of securing a lull in hostilities. Whenever either state felt internally strong enough, it withheld the payment of tribute. If Borno felt strong enough, war was resumed; if not things were allowed to lie. In other words, the payment of tribute was quite often an instrument of diplomacy. What is true for Borno and Hausaland is also true for other areas in pre-colonial Nigeria. References have been made to Igala refusing to pay tribute to the Jukun, or of some Edoid groups falling off in the payment of tribute to Benin. There is also the case of Nupe and Oyo each seeking to throw off tribute paying status at different time in their history. These are clear indications that conquests were not always permanent; that no one state was dominant for all or even most of its history over all surrounding peoples. There was something of a cycle in the history of these states. The size of empires kept altering all the time in line with the balance of power between the metropolitan power and the outlying province doing the *amoebic* dance. That balance of power was in turn determined by a variety of other factors. It is also important to remind ourselves that sometimes payment of tribute must have been embarked upon to pre-empt war and conflict, another instance of diplomatic manoeuvre. Thus, it is more than likely that some of the Edoid and western Igbo groups, which claim to have paid tribute to Benin, fall into this category. Seen in this light, there is no doubt that inter-group relations among our multifarious peoples fall into greater historical perspective

CONCLUSION

In concluding, it is important to state that nothing said in this work is designed to justify an over-concentration on the history of empires and kingdoms. It will not be wide off the mark to suggest that the history of the so-called non-centralized polities was dictated by that of the kingdoms and empires. That history had its own dynamics, which included relations with other groups, be these centralized or non-centralized polities. Indeed, in the realm of inter-group relations, there were ways in which non-centralized polities played crucial roles in the history of centralized polities. Perhaps an excellent example is that given by E. J. Alagoa in his examination of relations between Benin and the Ijo groups of Olodiana, Furupagha and Egbema. These groups, according to Alagoa, controlled the site of Ughoton, the port of Benin. The Oba of Benin had to enter into formal agreement with these Ijo groups to secure hitch free use of the port.⁵¹ Clearly, in this instance, a non-centralized polity was important enough in the affairs of a centralized polity to demand adequate attention. As earlier indicated, the thrust of relations was not and could not have been always one way

It is therefore unacceptable that historians of early Nigeria should seek to debunk the idea of conquests in the relations between certain groups. Certainly not all such claims are to be entertained. Such evidence need to be examined closely, to continue researches towards establishing what in fact did happen. Nevertheless, one cannot reject the idea of conquests even before such researches are carried out. History is full of groups gaining temporary ascendancy in war as in other fields over their neighbours. There could be no denying of that possibility for the history of pre-colonial Nigeria. What is imperative is to seek to understand exactly how the conquests, which took place, took place; to seek an understanding of their significance and impact; what they meant to the two groups concerned; what relations subsisted after the hostilities.

It seems obvious that the examination of political relations between Nigerian groups has been too simplistic. Political relations do not consist just of an examination of sovereign-vassal relationships; they consisted of more many other forms of association. In fact, there should be a closer examination of these other possibilities.

By and large, it is most probable that historians have not sufficiently drawn attention to the role of the kingdoms and empires, which did flourish in the Nigerian geographical area in the shaping of what we may refer to as modern Nigeria: It is not enough to say that the peoples traded together and that they intermarried. They did more. The kingdoms and empires through conquest, assimilation and other processes brought many Nigerian peoples together, albeit in different geographical locations. The Benin Empire had within it not only those who may be described as *Edoid*, but also Yoruba and Igbo. It had relations with the Igala and Nupe kingdoms. It clearly also had relations with Igbo and Ijo groups which may never have come within its political umbrella as such. The Old Oyo empire had within it a number of the Yoruba groups which would otherwise have been independent. It had fairly close dealings with the Nupe and the Borgu. The Igala kingdom, as has been shown, had relations of a political nature with many groups of the middle belt. So had Nupe. In the farther north, the Hausa states in their effort to see whether any of them could become the master of the region must have come to know each other very closely indeed. Nor was that all. Warfare between the Hausa states and Borno and the middle belt led not only to a great ruling of peoples, but to permanent settlement of Hausa in the middle belt and the emergence of new ethnic groups, the result of fusion between the hosts and the newcomers. Some of these Hausa migrants succeeded in establishing dynasties in some of the middle belt centres. The overall consequence of these developments was that those who became Nigerians were not nearly so strange to one another as is so often proclaimed, whenever the people are faced with political difficulties in modern Nigeria. Nigeria history before the coming of the British had witnessed 'overlapping imperialisms' which must have left their mark on the thinking of the peoples; on their estimation of various neighbours and on their attitude to the coming of the British. Besides,

the remembrance of the events of pre-British days must continue to linger in certain areas and under certain circumstances of the nation present day politics. The more we understand the politics of the past, the more we are, likely to present a fuller interpretation of the politics of today.

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