

Agatu-Alago Relations in the Colonial Days, 1900-1960

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Abstract

The paper examined how the British colonial rule impinged on Agatu - Alago Relations in the Colonial Days, 1900-1960", it is also an attempt to reconstruct the intergroup interplay and relationship between the Agatu and the Alago in present day Nasarawa State, North Central Nigeria since their Colonial history as ethnic groups and Neighbors. In order to achieve the objective of the paper, which is hinged on the Agatu – Alago relations, the paper adopted the historical methodology of research using primary, secondary and tertiary sources of data. The primary sources were basically derived from oral interview. From findings, the paper gathered that their epochal relationships cut across spectrum of relationships. These relationships captured in the paper includes: Socio-Cultural, economic, political and historical ties. The paper also unearths contemporary changes and evolving events within the scope of the research. The groups are found intertwined in their contemporary endeavours. The groups is breaking their intergroup relationships in present day are quite proven based on their affinity since the Apa homeland in the defunct Kwararafa confederacy. The methodology adopted in the completion of this paper is anchored on multidisciplinary approach in historiography. The paper had challenges in the course of the investigation bothered on lack of credible informants as many are lost to death on the both sides but the availability of rich archival documentation on the group by colonial ethnographers came handy. The paper is valuable addition to deliberate attempt by scholars to promote intergroup relations anchored in peace and tranquility.

Keywords: Agatu, Alago, Intergroup relations and North Central Nigeria

Introduction

This paper examines the conquest and subjugation of the Agatu and Alago land and people by the British colonialist which led to the changing nature in their relations. Before the British occupation of the Agatu and the Alago people, they had a very organised and democratic political system that was suitable their socio-economic and political development. The Agatu in her ideal settings were united by the political system through their belief system and the institution of *Ose* as the case were. The British occupation gradually destroyed this unity to pave way for their exploitation. Consequently, the downwards development movement in the socio-economic and political system set in amongst these people. The methodology employed in this research was a much reliance on oral investigation, published literature and some relevant archival materials. This paper concludes that the arrival of British colonisation on the stage truncated the smooth development of the Agatu and Alago socio-economic and political development. The result today are the problems of historical distortion and lack of originality occasioned by the effect of alien imports system imposed on these people. The paper is a historical reflection on the pre-colonial times of the Agatu and Alago and how it has in the present day Nasarawa State.

Conceptual Clarifications

The concept of colonialism is associated with the conquest and control of foreign lands by a more superior or powerful country. In Africa, colonialism, connotes the forceful occupation of Africa by the Europeans in the 19th century. In other words, it was the forceful subjugation and dominations of foreign land by the Europeans in order to accumulate raw materials for their industries and creation of foreign market for their finished goods. C. Ake. A pointed out that It is the imperial policies by which the European great powers seized control of territories throughout much of the world, but especially in Africa.

From this definition, it become imperative to note that colonialism is that system of domination of the so called third world countries today by the Europeans for economic and political gains and not for civilizing purposes and better government as postulated by some bourgeois oriented scholars of western bloc such as Lugard². To buttress this idea

further, the colonial masters were on exploitation mission of the African countries that *Agbo* maintains that “the prime motive of the colonialist in Africa was to exploit its resources and not to provide better government and the benefits of civilization”³.

Colonialism in the twenty century involved disparity of power between the imperial capitalist countries of Western Europe and largely less developed feudal and semi-feudal societies Africa, Latin America and Asia. Inequality therefore facilitated the fulfilment of the motive of domination. The achievement of the expansionist drive through subjugation and domination required the imposition of the political will, culture and military might of the capitalist states upon the host countries so as to facilitate the plunder of the later by the former. Nevertheless, overpopulation and land hunger as well as the will to criminally plunder, has propelled nations to dominate less powerful ones throughout the epochs of history. The actual and potential economic resources of weaker states were exploited by the powerful states. Imperialist exploitation involved appropriation of economics of the third world by another through enslavement, forced labour, low wages, acquisition of minerals rights, land alienation and capital augmentation perpetuated by the west in the processes of capitalism. This meant for the generation of huge profits for the imperialists. Colonialism was the institutionalization and legitimating of these forms of primitive appropriation through the establishment of the colonial state⁴.

The concept of inter-group relations is a “simple or complex, conflicting or accommodating, cooperating, consensual and indifferent” way that one group is connected or associated with another in the course of their interaction with each other⁵.” This is in line with the basic assumptions of interactionist perspective which hold that, the central issue about inter-group relations is “interaction” which is often driven through the medium of communication and negotiations. . He went further to posit that it is not institutions or groups but real people who exist that interact among themselves. The theory thus, insist that, “change occurs as people communicate with one another”. They concede, however, that much of this takes place in reference groups such as “professional organisations, friendship groups, doctors and medical people ... etc⁶.”

To buttress this point further Obuje opines that the central element in inter-group relations is interaction. This is the responsive behaviour and reactions of societies towards each other. Interaction is a social process that involves several human actions that permeate all spheres of life. As a socio-cultural activity, it implies contact among institutions of age grades, secret societies and shared rituals, cultural exchange and the development of marriage ties among members of different communities. Interaction as a political concept relates to friendship, peace, diplomacy, wars, conflicts and their management. As an economic phenomenon, interaction takes the form of interexchange of goods and services as well as the establishment of trading networks⁷. More recent discussions of ethnicity, however point out that although “ethnic group” may have a natural existence, the consciousness about them and making them functional in a society or nation is the result of deliberate effort of highlighting the differences among the groups⁸. While early writings mostly tended to assume that contact and interactions results into antagonistic relations⁹, it has been shown that contact and interaction can promote co-operation as groups learn to adjust their differences even though they have prejudices, myths and creeds regarding themselves¹⁰.

Okpeh's work on inter-group relations in Nigeria: “Colonialism and Changing Nature of Idoma relations with their neighbours” looks at colonialism and the changing nature of Idoma relations with their neighbours. It sees many changes occurring first of which he says was the military force with which Idoma people were conquered by British. He then went on to look at the imposition of colonial rule in the area but he did not take cognizance of the pre-colonial pattern of good contact and interactions. For instance, he points out the colonial boundary demarcation created hostilities between Idoma and some of her neighbours. He also maintained that colonialism destroyed the basis of autonomous action between interacting groups by dividing them into districts. The construction of railway through Idoma land between 1920 and 1924 and feeder roads in 1930 open up Idoma land to the outside world bringing in Igbos, Yoruba and Hausa among others. This, he says affected the relations in the area as the people increasingly became conscious of the cultural and other affiliations which eventually generated a sense of nationalism in Idoma land.

Another contribution by Okpeh, in “Pattern and Dynamics of Inter-Group Relations in Nigeria, 1800 – 1900AD” is the examination of the evolution of inter-group relations patterns between the divers' ethnic groups in pre-colonial Nigeria. He maintained that relations in the form of economic, political and socio-cultural aspect characterised inter-group relations before the advent of Pax Britannica and the amalgamations in 1914 he identifies factors that promoted inter-group relations and contact between these people of Nigeria such as geographical proximity, trade and commerce, war, market centres and differences in agricultural output¹²

British Colonial Conquest and Rule, 1903 - 1960

Agatu and Alago land was first administered by the British colonialists through Bauchi Province. However, between 1903–1918, Nasarawa Province was carved out of the (then) Bauchi Province and Agatu and Alago land were placed under Nasarawa Province as a sub-province called Lafia – Emirate¹³. Agatu and Alago were administered through the Lafia Emirate Council. Unlike the Mada and Eggon people who had serious battles with European in resisting colonial incursion on their land, the Agatu and Alago did not embark on war with the Europeans because of the superiority of the European Maxim gun over them¹⁴. Agatu and Alago lands were incorporated into Lafia Emirate of Nasarawa Province. Meanwhile, it was the Kamberi that were appointed as chiefs to rule over Agatu, Alago and other ethnic groups on behalf of the colonialists⁵.

It is important to note that Agatu and Alago settled in Doma chiefdom which was found to be well organized and this made the colonial administration to recognize the chiefdom in 1906 and was given a Fourth Class Staff of Office by Lord Lugard under the reign of Andoma Omaku. The ceremony took place in Keffi, the then headquarters of Nasarawa Province. Subsequently, in 1909, Doma chiefdom was up-graded to third class status¹⁶. The colonial authority promoted the growing of export crops and as soon as possible replaced local currencies. British merchants and explorers had visited Lafia on a number of occasions. The first was W. Baikie¹⁷, an explorer who came to Lafia in the late 1860s. These British business merchant, George Tubman Goldie¹⁸ also came to

Lafia on December 16, 1885 on behalf of the United African Company (UAC) and later the Royal Niger Company (RNC) to sign a commercial treaty with the *Emir of Lafia*. He presented the *Emir* with gift of clothes, shoes and some items of interest after which they signed a commercial treaty which stipulated that the *Emir* would offer them protection against robbers from North Bank of River Benue.

Other Europeans also came to Lafia and presented the *Emir* with gift items to the intent that the *Emir* commented thus: “this kind of gift, I hope nothing would follow it, because you did not conquer somebody in a war. But he was presenting you with gift”. Early in 1900, the first Resident (Major A. Burdon and later Dr. Cargill commenced the exploration of the Province. Headquarters were first established at Akpanaja (in the south-east corner of the Province) and an attempt was made to pacify the Munshi. Headquarters which was later transferred to Nasarawa town after the formal submission of Sarki Kwotto and the name of the Province was changed from Lower Benue Province to Nasarawa Province in July 1902¹⁹.

According to E.C. Ayangaor, on January 8, 1900, expatriates were clearing the bush and laying a telegraph line from Lokoja to Ibi along the Northern bank of River Benue. Under Lugard's directives, Tiv farmers were shot dead near Akpanaja in Agatu land. These Tiv farmers were said to be reacting to trespassers, on their farmland. Captain Carroll who led the column to protect the team returned fire but this did not deter them. In spite of the reinforcements and the great damage they did, no Tiv leader emerged to negotiate the telegraph line that was then diverted further North, avoiding the Tiv territory²⁰.

Changing Patterns in Agatu-Alago Relations

The British administration in Nigeria had important impact on inter-group relations. Each community was brought under effective control by the British administration and lost the initiative to determine whether its relations with its neighbours were going to be hostile or peaceful. The real repercussions of colonialism on the dynamics of inter-group relations in the Agatu and Alago on the one hand and the nature and character of human relations among them on the other were either taken

for granted or deliberately ignored until perhaps, recent times. In addition, the pattern and scope of these relations was such that the people no longer had control of their internal. As a result of these changes and continuities in Agatu and Alago relations with their neighbours during this period it became a central variable in the evolution of ethnic and identity politics as well as their struggles.

Social and Economic Changes between Agatu and Alago people

The establishment of Colonial Rule in Central Nigeria and the country in general, as mentioned above, the operationalization of these socio-economic forces to some extent was demonstrated by the colonial government policies or strategies. It was gradual and the controlled socio-economic changes of this entity called Nigeria culminated in words K.W. Post and M. Vickers following M.G. Smith, aptly called 'differential incorporation'²¹. A process under the colonial regime with different ethnic groups was brought together under one umbrella called Nigeria, a period which affected Agatu and Alago relations. By and large, the forces behind these changes in relations between these two groups during the colonial period were as follows: The development of infrastructures in the study area included roads, railways, bridges etc. Roads in these areas received serious attention from the British government. This was aimed at addressing political and socio-economic factors confronting the operations of the colonial administration. Give it cheap and available nature, there was high degree of exploitation of the manual labour among the people. By 1922, the Doma-Lafia road, Doma-Loko road, Keana-Giza road, Assakio-Lafia road, Agwatashi-Awe roads among others were constructed and at the end of 1930, the people of the study area were linked with their other neighbours through the colonial network with the constructions geared towards the siphoning of the economic resources of the people.

The construction of railway line from Port-Harcourt through Lafia by 1920-1927, rest houses, feeder roads saw thousands of Agatu and Alago able body men conscripted to perform some manual labour on the railway line²¹. These projects actually deepened the Agatu and Alago interactions into the orbit of political economy of the colonial authorities. This had serious implications on interactions between them and that of

their neighbours. For instance, it favoured the consolidation of colonial rule in the area which paved way for the incorporation of Agatu and Alago lands into Lafia Division and Nasarawa Provinces²². The implication of this scenario was that, it influenced or generated a sense of common identity between the people in the study areas.

Other forms of forced labour included military services, which saw about 2,000-3,000 of the Agatu and Alago people served in the West African Frontier Force which helped in the conquest of Agatu and Alago lands²³. They were also forced to fight in the Colonial army during the World War I and II in order to gain their economic power. Agatu and their neighbours were used as human portage, responsible for carrying virtually all categories of European goods from place to place.

Furthermore, the construction of railway line across Lafia helped bridge the barriers restraining them to travel longer distances for commercial activities, linking Lafia to Jos, Makurdi, Zaria, Kano and Maiduguri. This accelerated economic transformation in the area of goods and services and above all the sharing of ideas between Agatu and Alago. In conjunction with newly constructed roads and the rail line, the long distance journeys during the pre-colonial period was now made shorter, easier and fascinating.

Another significant factor that favoured the changes during British rule was that, this period saw a crossover of Agatu and their Alago neighbours as well as many other Nigerian ethnic groups into other areas such as the Tiv land, Hausa-Fulani land, Gwarri (Gbagyi), Yorubaland, the Idoma and Igala land among other. In the interim, Fulani, Koro (Mighili), Bassa, Tiv, Berom also visited the Alago land for commercial, rearing and farming activities²⁴, and the Hausa, Nupe, Afo traders, businessmen and women resulting to overcrowding and thus alter the patterns of interaction leading to mutual suspicious and chaos among them.

The alterations of the Agatu-Alago interactions with the penetration of economic and social amenities in Agatu and Alago towns of Agbashi, Akpanaja, Loko, Doma, Keana and Lafia became a 'melting pot' for the various ethnic groups or neighbours. Outlining the overall idea of the

Colonial political economy, the environment of the study area was set for anarchy amongst Agatu and Alago²⁵.

One other change that took place in Agatu and Alagoland was the introduction of taxation and monetization of the economy by the colonial regime after the construction of railway line for profit derivation and to subject the people to capitalist economy. The British colonialists further involved the Hausa-Fulani, the Kambari (Kanuri) as local agents aiming at imposing the will and directives of the Colonial government, available records have it that, although Agatu and Alago did not resist colonial domination like their Eggon and Mada counterparts, however, they were not comfortable with the introduction of tax in the area.

The compelling demands for fund which began with compulsory cash taxation and subsequently arrived at the desire for cheap British manufactured goods both pushed and manipulated the Alago to embarking on unplanned journeys to seek paid job within and outside their territory. Many of them soak wage labour during the railway and roads construction and tin mining in Jos-Plateau. This search for wage employment served as a basic factor of inter-group relations amongst the people in question and their neighbours²⁶.

It should also be noted here that the monetization of the economy changed both the inter and intra-group relations amongst the Agatu, Alago and their neighbours. The desire to earn currency led to the gradual erosion of the communal life with which the Agatu and their neighbours Alago were known, even amongst one another. The Agatu and their neighbours who visited each other's farm on reciprocal system known as *Oluma* in Agatu and *Oruma* in Alago was almost abolished; this was because there was high demand for money to pay tax and the craving for European products, thus leading to the perfection of the capitalist economy. This policy led to lack of appreciable developments in the study area, this prompted the Agatu and Alago migration to urban areas in search of greener pasture were so as to meet up with the tax requirement as imposed by the colonial agents through colonial authorities.

Western education was another area in this paper. Education is the

greatest legacy a nation could bequeath to its citizens. However under the colonial education, people were only taught to acquire knowledge to assist in the exploitation of their fatherland rather than educating the people to meet their needs²⁷. Various schools were established. Doma Junior Primary School, 1955, Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) Agbashi, 1955, later St. John Bosco's College, Doma. Teachers were recruited from those already trained under them as interpreters, clerks and secretaries e.t.c. to assist the limited European tutors. And every parent was responsible for his or her children in respect of school fees²⁸. The schools brought about high degree of interaction between Agatu and Alago thereby promoting their relations. This therefore, affected the traditional education of acquiring skills in agriculture and craft that was intended to be used to enlarge or expand farmlands in order to produce abundant farm products to feed the family.

Agatu –Alago Political and Administrative Changes

As a result of the conquest and imposition of colonial rule into Agatu and Alago lands, attempts were made by the British colonialists to establish a local administration known as Indirect Rule System in the area. This policy first embarked upon in the Northern areas of Sokoto, Kano, Borno where the bureaucratic structures and procedures were laid down and observed. The introduction of this policy did not go down well with the inhabitants of the places mentioned above. This was because of the prevalent pre-colonial administrative set up. This concept, simply interpreted meant rule by indigenous traditional political institutions with strict supervision by the colonial government.

Tseayo²⁹ averts that the Hausa-Fulani Emirate System of Northern Nigeria possessed what was christened the 'closed system' of political structure. In this system, the highest political offices were usually reserved for close relatives of the ruling class (the *Emir* and his ruling lineage). An important feature of this system is the existence of a commoner class, the *Talakawa*. On the other hand, the extent and application of this system to the non-Muslim areas of the Northern provinces was therefore directed at incorporating them into this system³⁶. In this way, the study area within the period under review, saw the appointment of Kamberi and Hausa as District heads in Doma, Keana

and Assakio Districts³⁰.

The rejection of the Hausa and Kamberi alien district head system, was significant in many ways. First, it symbolized the people's response to colonial rule and the type of changes that were imposed on them. In the interim, the rejection of this policy was an essential element in the change in the Agatu and Alago ethnic awareness and consciousness under the Colonial rule. The Agatu and Alago saw the strangers as usurpers who seized positions for themselves which originally and by rights belonged to them³¹.

It is on records that though, they try to involve the local people in the administration of their land to make the collection of tax easier and to maintain law and order. Not only did the colonialist disorganize the traditional political arrangement of the people, the people were forced to relinquish power of determining their destinies, entirely to *Kamberi* and this in itself was a form of underdevelopment³². It is worth of note that, prior to the advent of British rule in these areas, *Doma*, *Obi*, and *Keana* were living as autonomous political units³³.

The Richard Constitution of 1946 and Macpherson Constitution of 1951 created and introduced the election of the majority members of the legislative council through various electoral colleges and the North and West responded through the formation of Northern Progressive Congress (NPC) and Action Group (AG) respectively that same year. The 1954 Federal Constitution marked the beginning of reorganization of Nigeria's politics along ethnic line. It is pertinent to state that the constitutional and political development of Nigeria between 1946 and 1966 generated many socio-political problems and conflicts between ethnic groups and regions³⁴. This marked the political consciousness and interactions of the non-Muslim groups of Agatu and Alago.

During colonial period, the non-Muslim groups had two colonial structures, which were the British Colonial structure and the Hausa Fulani Kamberi (Kanuri) domination build-in, the Emirate System of governance. The first ceased to exist while the second was perpetuated even after independence. The above is part of the political and

administrative changes that took place in the study area during the colonial era and increased the level of political interactions between Agatu and Alago. From what we have so far, the administrative and political changes were to serve the British interests. It is within this circle that we consider the colonial administrative and political factors as very important ingredients in the changing nature and character of Agatu and her neighbours' relations. The arbitrary boundary demarcations that occasioned the conquest and occupation of the area did not take into consideration the pre-colonial nature of relations between these groups on the other side. This situation had implications of generating 'land disputes' among the interacting groups that negated peaceful co-existence during the period in question³⁵ which led to the imposition of the British District heads on the people and severed hatred against the Hausa-Fulani and Kanuri.

Conclusion

This paper has unfolded how the Agatu and her Alago neighbours were brought under British Colonial rule by the forces of the West Africa Frontier Force based at Lokoja. The Agatu and Alago were brought under the control of British colonialists through Bauchi Providence under the sub-Lafia Emirate until the conquest of the area in 1903 by the British Colonial Regime following hoisting of the Union Jack flag at Lokoja by Fredrick Lord Lugard in 1900. The colonial officers were sent to all Emirates to bring them under the tutelage of British Administration. There were records attempted resistance against the British invaders by the Agatu and Alago before they were subjected to Colonial rule. Beyond the trauma of the conquest, the colonial regime introduced new cash crops, new general purpose currency, imposed taxation, levied people through their chiefs for forced labour and the constructions of civil structures as offices, new roads and new markets. However, the relationship between the Agatu and her Alago neighbours underwent fundamental changes.

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