

HISTORICAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF INTERNAL IMPERIALISM IN PRE-COLONIAL AFRICA: AN IN-DEPTH STUDY OF IMPACTS OF FULANI IMPERIALISM IN NORTHEAST YORUBA LAND, 1840-1897

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ABSTRACT

This study offers a critical historical, anthropological examination of internal imperialism in preColonial Africa. Scholarship on pre-Colonial imperialism in Africa provides big data on the dynamics of intergroup relations among autochthonous groups and nationalities in the continent. This study focuses on the complex relationship between the Fulani and indigenous peoples of northeast Yoruba land from 1840-1897, characterized by invasion, excessive plundering, and domination. The study aims to examine the impacts of Fulani's hegemony over northeast Yoruba land. The study of the period can be enriched with political and anthropological discussion. Data indicate Fulani's incursions into northeastern Yoruba land for sixty(60) years, which was designed as a jihad. The source materials used include ethnography, oratures, and literary sources. Methodologically, the study uses political, anthropological discursive paradigms and field-based examination of the dynamics of the political interplay among the groups involved. It is explanatory and quantitative in presentation. This study reveals the variables of political, cultural, and social engagements, law, order, conflict, and governance between the Fulani and the peoples of the northeast Yoruba land. Research findings reveal that Fulani rule was imperialistic, marked by excessive inhuman and material exploitation, demographic dislocation, and political manipulation.

The study concludes that Fulani's domination has severe political, anthropological, and historical implications, and it establishes that the unity of the oppressed people led to the defeat of the Fulani and their expulsion from Yoruba land. The study reiterates that Fulani's presence in the traditional communities of Northeast Yoruba land was internal imperialism

Keywords: Fulani, internal imperialism, jihad, political anthropology.

INTRODUCTION

This paper submits that historical, anthropological investigation into internal imperialism in pre-Colonial Africa can enrich our knowledge of intergroup relations among autochthonous groups and nationalities. Internal imperialism in pre-colonial Africa falls within what scholars described as parts of interethnic relations in ancient Africa (Buttner, 1975; Kiwanuka, 1972; Pella, 2014; Taylor, 2018). This paper construes internal imperialism as the hegemonic rule of one group over another utilizing territorial acquisition and control. Imperialism is a complex system whereby people are ruled and dominated by another group by force. One such internal imperialism in Africa was the Fulani domination of northeast Yoruba land from 1840-1897, which is the focus of this study. From 1836-40, the Nupe ethnic group, the northern neighbours of the Akoko and Okun, fell to Fulani hands. From Nupe land, the Fulani attacked their southern Yoruba neighbours (Apata, 2003; Lewu, 205; Tubi, 2021).

The paper utilized field-sourced data involving anthropological and historical materials. This involves ethnographic insertion, by which the researchers lived and interacted in participation-observation with the communities of northeast Yoruba land. Oral information in stories, songs, and dance considered relevant to the study was collected from Key informants and analysed. Also, the paper derived data from archaeology and oratures obtained firsthand from the peoples of Akoko and Okun lands. In addition, it examined relevant literature, which include firsthand written accounts of colonial administrators and missionaries who witnessed the events of 1840-1897 in northeast Yoruba land and writings of African scholars.

INTERLINK OF HISTORY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

Kroeber first drew scholarly attention to the interconnectivity between anthropology and history (Kroeber, 1966), which has become more topical in scholarship. This paper explains historical anthropology as the study of historiographical data by application of anthropological paradigms. It focuses on records, artifacts, and oratures, which are analyzed through historical prism. It is becoming increasingly clear that history and anthropology are inseparable because of their common interest in human beings (Axel, 2002; Cohn, 1987). The two disciplines are mutually beneficial, a theme that needs to be adequately explored in African scholarship. Anthropology will purge the history of conjectural traits, and history will extend anthropology into the past. It is a qualitative research focusing on the interplay of political, cultural, and social engagements, law, order, conflict, and governance. It focuses on field-sourced data and analysis of the interplay of politics and political influence in human societies. Scholars like Gutorov (2019) state that political cultures have anthropological dimensions. The paper submits that historical issues can only be adequately situated once they become the study of society which subjects it to critical anthropological problems. Archaeologists such as Obayemi (1976, 1978), Usman (2003), and Tubi (2020, 2021) and historians like Apata (2003), Aremu and Oniye (2018), Aremu and Afolabi (2018), Idrees (1989), Kolapo (2012), Lewu (2015), Mason (1973) amongst others, have shed lights on the

period. However, the events were not anticipated and required political and anthropological study and discussion. It is envisaged that historical anthropological study portends excellent significance for the critical examination of traditional societies, as Axel (2002), Lewellen (2003), Kurtz (2001), Aronoff and Kubik (2014) pointed out. Therefore, the study by applying political anthropological paradigms, seeks to make meaningful contributions towards the study of internal imperialism in pre-Colonial Africa, and it will help discover, interpret and document those events of 1840-1897 that hinge on political power organization and social control which the Fulani exercised over northeastern Yoruba land.

FULANI CONQUESTS AND DOMINATION OF NUPE, NORTHEASTERN YORUBA, AND THEIR NEIGHBOURS

The Fulani are groups of kindred indigenous Africans originating in Futa Toro, an ancient territory covering parts of present-day Senegal. They are found in several countries of West Africa, especially Nigeria, Niger, Senegal, Mauritania, and Guinea. The northeastern Yoruba are the Akoko and Okun-speaking peoples, indigenes of the northeastern most part of Yoruba land. They are two of about 30 indigenous dialects of the Yoruba language. Due to a series of internecine wars among the Nupe and political upheavals from 1836-1840, the Fulani completed their total conquest of Nupeland and usurped the throne. The factors that facilitated this conquest ranged from division among Nupe people, dynastic struggles among Nupe princes, internecine wars among Nupe groups, superior military tactics of the Fulani, and finally the motivation received from successful Fulani conquests of Hausaland.

After the conquest of Nupeland, the Fulani turned their attention to their southern Yoruba neighbours in a series of coordinated attacks disguised as jihad. From 1840-1897, the Fulani achieved the conquest or near conquest of Akoko, Epira, Okun, and Kukuruku peoples (Apata, 2003; Aremu & Oniye, 2013; Obayemi, 1978; Tubi, 2020). The Akoko and Okun peoples called it *ogun Tapa/ibon*, (war from Tapa/Nupe). The conquest was achieved for several reasons, including the conquered people's weak military strength, lack of unity to confront a common enemy, and internal collaboration given to the invaders. Other factors include a weak traditional political system of the people, connivance of European traders with Fulani raiders at the Niger-Benue confluence led by Tubman Goldie of the Royal Niger Company stationed at Lokoja, and probing from the Caliphate at Sokoto/Gwandu for more conquests to meet their demands for enslaved people as war booties.

Religion was used as a pretext for the wars (Obayemi, 1978; Tubi, 2020; 2021). Through alleged forceful *jihadic* incursions into the Niger-Benue confluence area, the Fulani extended their hegemony over northeastern Yoruba. As a result of these wars, the Okun, Akoko, Epira, and Kukuruku peoples came under Fulani influence and hegemony. The period was marked by coordinated raids and imperialistic hegemony described as jihad. Jihad was a subterfuge for slave raids and economic domination. Religion, the touted reason for the invasion, was not pursued, as proselytism was abandoned, and the Fulani engaged in unbridled imperialism. Key informants (Abiola, personal

communication; Ajakaiye, personal communication; Akande, personal communication; Gbaluju, personal communication) point out that complete domination was fully imposed on the peoples and was marked with military conquest, economic exploitation, technological plundering, total political domination, cultural bullying, depopulation, massive enslavement, killing, and arson.

POLITICAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF FULANI IMPERIALISM ON NORTHEAST YORUBALAND AND THEIR NEIGHBOURS

This study offers a new vista of knowledge on the impacts of the chequered Fulani-Yoruba relations of 1840-1897. By looking at the political anthropological impacts, it seeks to connect scholarship with analysis of power structures, consensus, and patterns of social contexts. The assessment of the anthropological details of the period needs ethnographic details. Local informants uphold that Fulani hegemony was the most destructive event in the annals of the Akoko and Okun and their neighbours (Gbaluju, personal communication; Abiola, personal communication; Joledo, personal communication). The invasion of northeast Yoruba land and the neighbouring peoples was conducted in coordinated ruthlessness and with barbarity as with all wars. The invaders began by kidnapping unsuspecting farmers who went to the farm. They laid ambush for women and children who went to fetch water, collect firewood, etc., and kidnapped them. Later, they launched a full-scale war of enslavement and total subjugation. They used extreme force to exterminate those who put up resistance to them. Those who hid in caves were smoked and killed inside the cave. They destroyed farmsteads and looted animals and crops. They enslaved whole communities. They burnt houses and obliterated many settlements from the map. Many huge communities were reduced to rubble.

Kings and chiefs, husbands and wives, adults and teenagers, mothers and their children, freeborn and enslaved people, males and females were all captured and taken to Nupeland as war booties where they were sold as enslaved people or were taken to Gwandu the southern headquarters of Sokoto Caliphate as tributes. Some were conscripted into the military; few were kept as house helps and artisans; among them, some were assigned to the loom to weave cloths. Several metallurgists were sent to foundries to mine, cast, and forge metals at blooms, while others were taken to farm camps. Historians are still unable to completely decipher the extent of carnage or count the number of enslaved persons. When Lord Frederick Lugard, the British colonial administrator, arrived in Lokoja, he visited the area and lamented the severity of Fulani rule over the people. The diaries of Lord Lugard, published in 1967, contain details of his eyewitness account of the inhuman treatment imposed by the Fulani rulers on the people. He particularly noted that people were forced to give their children to the jihadists as payment for severe taxation (Perham & Bull, 1976).

Oral sources (Alaniyo, personal communication; Obahun, personal communication; Oaju, personal communication; Otetubi, personal communication) and literary sources (Apata, 2003; Aremu & Afolabi, 2018; Lewu, 2015; Mason, 1970; Tubi, 2020) show that Fulani imperialism had multifarious impacts on the Akoko and Okun speaking peoples and their neighbours with grave anthropological consequences and far-

reaching proportions. The following points can be discussed as having political anthropological relevance: Imposition of excessive taxation, constant wars, and massive enslavement, conscription for military services, forceful deportation and demographic dislocation, annihilation of local industries, and imposition of cultural hegemony.

(i) Massive enslavement of persons: The conquered territories were subjected to constant invasions and massive enslavement. People were captured and held as cartels, mere commodities to be bought, sold and used. Captured people to be sold were gathered as commodities in a market square at Bida. Key informants say that those to be sold would sit on bare ground with two legs spread forward, while those that have been bought would sit on one leg and put one leg forward. They were subjected to the worst forms of inhuman degradation. William Balfour Baikie, the British explorer, reports that in 1854 about 300-400 enslaved people (consisting of Akoko, Ebira, Ekiti, Okun, Kukuruku peoples and others) were sold daily, and someday the figure rose to 800. A similar narrative about the plight of the people was provided by the African missionary Samuel Ajayi Crowther, the first African Anglican Bishop, who in 1854, was a firsthand witness of the events at Lokoja. By calculating daily sales at 400 persons by day, the figure comes to 146,000 per year. Multiply this figure by sixty(60) years of the hegemony, and the total persons enslaved by the Fulani would be about 8,760,000 persons. There were 1,611 slave labour camps in Nupe for captured people (Lewu, 2015; Tubi, 2021).

(ii) Economic impact: One of the major fallouts of the raids in northeast Yoruba land and the surrounding areas was the economic despoliation of the people. The imperialists literarily imposed economic slavery on the Akoko and Okun peoples through resident agents. According to a Colonial report by James (1914), the conquered peoples lived in serfdom condition, whereby the invaders appropriated all their produce and services. Their *ogbas*(agents) forcefully demanded that people adhere strictly to paying tributes and exorbitant taxes that were further imposed. Their foodstuffs and domesticates were confiscated at will by the *ogba*. Another dimension was that famine and hunger became entrenched due to constant invasions and raids that prevented them from farming. Due to fear of enslavement, the people abandoned their settlements and hid in hills and caverns. The result was severe famine and hunger. Key informants say that in the annals of the people, the period remains the most unforgettable period of famine and hunger called *iyanagbedimotan*, meaning “famine that shrinks buttocks and hips” (Lewu, 2015; Tubi, 2020).

(iii) Demographic impact: Depopulation of the entire landscape was another impact of Nupe-Fulani imperialism. Prior to the Fulani incursion, the area was said to be heavily populated (Ijagbemi, 2005; Bakinde, 2013; Tubi, 2021). Ethnographic sources assert that communities were heavily depopulated due to incessant raids by invaders. European accounts indicate that whole villages were captured and taken to Bida as enslaved people (Vandeleur, 1898), as the invaders kidnapped and enslaved people. The Colonial office (File 2339 A NAK) records that, had the British not come by the time they did, all communities would be razed. Slave raids massively depopulated the entire area;the only

exception was the Owe people, who enjoyed the patronage of the Fulani rulers. The communities of Kiri, Bunu, and Oworo were the worst hit. Most communities in these areas were completely obliterated from the map.

Another aspect of the demographic factor was the formation of Yoruba communities in Nupeland. One such group consists of the *ěji-okun*, formerly enslaved people who decided to remain in Nupeland. Another group is the *enawuzi*, a group of servants who remain at the service of Nupe rulers and the elites to date. The last group includes artisans called *konu*.

(iv) Destruction of traditional technology: The raids and enslavement destroyed the people's traditional technology. Archaeological research by scholars like Obayemi (1980) and Tubi (2020) have revealed data on abundant ancient iron technology, pottery, and weaving among the northeastern Yoruba peoples. Researchers posit that they were adept in iron and brass casting (Obayemi, 1978; Tubi, 2020, 2021). The Okun were also experts in cloth weaving and pottery technology. Old brass and iron working were at an advanced stage among the people. The Bunu *opo* cloth was renowned in the whole area. The invasion undermined these achievements. The raids impeded the advancement of traditional technology. It killed it in many places. They lost an immense number of their skilled men and women to Bida. Expert blacksmiths were enslaved to Bida and they began to produce weapons of war and farming equipment for their masters. According to oral sources, one of the consequences of that local imperialism was the forced transfer of cloth weaving and dyeing technology from Okunland to Nupeland. The enslaved Yoruba people, known as *konu* have formed a weavers' guild that introduced new techniques in weaving and *indigo* dyeing in Nupeland (Lewu, 2015; Tubi, 2021).

(v) Emergence of ruling families: Another significant impact of the hegemony on the Akoko and Okun and their neighbours was the distortion of their political system with the emergence of ruling families. The people that came under Fulani domination, the Akoko, Ebira, and Okun, according to Bakinde (2013:56), “did not evolve a state system like other parts of Yorubaland where there is a ruling house. Rather, they evolved a rotational system whereby the kingship rotates from one quarters to another at the demise of the incumbent king”. Similarly, Apata (2003), Obayemi (1976), and Tubi (2020) point out the absence of the concept of ruling families or royal houses in their traditions. However, for the exigencies of imperialism, the Fulani conquerors forcefully created ruling families in the conquered communities, which became willing tools in their hands.

Under Fulani's imperialistic administrative purposes, in some communities, collaborators were installed as kings, and their families were perpetuated on the throne. The best illustrations for this are Arigidi, Ikare, Kabba, and Ogidi communities. The idea of a "ruling family" was promoted in Kabba and Ogidi, which had no basis in the tradition of the Okun. Among the Akoko, in Ikare, it resulted in the imposition of non-indigenes to Olukare stool, traceable to Fulani- Hausa ancestry against the traditional Owale stool, while at Arigidi, a king with a novel title, Zaki (non-Yoruba title) became the king. Due to the imperialistic influence of the period on the two neighboring towns of Kabba and

Ogidi, which played opposite roles in Fulani's imperialism, Kabba became the most centralized polity while Ogidi became the most decentralized polity in Okunland (Tubi 2020).

(vi) Mistrust among communities: Part of the outcome of Fulani's imperialism was that mistrust and suspicion arose among people against communities that were alleged, rightly or wrongly, to have assisted Fulani's imperialistic domination and the exploitation of the people. Some people in general discussions are still referring to the animosity. According to Lewu (2015) a historical scholar, the Okun kith and kin still harbour animosity against the Owe for their support of the Fulani. She observes that there still remains among the Okun a general "antiobaroo feelings of the 19th century which translated into anti-owe sentiment" which "are yet to be eradicated even in contemporary Okunland" (Lewu, 2015, p. 159).

On another level, there remains unending animosity by the *oji-okun*, *konu* and *enawuzi* (three groups of enslaved Yoruba in Nupeland) against their Yoruba brethren for giving them up to slavery. Their anger persists against the betrayal of their kin who sold them into slavery or who could not save them from invaders. After the cessation of hostilities, these groups of Yoruba refused to return home. Key informants opine that the sense of shame prevented many from returning home, yet data indicate that some were already integrated into the ruling elites of Nupeland, making it impossible for them to return home (Lewu, 2015; Tubi, 2020).

(vii) Famine and hunger: Another consequence of the imposed wars was hunger. According to the Colonial report on Kabba Division of 1932, (N.A.K. Loko. Prof. 354), the invaders deliberately imposed systematic starvation as a war mechanism. While the occupation lasted, starvation and hunger confronted the people largely because they had no time for farming and cultivating farm produce. The farms they cultivated were appropriated fiercely by the *ogbas*. People migrated to hilltop sites for settlement to escape enslavement and sought hideout in caves and rock shelters. As a result of these prolonged disruptions of farming activities, the people experienced what they generally referred to as *iyanagbedimotan* (Alaniyo, personal communication, Otetubi, personal communication, Joleo, personal communication); a graphic description of the severest hunger in their annals.

(viii) Social impact: Socially, the imposed hegemony bequeathed its consequences on the people. The greatest of these was the emergence of the so-called lineage of slaves. The destructive and cataclysmic events of incessant raids in the area in the 1800s created a slave class that was novel to the people. The Okun had groups of aboriginals and autochthones called *idamori/omoodo* some of whom were oppressed but not classified as *aru* (slaves). However, due to the invasions and the intense oppression that became exacerbated during Fulani slave raids, they were forced to coalesce into "slave clan" within Okun society. After that, the classification into slave clans became entrenched (Tubi, 2020).

Another aspect of social impact became noticeable in their language. Due to intense Fulani presence and their Nupe collaborators, there was infusion of Nupe terms and names into northern Yoruba terminologies. Some indigenous words acquired other names like; evil (*ibi*) became *bilisi*, property (*ohun ini*) became *dukia*, truth (*otito*) became *hakika* and judgment (*idajo*) became *seria*. Also, personal names like Mayaki, Makun, Abu, Sumanu, Bello, Maliki, etc., were enculturated into their lexicon. The social impact could be felt in the adoption of Nupe culture by some Yoruba people. Fulani and Nupe tribal marks appeared on the people. Similarly, Fulani and Nupe dressing and traditional attires filtered into their costumes (Gbaluju, personal communication, Jelodo, personal communication, Obahun, personal communication).

(ix) Impact on settlement pattern: One of the enduring effects of Fulani incursions was felt in the settlement pattern of the people. Bakinde (2013) points out that human settlement in the area has long antiquity and that communities flourished in the past. Due to incessant wars imposed by the Fulani, traditional settlements disappeared while new ones emerged. Villages and towns were abandoned due to incessant raids, and the people were forced to migrate to inaccessible areas in forests and hilltops. It was after the conquest of Bida by the British constabularies that people finally returned from their hideouts. Consequent to the imposition of British imperialism on the people under *Pax Britannica*, modern road networks necessitated the relocation of new settlements along tarred roads in search of modernity.

(x) Emergence of war lords: One of the effects of the invasions imposed on northeast Yoruba land and their neighbours was the emergence of war lords (*akogun*) among the people. These individuals raised militia to defend their territories and carved a haven for themselves. Due to their military prowess, they were able to provide safety to those who came to seek refuge with them. NoahMejabi (2005:137), writing on the issue, states that external raids “led to the emergence of *Akoguns* (war lords) who rose as defenders and war commanders. They became an embodiment of power”, and “the institution of war commanders (*akogun*) eroded the powers and prestige of the *oba* who, as de facto and the de jure head of his "state," became no more than a primus inter pares while the *akogun's* word was law." Among such were Onoheri and Ajakaiye in Ogidi, Kudofo in Ogale and we have Esubiyi and Aduloju in Akoko (Tubi, 2020).

(xi) Political dominance of Kabba: The peoples of northeast Yoruba land had no central political governance in their culture. However, they were forced into a political union under Fulani rule. From the inception of Fulani rule in northeast Yoruba land, Kabba was chosen as headquarters. After the conquest of Bida forces in 1897 at the Ogidi war, Kabba maintained its position as the political headquarters of the liberated peoples under British rule (Alaniyo, personal communication; Obahun, personal communication; Joledo, personal communication).

(xii) Religious impact: Religiously, the impacts of the invasions were mixed. Islam in Akoko and Okun communities certainly predated the coming of the Fulani. Merchants, who traversed the area either as indigenes or sojourners for commercial activities, first brought Islam into the area as a new religion. These were followed by Hausa and Nupe traders, but Islam had no significant foothold among the people (Oju, personal communication, Joleo, personal communication). With the imposition of Fulani rule, conversion to Islam was not pursued because, under Islamic *hadith*, it is inappropriate to enslave fellow Muslims. It became clear that the invaders were only interested in slaves and appropriation of the land produced from the conquered territories, so proselytisation was not advanced. After the war, however, returnees from Bida who had accepted Islam returned with their new religion and formed new sets of native converts. It is instructive to know that many returnees who accepted Islam while in Nupeland, upon their return to their communities, rejected Islam, which they held as the religion of the oppressors and returned to traditional religion or converted to Christianity. Real conversion into Islam among the northeastern Yoruba peoples was achieved in the last few decades through the activities of

Yoruba Muslim clerics like Ajagbe-Mokefiri who visited the area in the 1970s (Abiola, personal communication, Ajakaiye, personal communication).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Fulani hegemony came to a sudden end on January 14, 1897. The Fulani never had a peaceful reign over the dominated territories. There were a series of revolts and insurgencies against Fulani rule, (Abiola, personal communication, Gbaluju, personal communication, Obahun, personal communication, Oju, personal communication). The Akoko, Ebira, Okun, and their neighbours, in a bid to ward off Fulani's domination, formed a formidable military alliance called Ogidi Grand Alliance to confront Fulani imperialism. This led to direct military confrontation between the Alliance, the Fulani, and their collaborators between 1865-1897. After a series of protracted battles were fought at Ogidi Ela by the contending forces, on January 14 1897, the Fulani forces fled overnight from northeast Yoruba land at the approach of Royal Niger Company constabularies (Apata, 2003; Aremu & Oniye, 2018; Idrees, 1989; Kolapo, 2012; Lewu, 2015; Tubi, 2020). On the same day, Fulani's imperialism ended, and it was replaced with British imperialism.

This study contributes to the understanding of the historical anthropology of traditional communities of Africa. It provides a new light on pre-Colonial power and domination among indigenous groups. Importantly, it sheds primary light on the historical anthropology of the landscape of northeast Yoruba land marked by sixty years of invasion, plundering, and domination by the Fulani. This study reveals that the application of historical anthropology can become an academic field that restores to the conquered the full realization of their political potential as it unmask the real intentions and full impacts of imperialism and colonialism. The study also reinforces the relevance of oratures and ethnography in unearthing and distilling the history and anthropology of traditional societies. The study is essential in understanding traditional societies which

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were/are confronted with sudden external aggression and are losing their traditional culture. The call for joint historical-anthropological study of pre-Colonial Africa as tool that can demystify certain anthropological and political positions in Africa, as it becomes certain that concepts of the conqueror and conquered are inappropriate terms.

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