

The Socio-cultural and Political Practices of the People of the Auchi Kingdom Before the Arrival of the Nupe in Nigeria

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Ancient African civilizations flourished for centuries in large expanse of land stretching from the Nile Valley to West Africa. In what is known as the Nigeran nation today was formerly made up of kingdoms and empires. One of such kingdoms was the Auchi Kingdom which was invaded by the Nupe in 1860 and they introduced some of their socio-cultural practices but the British dislodged the Nupe in 1897 by establishing British colonial rule which brought about socio-economic exploitation and also further innovations in the Auchi kingdom. Many socio-cultural and political practices of the Auchi Kingdom was abolished and the Nupe people introduced their own cultural and traditional practices after they established their imperial rule over the Auchi Kingdom. It must be said that many indigenous African traditions and socio-cultural practices dwindled away while some remained after European colonialism. Drawing from oral sources and ethnographic research in the region, the article argues that Auchi Kingdom in Nigeria had well-organized socio-cultural and political practices that was the binding force of the people before the Kingdom was overrun by the Nupe people that altered their indigenous practices in 1860 prior to the arrival of the British colonialist in 1897.

Introduction

One of the greatest challenges faced by any open-minded historian concerned with traditional and cultural practices of the Auchi Kingdom is getting or locating concrete evidence on the existence of indigenous activities and practices of the people of the Auchi Kingdom before they had contact with people from a different ethnic group or background and the white colonialist.¹ At the time of its earliest unfolding, there were only few written records and no precise authoritative source that could point to the most authentic facts concerning the Auchi people. In those parts of the world inhabited by peoples without the art of writing, oral tradition forms the main available source for the reconstruction of the past, and even among peoples who have writing, many historical sources, including the most ancient ones, are based on oral traditions.² This makes the

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1. Egbefo Omolumen Dawood, "The Nupe Invasion of Esanland: An Assessment of its Socio-Political impact on the People- 1885-1897," in *Haskenmu*, volume 1, 2007-2008 (Faculty of Education and Arts Seminar Series, IBB University Lapai, Niger State, Nigeria, 2008), 75-76.

2. The reconstruction of African history is impossible without oral sources. The bulk of sources of African history is heavily indebted to oral tradition. This is so because the art

researcher to ask 'if the Auchi Kingdom actually had indigenous socio-cultural and political practices?' This invariably implies that oral sources are the greatest means of reconstructing African History.

Most of the bits and pieces of historical information about the origin, culture and tradition of the Auchi people as we have them today are derived from what was passed across orally through the centuries. One cannot deny the fact that in such a long period of oral transmission of information spanning through generations, much has been lost and individual accounts differ. This brings up the question 'to what extent or degree was the indigenous socio-cultural and political practices of the people altered?' The history varies from one oral source to another, and each history/story teller provides a version that gives primacy or premiership to his own distant ancestry, clan and village. Consequently, there are divergent views about the origin of the Auchi people and its indigenous socio-cultural and political practices. The account of this article will be limited to the origin, socio-cultural and political situation of the people of the Auchi kingdom.³

In assessing the nature of the indigenous ideas, political and socio-cultural practices of the people of the Auchi Kingdom before the incursion by the Nupe in 1860, it is important to note that the people of the Kingdom were very satisfied and contented with their way of life before their internal system was disrupted, annexed, exploited and their culture and way of life altered. The political and socio-cultural practices was the binding force of the people and this made the people to continue to live in peace and harmony before the kingdom was taken over by the Nupe people.⁴ This also raises the question "how did the indigenous socio-cultural and political practices impact on the lives of the people?" The article proves that the Auchi Kingdom had indigenous political and socio-cultural practices, which impacted greatly on the lives of the people, before the conquest by the Nupe in 1860.

Research Methodology

This article is anchored within the disciplines of history and cultural anthropology. Other scholars and writers have written on kingship issues, religion, Nupe hegemony and a host of other issues concerning the Auchi Kingdom but this article is exclusively about the evidence and impact of the socio-cultural and political practices of the Auchi Kingdom before the annexation

of writing at the time was absent. Words of the mouth was handed down from generation to generation. Without oral tradition there is no African history. See Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition, A Study in Historical Methodology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), 2.

3. Wajeed Obomeghie (55), Journalist and writer, interviewed at his office at Abuja in Nigeria. 3/4/2021.

4. Zakariyyah Idrees-Oboh Oseni (72), Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies, interviewed at his residence at Auchi, Edo State in Nigeria, 3/15/2021.

by the Nupe people. The history of the Auchi Kingdom is heavily built on oral history kept alive through immemorial customs and traditions, transmitted from generation to generation because the Auchi people kept very little written records. The fieldwork for this article was carried out in Nigeria. Although it was difficult to reach out to people to conduct interviews due to the COVID-19 pandemic but it was successful eventually due to the willingness of some people that were interviewed when they realized the great importance of the research. Moreover, historical and socio-cultural parameters enhance the construction of knowledge and reconstruction of history.

The research combines ethnographic and historical designs by using different research technics such as structured and unstructured interviews. All the respondents, apart from the two professors, were selected based on referral due to the roles their parents and grandparents placed in Kingdom. They further claimed that the information that was transmitted to me was transmitted to them through their parents and grandparents directly. Moreover, all the participants participated willingly. Many questions were asked randomly while others were specific to achieve desirable results. Basic demographic information, including age, religion and marital status were collected from participants. During the research, we⁵ carried out some interviews with different respondents including two politicians, a former member of the house of representative and a former federal minister,⁶ two professors, one civil servant, one housewife and one journalist/writer. The oral interviews were conducted with the technique of asking questions and some of the interview sessions were recorded with a dictaphone and notes were also taken down. The two professors had carried out studies on Nupe imperialism in the past and they were able to provide some very vital information on the subject. The oral testimonies of these people were very helpful and contributed to a better understanding of the Auchi Kingdom and that it had well organized socio-cultural practices before 1860. During the course of the research, I decided to analyze not only personal narratives but also the attitude, behaviour, mindset and age of the participants in order to identify credible patterns in their narratives. Secondary sources were also consulted to enhance the quality of the research.

Furthermore, information was collected through review of relevant literature on the history of the Auchi Kingdom and surrounding communities. These

5. The interviews in Auchi were carried out with the assistance of a close friend of mine called Alex Edaghese. We attended the same University in Nigeria.

6. The former Federal Minister was by name Chief Tony Momoh, a royal prince of the Auchi Kingdom. It was his father, King D. H. Momoh, who introduced the Islamic religion in the Auchi kingdom in 1914 but died in 1944. Chief Tony Momoh was Federal Minister of Information during the military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida from 1985 to 1993. He passed on February 1, 2021.

literature accounts provide anthropological, sociological, economic, political, and historical accounts of the Auchi Kingdom before and after 1860.

African Socio-cultural and Political Systems

The traditional African political system is described by the M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard's idea on how the African Political Systems dichotomized precolonial African state systems. According to them there were two groups, group A and B. Group A, they said, consisted of "those societies which have centralized authority, administrative machinery, and judicial institutions." Group B consisted of "those societies which lack centralized authority, administrative machinery, and constituted judicial institutions," and which were therefore characterized, by "the absence of explicit forms of government." This latter group, they also called "stateless societies." The political relevance of the lineage system provided Fortes and Evans-Pritchard with a major dividing line between the two groups. While acknowledging the importance of kinship ties in "the lives of individuals" in both state systems, Fortes and Evans-Pritchard emphasized that in Group-B states, the segmentary lineage system "primarily regulates political relations between territorial segments".⁷

There was significant heterogeneity in political centralization across African ethnicities before colonization.⁸ At the one extreme, there were states with centralized administration and hierarchical organization such as the Shongai Empire in Western Africa, the Luba kingdom in Central Africa, and the kingdoms of Buganda and Ankole in Eastern Africa. At the other extreme, there were acephalous societies without political organization beyond the village level, such as the Nuer in Sudan or the Konkomba in Ghana and Togo. The middle of the spectrum occupied societies organized in large chiefdoms and loose alliances, such as the Ewe and the Wolof in Western Africa. While these societies lacked statehood, they tended to have conflict resolution mechanisms and a somewhat centralized decision-making process.⁹

In the context of this article, the Group B best describes the Auchi kingdom political system during the pre-colonial period. The segmentary system is understood to refer to the kind of indigenous political structure evolved by the Auchi people before 1860. Before the arrival of the Nupe imperialist, the Auchi Kingdom lacked a centralized authority before 1860. The real power in the Auchi

7. M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard (Eds.), *African Political Systems* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), 5-6.

8. G. P. Murdock, *Africa: Its Peoples and Their Culture History* (New York; McGraw-Hill Book Company 1959), 15.

9. J. Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co 1997), 298-299.

Kingdom was in the hands of the oldest person in each family. The oldest man in each family had absolute power to take decisions in the family. He attended to all spiritual concerns of all members of his family and was, therefore, the spiritual head of the family. Hakeem explained the manner in which the various villages which constitute the Auchi Kingdom was being administered as semi-autonomous portions each of which came under the headship of the oldest men who had duties and responsibilities to carry out. As it will be shown later, this system did not provide for a strong central administration. Hakeem also explained that it did not make provision for the monarchical form of political culture but the socio-cultural practices of the people kept them together, hence neither the component nor the entire Auchi Kingdom itself emerged as a Kingdom before 1860.¹⁰

Background of the Auchi Kingdom

The Auchi Kingdom, as described by Boateng, is a city located in southern Nigeria.¹¹ It is bounded on the east by South Ibie, on the north-east by Jattu, on the north by Ayua, Iyuku and Imeke, on the northwest by Ikpeshi and Ihievbe-Ogben, on the south by Ivbiaro and Warrake and on the south-west by Era and Ayiele-Ugioli. The kingdom is located in Etsako West Local Government area of Edo State and currently serves as the Local Government headquarters.¹² Momodu described the location of the kingdom as hilly with pockets of valleys and flat plains. The Auchi Kingdom is described as a place having the root of the largest families in the world, the Momoh family.¹³ Tony, also a member of the Momoh family, described the Momoh family a very large, united and organized family. The language spoken by the people is Afenmai language or Etsako Language. It is an Edoid language dialect although the language is commonly referred to by the

10. Hakeem Billy Haruna, *The legacy of Nupe invasion on Etsako society, 1860–1897: A socio-political and cultural analysis* (Department of History, University of Lagos, 1990), 16.

11. Ernest Amano Boateng, *West African Secondary School Atlas New Edition* (Lagos: Thomas Nelson Nigeria Ltd, 1974), 22.

12. The Auchi kingdom is actually located in the South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria which also is the oil producing region in the country. See Kadiri Momoh Seghosime, *Origin and development of Auchi* (Auchi: Smilestel Global Digital, 2011), 1.

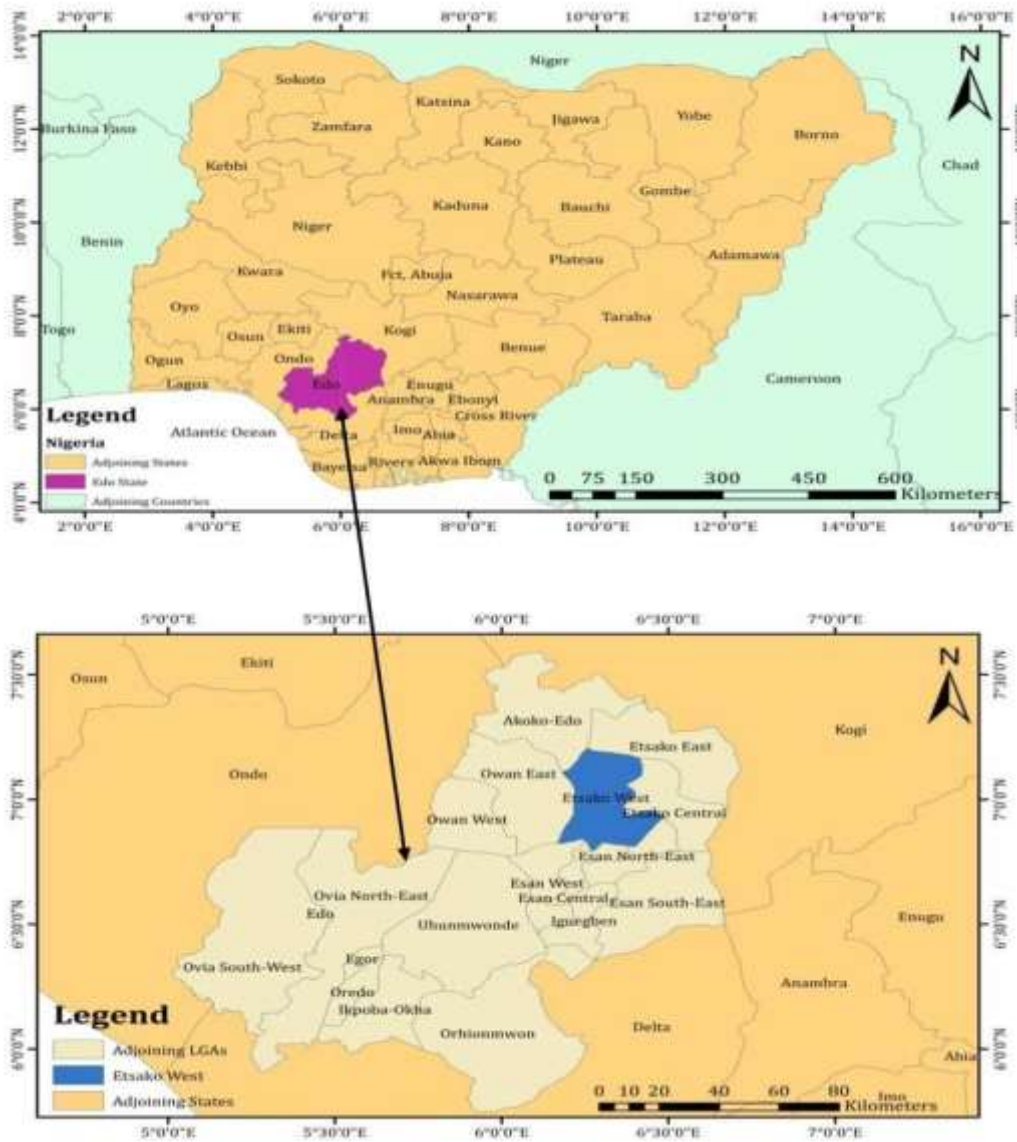
13. The Momoh family is the royal family (ruling family that produces the king) in the Auchi Kingdom is one of the largest family in the world. King D.H. Momoh had forty-seven wives and two hundred and fifty-seven children, making his family one of the largest in the world. I interviewed one of the surviving sons, Chief Tony Momoh via telephone conversation before he died last year, a former federal minister during the era of the military regime in Nigeria. The regime of King D, H, Momoh as king was from 1919 to 1944, a period of twenty-five years. Also see Obomeghie, *Auchi Kingdom: Twenty Decades of Ikelebe Dynasty 1945 and beyond* (Benincity: Wadorm Communication Nig. Ltd, 2019), 284.

same name as the people. The Auchi kingdom is divided into five grand quarters or villages which could also be referred to as districts.¹⁴ Auchi has been a major Islamic town having the largest population of Muslim communities in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Irrespective of religion, the people live peacefully. The welcoming and hospitable nature of the people has, to a very large extent, contributed to the cultural and religious diversity of the kingdom. The kingdom is headed by a monarch and this traditional ruler is referred to as the Otaru. The current Otaru of Auchi Kingdom is HRH. Alhaji Aliru H. Momoh.¹⁵ Figures 1 and 2 show the location of Auchi in Edo state, Nigeria and Etsako West Local Government Area in Edo State.

14. More information on the villages and clans of the Auchi Kingdom. The five grand villages are Utsogu, Akpekpe, Aibotse, Igbhei and Iyekhei. Other neighbouring towns in Etsako West local government area close to the Auchi kingdom includes, Uzairue, South Ibie, Agbede and the Anwain Clan. During the British colonial rule, the Auchi Kingdom was the headquarters of the Kukuruku Division, which was the former name of Afenmai land. The settlement was a splendid choice for the initial settlers. The town is close to about twenty rivers, rivulets and springs such as Orle, Omemhe, Ofhotsele, Eda Ibariki, Ukphelegi, Eda Nokhua (Utsogu), Eda Nokhua (Aibotse), Amasomhe, Umhouku, Ayeda, Ayeda-Aminu, Eda Udo, Eda Oke, Eda Ayomhe, Oki, Arhebekpeghie, Edo Ofoli, Ikpaigba. and Eda-Egini. See Seghosime, 1-3.

15. Obomeghie (55), Journalist and writer, interviewed at his office at Abuja in Nigeria, 3/4/2021.

Figure 1. Map of Nigeria Showing the Location of Auchi in Etsako West LGA of Edo Stat



Source: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Figure-2-Map-of-Nigeria-indicating-Etsako-west-local-govt-area-and-Auchi-Source_fig1_339928339.

Figure 2. Map of Etsako Land Showing the Location of Auchi, Edo State

Source: <https://etsakolanguage.com/etsako.html>.

It is believed that the first descendant of the Auchi Kingdom migrated from the Benin Kingdom. Ikharo argued that the indigenous society of the Kingdom was founded between 1481 and 1500 by a man from the Benin Kingdom known as Uchi, the progenitor.¹⁶ Uchi was a warrior prince and hunter who migrated from Udo in present day Ovia Local Government Area of Edo State. His migration was triggered by a dispute with his brother, the Oba of Benin, over the right to keep a leopard's skin. The leopard was then regarded a royal beast, sacred and political totem. It was customary at that time that anybody that killed a leopard was to surrender the skin of the animal to the Oba. Uchi killed a leopard and refused to surrender the skin to the Oba. He felt the law regarding the surrendering of leopard skins to the Oba did not apply to him because he was a prince and that the rule was meant for only commoners. The Oba, very angry, relieved Uchi of his command of the western defenses of the Benin Kingdom. Relieved of his duties, Uchi was recalled to Benincity where he stayed at Ogbe quarters with his family members. Uchi feared for his life because he felt the plot by the Oba against him had thickened. He decided to flee the Benin Kingdom for safety. Udo and his followers hatched a plan to flee from the Benin Kingdom. The secret code amongst the people that agreed to flee with him was "UNA EGBIA, UNA LE" meaning "EARLY MORNING, IT IS RUNNING". Whenever Uchi's emissary entered a compound on the appointed day and called out "Una Egbia" people in the compound who were faithful to the escape plan responded "Una

16. O. A. Ikharo, *The founding and origin of Auchi Clan* (Unpublished Manuscript, 1981), 1-11.

le". Momoh further stated that this was how Auchi got its good morning greetings "UNA GBBIA, UNA LE" and this has remained the early morning greeting till date.¹⁷

According to Seghosime, the emigration from Benin, which took place in the fifteenth century, was a very difficult one. There was the fear that the Oba of Benin would send soldiers to chase and capture them. After a very long trek and search for a suitable place to settle, Uchi and his followers settle at a place about 130 kilometers away from the Benin Kingdom on the top a hill just behind the present-day Guarantee Trust Bank (GTB). A market developed in and around the location that Uchi and his followers settled. The market is known as "Aku-Uchi" (Uchi Market).¹⁸ The market is still in existence and remains the biggest market in the Auchi Kingdom. Over the years after the demise of Uchi, he was deified and a shrine was built on his first place of settlement at Uchi Market. Worshippers of the Uchi deity go to the shrine with native chalk and salt and made requests believing strongly in the potency. The shrine, according to momoh, was eventually destroyed and uprooted in an upsurge of the spread of the Islamic religion in 1914.¹⁹

Essentially, the prevalent traditions of origin among the people of present-day Auchi Kingdom is that of emigration from the Benin Kingdom. Although, their society was an off shoot of the Benin Kingdom but over time they developed distinctive cultural features that set them apart. These features are noticeable in their language, system of government, traditional religion, and the title system. The most outstanding of these features was the absence of rigid centralization of authority and allegiance to one venerated ruler, which was the hallmark of the Benin traditional polity. Some traditional features of the Auchi Kingdom underwent considerable alternations as a result of "foreign contact". Erhagbe is of the opinion that the main external impetus for change was the Nupe invasion in the late nineteenth century before the eventual imperialism of the British in 1897.²⁰

17. Robson Momoh, *New perspectives on the history and politics of Nigeria: The Etsako Experience* (Benincity: Afenmai Grafix, 2016), 3

18. Seghosime, *Origin and development of Auchi*, 1-46.

19. Momoh, *New perspectives on the history and politics of Nigeria: The Etsako Experience*, 3.

20. Edward O. Erhagbe, *Etsako land in Transition, 1860-1948: An Analysis of Change in an Indigenous Nigerian Society* (Department of History, University of Benin, Nigeria, 1982), 40.

The Auchi Kingdom Intergroup Relations with Neighbouring Communities

Going by a brief description by Roderick, Intergroup relations involves the feelings, evaluations, beliefs, and behaviour that groups and their members have toward another group and its members. Whenever individuals belonging to one group interact collectively or individually, with another group or its members in terms of their group identification, we have an instance of inter-group relations. Olomola explained that the aspects of inter-group relations that concerns itself with political activities which could be referred to as political relations. Roderick further explained that it becomes clear that within organizational theory, the term inter-group relations refer to both individual interactions involving members from different groups and the collective behaviour of groups in interaction with other groups, at either the intra or inter-organizational level.²¹

Inter group relations, according to Haruna, between the Auchi Kingdom and neighbouring communities such as Ibie, Aviele, Agbede, Warrake, Ivbiaro etc. can be traced to the period before the coming of the Nupe in 1860.²² From the description of the location and proximity, it is clear that the communities that the Auchi kingdom had relations with were from within the same local government area and beyond as stated by Dauda. Early European explorers and anthropologist pointed out that the relationship between the Auchi Kingdom and neighbouring communities was so strong that they became indivisible communities. Till date, the Auchi Kingdom have continued to live side by side with these communities, each retaining its own culture and social organization which is gradually becoming integrated into an acceptable mixture. Amadasun explained that the interaction between the duos in the pre-Nupe days further strengthened their contact and interactions which led to the formation of intergroup relations due to similarities in cultural practices, religion and language.²³

Ikharo stated that one of the activities that fostered intergroup relations between the Auchi Kingdom and other communities was trading activities.²⁴ Upon the arrival of Uchi to the area where he settled which later became known

21. Steven G. Rogelberg (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Industrial and Organizational Psychology* (California: Sage Publications Ltd, 2007), 359; Isola, G. Olomola, *Patterns of Inter-Group Relations among the Yorubas in the Pre-colonial Period* (Department of History, University of Ife, Ile -Ife, 1977), 55.

22. Haruna, *The Kingdom of Auchi, its founding and development, 1897–1997, First Auchi day by the Otaru – in – Council*, 26; Saliu Garuba Dauda, *Otaru of Auchi Chieftancy Institution in Historical Perspective: 1860–1973* (Department of History, University of Ilorin, 1992), 54; Uwamose B. Amadasun, *Migrations and Trade in the Pre-colonial Economy of Benin Kingdom 1500–1900* (Department of History, Ambrose Alli University, 2001), 35.

23. Dauda, *Otaru of Auchi Chieftancy Institution in Historical Perspective: 1860 – 1973*, 54.

24. Ikharo, *The founding and origin of Auchi Clan*, 11.

as Auchi, a market was created.²⁵ This market was situated at the top of the Ekhei hill, one of the highest points in the Auchi Kingdom. Uchi market holds in four days intervals. This market brought together traders from all over Etsako land and beyond. People from other ethnic groups with entirely different spoken languages met and traded in the market. People from communities like Ibie, Aviele, Ivbiaro, Warrake, Okpella, Agenebode, the clans of Uzairue etc. People from Uromi, Ewu, Irrua and other Esan towns and villages also came to Uchi market to carry out trading activities.²⁶ Hausa and even Nupe traders also came to the market to carry out trading activities.²⁷ It must also be noted that all these communities mentioned above had their own various market days. People from the Auchi Kingdom also went to their various markets to trade too. Articles of trade varying from food stuff to life stock were sold in the market. It is not really clear how the trade, exchange of goods, was carried out. Whether it was trade by barter or the use of cowries that was used to conduct the trade is still sketchy. Obomeghie is of the opinion that this interaction through trade continued for a very long time before the invasion of the Nupe in the late nineteenth century and this interaction continued till date.²⁸

Also, another very important issue was intermarriages between the Auchi kingdom and other neighbouring communities. Obomeghie explained that this could be considered as one of the greatest unifying factors in any typical African community till date.²⁹ It cemented the relationship between the Auchi Kingdom

25. Uchi market remains the largest market in the Auchi Kingdom till date. The market made the Kingdom to be a beehive of activities till the present day.

26. Esan is an ethnic group of southern Nigeria who speak the Esan language. The Esan are traditionally known to be agriculturalists, trade-medical practitioners, mercenary warriors and hunters. The modern Esan nation is believed to have been organized during the 15th century, when citizens, mostly nobles and princes, left the neighbouring Benin Empire for the northeast; there they formed communities and kingdoms called eguares among the aboriginal peoples whom they met there. The Esan Kingdoms often warred among each other. Despite the wars, the Esans kept a homogenous culture that was chiefly influenced by the Benin Empire. However, these kingdoms were colonized, along with the Benin Empire, by the British Empire during September 1897, only gaining independence 63 years later in 1960 when Nigeria became independent from British Colonial rule. Quite similar to the history of the Auchi Kingdom. The Esans primarily speak the Esan language, an Edoid language related to Edo, Urhobo, Owan language, Isoko, Anioma and Etsako. See R. E. Bradbury, *The Benin Kingdom and the Edo Speaking Peoples of South Western Nigeria* (London: International African Institute, 1996).

27. It is most probably through this trading contact that the Nupe people came to know about the viability and potentials of the Auchi Kingdom and this subsequently resulted to the invasion in 1860. See. Abdulrahman O. Arunah, *A History of Auchi Kingdom* (Ilorin: Haytee Press and Publishing Co. Ltd, 2010), 5.

28. Obomeghie, *Auchi Kingdom: Twenty Decades of Ikelebe Dynasty 1945 and beyond*, 210.

29. Obomeghi (55), Journalist and writer, interviewed at his office at Abuja in Nigeria, 3/4/2021.

and neighbouring communities and created relative peace and harmony between them. This was the case between the Auchi Kingdom and other neighbouring communities. Arunah stated that it was due to similarities in language, tradition and culture many Auchi people married wives from neighbouring communities such as the clans of Uzairue, Aviele, Okpella, Ivbiaro, South Ibie etc. It was also very evident that there was a lot of inter marriages especially from the south Ibie clans. The practice of marrying wives by Auchi men from Ibie continued till the present day. Even the current King of the Auchi Kingdom, His Royal Highness, Alhaji Aliru H. Momoh, married an Ibie woman as one of his wives. It is also on record that previous kings before the current one also married Ibie women.³⁰ It is also very interesting to note that the proximity between Auchi and Ibie is so close that it is just a walkable distance.

Another very important activity that brought the Auchi kingdom in contact with other neighbouring communities was the need for the consultation of the oracle.³¹ Before the introduction of both Islam and Christianity in the Auchi Kingdom and other neighbouring communities everyone practiced the traditional religion, which was the worship of several deities such as orle, ogun, oritsa, orle etc. These local deities had shrines and were offered sacrifices from time to time. These local deities were consulted and appeased during the times of famine, drought, plague etc and offered sacrifices with sheep and goats to ensure a good harvest of crops.³² Oroh explained that there were communities that were skilled in the act of oracle consultation. One of such communities was Abunekeh in Ivbiaro, a village very close to the Auchi Kingdom. People travelled far and wide to visit this community with their never-ending problems with the belief that they would get solutions. Many Auchi people also visited this community with their problems. Some of the issues and problems that made Auchi people go for divine consultation at that time was bad harvest, infertility of women, spiritual affliction etc.³³ Many women within and outside the Auchi Kingdom also came to seek for traditional means of solving the problem of infertility and other issues by offering sacrifices to orle, the river goddess of fertility in the Auchi Kingdom.³⁴ This

30. O. A. Momodu, *The role of Otaru Momoh in the Islamization of Auchi and its Environs* (Department of Religion, University of Ilorin, 1987), 5.

31. Oroh Audu (68), Politician and former Member of the House of Representatives, interviewed at his residence at Ivbiaro in Edo State, Nigeria, interview based on African traditional religion and Intergroup relations, 23/3/2021.

32. Oseni (72), Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies, interviewed at his residence at Auchi, Edo State in Nigeria, 3/15/2021.

33. Audu (68), Politician and former Member of the House of Representatives, interviewed at his residence at Ivbiaro in Edo State, Nigeria, interview based on African traditional religion and Intergroup relations.

34. One of the cultural practices of Africans is consulting the oracle for different purposes. Some of such purposes include for protecting and wading off evil spirits, for curing infertility in women, for procuring charms for good luck and prosperity, to end

practice of oracle consultation was abolished after the adoption of the Islamic religion as its official religion in the early twentieth century. Despite this, many people still continued with the practice. According to Aloysius, "there are also Christians and Muslims who still practice elements of traditional African religion alongside their professed beliefs. For many people, combining traditional religion with either Christianity or Islam is also a way of life. It is very difficult to totally discard the practice of the African traditional religion." Despite the introduction of Islam and Christianity many Africans, especially people residing in the rural areas and villages, still practiced the act of Oracle consultation and this was also the case with the Auchi Kingdom.³⁵

The Socio-cultural and Political Practices of Pre-Nupe Auchi Kingdom

Pre-colonial Nigeria, as explained by Ibenekwu, was characterized by fragmented ethnic nationalities each with its own unique system of government or institutions of governance. Such systems were traditional in nature and structured to suit the peculiarities of the ethnic groups involved. In stateless societies the lineage system possesses key features of political relations and other social relations. Middleton explained that political power and authority were exercised between groups and statuses. External political relations of local groups were often conceived in lineage terms when there is no centralized political authority.³⁶ It must also be noted that there were some political positions that were awarded to women because of their importance in the Kingdom. Nwando explained that the female principle was embodied in women's roles as overseers and females of privilege, including women leaders of their people or wives of male leaders. These women exercised great power, authority, and influence publicly, temporally, and in spiritual/religious spheres.³⁷ This was exactly the case with the Auchi Kingdom.

The administrative structure, according to Arunah, in the pre Nupe era in the Auchi Kingdom was one that was based on a gerontocracy system, which was a government based on the rule by old people. At the time, Africans had great

drought and a host of other reasons. This practice was very common among the Auchi people and neighbouring communities. See Arunah, 136.

35. Dawood (68), Professor of African History, interviewed at his office at Iyamho, Edo State in Nigeria, interview based on the socio-cultural practices of the Auchi people, 3/4/2021.

36. Ikpechukwuka E. Ibenekwu, "Igbo Traditional Political System and the crisis of Governance in Nigeria," *Ikoru Journal of the Institute of African Studies UNN* 9, no. 1-2; John Middleton, and Tait David (Eds.), *Tribes without Rulers* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), 6.

37. Achebe Nwando, *Female Monarchs and Merchant Queens in Africa* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2020), 23.

respect for old people but Africans believed that age was synonymous with wisdom. There was the family unit, quarter council, village council and council of state. The head men, that is the oldest men in the family unit, quarter unit and village council and the chief, later renamed as Otaru by the Nupe, were the symbol of authority was in the Auchi Kingdom.³⁸ The basic unit of political and administrative interactions in the earliest times was the family unit. The family unit comprises of persons who are essentially of the same grandfather, a bilateral descent group. Within the family unit, a man's attainment to the position of head was usually predicated on his age.³⁹ The eldest man of this type of administrative unit was known as odate and he was automatically charged with the responsibility of governing the family. Tony, a writer, explained that disputes ranging from fighting within the family and other issues that would likely dent the good image of the family were handled by the head of the family with some other appointed people who had been initiated into manhood through the age-grade system.⁴⁰ Segosimhe explained that it was also customary at that time was that family houses were built in a way and manner that the oldest man's apartment was always at the entrance of the compound. It was his duty to know the people and visitors that went into the compound. This done because of security reasons.⁴¹

During this period, religious sanctions provided much essential backing for the authority of the head of the family. He was taken as a representative of the ancestors on earth. Oseni stated that the family head retained headship authority as long as he discharged his obligations and treated all members of his family with equitable justice. The head of the family was duty bound to perform some religious rites expected of him on behalf of his household. For instance, he was supposed to alert his family members of the religious plans and rites of the Quarter council, Village Council and the Council of State. These included sacrifices during the times of wars, epidemic, years of low yield in harvest, before commencement of planting season, festivals and so on. It is worthy to note that the family unit was the first unit and point of contact for political, economic and socio-cultural interactions among the people before the incursion of the Nupe.⁴²

In the economic sphere, the head of the family unit played special roles within his household. Tony, explained that agriculture was the live wire of the Auchi economy before the incursion of the Nupe. In most African societies of the

38. Arunah, *A history of Auchi Kingdom*, 20.

39. It must be said that African place a lot of emphasis on age right from the earliest times till date. Old people were always placed in leadership positions because it is believed in the wisdom comes with age. See Arunah, 23.

40. Tony Momoh (83), writer and politician and former Federal Minister of Information, interviewed at his residence at Lagos State in Nigeria on 10/02/2020.

41. Seghosime, *Origin and development of Auchi*, 46.

42. Oseni, "The Islamization of Auchi Kingdom in South Central Nigeria," paper presented at *First Auchi Day celebration* (Lagos: Efu Media, 1998), 62.

primeval age, land and labour were vital ingredients for production through which people earned their livelihood and these were jointly owned by all members of the family. They were, however, administered by the family head. Farming was a group exercise in which all members of the family participated actively. Their available farmlands were shared among the male members of the family for cultivation under the trusteeship of the family head. He could, however, be represented when he became too old to go to farm by his Ukor (representative). For the purpose of bush fallowing, it was also mandatory on the family head to ensure his family members' acquisition of more than one farmland. Harvested crops were placed at his disposal to determine the harvest to be kept for consumption and those to be sold for monetary gain. This practice is still common in some families till the present day.⁴³

Beyond agriculture, Oseni also explained that some men within the family unit were engaged in hunting activities. Hence, it formed another means of economic life where the family head again exerted much influence prior to the emergence of Nupe imperialism. The family head of each family unit was expected to do a lot to protect the life of hunters in his family, especially by providing them with mystical powers, talisman and charms. Upon the killing of a wild animal such as elephant or any other wild beast by a hunter, the family was automatically supposed, in conjunction with the quarter head, to share the meat among everyone in the community. Thereafter, the entire family of the accomplished hunter, especially the hunter himself and the family head, were held up in high esteem. The family head was accorded great respect that even during dry season when fishing activities in rivers Orle and Edio had started he was placed in a position of receiving the biggest fish from both individual and collective fishing exercises by member of his family. He also gave instructions on which to be consumed and that to be sold.⁴⁴

Seogsimhe stated there was also the Quarter Council which was the next structure of administrative leadership in the Auchi Kingdom before the arrival of the Nupe in the second half of the 19th century. The Quarter unit was a conglomeration of two or more contiguous extended families or households who were descendants from a single ancestor. Just as the governance of the family unit was in the hands of the most senior man, odate, that of the Quarter unit was entrusted in the hands of the various family heads within each village under the leadership of the oldest man. This oldest man in the Quarters was referred to as "Okpishia-ede". Oseni explained that the technique used in identifying the most senior man in the Quarter Council was reached through a careful study of the time of successive names of different age-groups. There and then, all family heads

43. Tony, "My father had 48 wives and they always took an oath every six months," in *Punch Newspaper online*, September 10, 2016.

44. Oseni (72), Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies, interviewed at his residence at Auchi, Edo State in Nigeria, 3/15/2021.

within each Quarter who were automatic members of the Quarter Council owned their responsibilities to the Quarter head. With the help of the various family heads, the Quarter Council deliberated on issues that generally affected the whole Quarter. The Council, under headship of the oldest man, settled inter-family disputes among the people. Other cases or matters which could not be resolved at family level were usually transferred to the Quarter Council for onward arbitration. As the Quarter representative at the Village Council, the Okpisha-ede (Quarter head) was expected to make the announcement and implementation of the decisions of the Village Council in his Quarter. Segosimhe stated that during every harvest season, he enjoyed tribute or royalty of farm produce from members of his quarter. He also ensures a proper and fair division of the dead's property among the heirs. Much economic and socio-cultural functions were never exercised by the Quarter Council; probably because the family unit had taken much responsibility of these. Nevertheless, the Council effected the sacrificial rites of any guilty adulterer. The major sacrificial item of this offence was a matured she-goat.⁴⁵

Obomeghie stated that just above the Quarter Council was the village council which comprised of all heads of Quarter Councils. The village was a conglomeration of quarters, wards or large kindred. Authority in the Village Council consisted of quarter heads or their representatives within the same village. The leadership of the Village Council was placed in hands of the oldest man among members of the council. Bradbury explained that the importance of the council head was also predicated on age-grades system, since it was the only way through which the oldest man could be known in the village. The village head was expected to live up to his age and experience in ruling over his people. He was only responsible to the Auchi Council of State headed by the Okpishia-evbo. Village meetings were presided over by him and were mostly held at the village market square or his house. Cross-quarters' political, economic and socio-cultural matters as they generally affected the village were discussed by the Village Council.⁴⁶

Oseni stated that appeal cases from Quarter Councils and other cases beyond the legal jurisdiction of both the family unit and quarter councils were brought forward to the village council for possible and final settlement. Decisions reached at the Village Council were not difficult to be carried to the people which they were meant for because the composition of the council was always an even representation of the various quarters and all quarter heads were members. Thus, the only task was getting the various family heads under their areas of administrative influences informed of such decisions of the Village Council for effective implementation. Oroh stated that religiously, the Village Council was

45. Seghosime, *Origin and development of Auchi*, 45-46.

46. Obomeghie, *Auchi Kingdom: Twenty Decades of Ikelebe Dynasty 1945 and beyond*, 210; Bradbury, *The Benin Kingdom and the Edo Speaking Peoples of South Western Nigeria*, 104.

one of the places where priests performed very important functions. Through their mystical powers, they consulted and interpreted the utterances of the local gods and goddesses. The priest made sacrifices on behalf of the village to the gods and goddesses which were always efficacious. Bradbury also explained that the priests commanded significant political influence within their various villages as diviners and advisory members of the Village Council of Elders.⁴⁷

Economically, the Village Council played a very significant role in the area of commercialization. Obomeghie stated that the increasing volume of trading activities, which was the culmination of the continuous growth in population and increase in agricultural products, precipitated the creation of more markets in the villages that conglomerate to form the Auchi Kingdom. Each village created its own local markets called Ughele, where goods were exchanged from morning till evening. Despite of the degree of autonomy exercised by various villages through the Village Councils in the pre Nupe era of the Auchi Kingdom, there were still some other functions that were beyond their jurisdiction or spheres of influences. Such issues were handled by the highest hierarchy of policy formulation and administrative body, the Council of State.⁴⁸

The Council of State was the highest policy formulating and administrative body of the socio-cultural and political system that operated in the Auchi Kingdom prior to the arrival of the Nupe. Oroh stated that the Council of State was comprised of village heads. The co-ordination of opinions on matters of common interest like communal labour, inter-village disputes, ancestral worship and state security as they generally affected the Auchi Kingdom were deliberated upon by the Council of States under the chairmanship of the Utsogu village. Meetings of the Council of State depended on exigencies, but before such meetings were held, the odio of Utsogu would have to send the ukabon 'evbo (town crier) to notify the village heads of all the villages. Decisions reached were thus communicated to all Quarter Councils by the village heads that constituted the forum. They were in turn to communicate to family heads for onward transmission to their wards and other members of their household for implementation. Decisions reached were never flouted by village, Quarter and family heads.⁴⁹

47. Oseni (72), Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies, interviewed at his residence at Auchi, Edo State in Nigeria, 3/15/2021; Audu (68), Politician and former Member of the House of Representatives, interviewed at his residence at Ivbiaro in Edo State, Nigeria, interview based on African traditional religion and Intergroup relations, 23/3/2021.

48. Obomeghie (55), Journalist and writer, interviewed at his office at Abuja in Nigeria, 3/4/2021.

49. Audu (68), Politician and former Member of the House of Representatives, interviewed at his residence at Ivbiaro in Edo State, Nigeria, interview based on African traditional religion and Intergroup relations, 23/3/2021.

In the event of war with enemies, the Council of State arranged for the Auchi military forces, Umaireghe and Umakpoqho,⁵⁰ to defend the state. The Umaireghe and Umakpoqho was always selected from a virile age grade. The Umaireghe was also responsible for the spearheading of the Omogbai festival. This festival was carried out when a new king was to be coronated. The Umaireghe conducted the ritual exercise of the Omogbai. Tony further stated that the selection of this age-grade is done by the eldest of the king makers. He appoints a certain age grade which has shown exemplary element of gallantry and toughness in socio-political activities in the kingdom. A much younger age grade is co-opted to assist in the strenuous sections of the rituals such as the killing of any domestic animal that would be used for the ritual.⁵¹

Also, Obomeghie explained that judicial issues that bothered on inter-village disputes and other issues, and cases of serious crimes which village councils could not solve, were usually brought to the Council of State for equitable arbitration. In the Council of State, the position of the Chief Priest was found to be most renowned as it was imperative for him to consult the oracle, gods, and goddesses whose verdicts were seen as final and indisputable. The Chief Priest, was expected, in conjunction with other local priests, to make sacrifices on behalf of the entire Kingdom to usher in a new planting season and/or in the event of low yield of crops, warfare and other pressing issues. In fact, it was through his oracular consultations that certain festival dates were fixed. In the economic sphere, the Council of State wielded much power on Uchi market. The market was a true symbol of immortalization of the founder of the Auchi Kingdom. The market which is located on the boundaries between Utsogu and Iyekhei is, till date, still well visited by traders on the stipulated market days. The Council of State was always represented at the market which was attended by Auchi people and their neighbours to ensure the maintenance of peace and the stabilisation of market prices against inflationary trends.⁵²

Another socio-cultural practice of the people of the Auchi Kingdom before the imperialism by the Nupe was the age-grade system among its male

50. Umaireghe and Umakpoqho is the name of the local army that defended the Auchi Kingdom during the times of war before Nupe imperialism. Members of the army was made of young men that have been initiated into manhood. This army was fearless because they were given local charms and talisman to protect themselves from their attackers. The Auchi Kingdom army was defeated by the Nupe imperialist due to superior arms, horses and more potent charms. The Nupe imperialist then established firm control over the Auchi kingdom in 1860 but were subsequently dislodged by the British colonialist in 1897. See Tony, *Each man, his time: The biography of an era* (Lagos: Pemark Nigeria Ltd, 1995), 94-95.

51. Obomeghie, *Auchi Kingdom: Twenty Decades of Ikelebe Dynasty 1945 and beyond*, 200; Tony, *Each man, his time: The biography of an era*, 117.

52. Obomeghie, *Manhood initiation festival in Auchi Kingdom* (Benincity: Wadorm Communication Nig. Ltd, 2014), 80.

population.⁵³ Obomeghie stated that the age grade system was a very significant socio-cultural practice which formed the super-structure for the effective operations of the political units in the Auchi Kingdom. Like all other Edo speaking societies, the Auchi Kingdom maintained the age grade system among its male population from the primeval age. The system, which still operates till date, was of different stratifications. The first aspect of these stages drew its membership from the youths or Igbama at about 18 to 20 years of age, membership was automatic for youths of this age range. The next strata is the Itseba age group. The age range was about 20 to 22 years. This group moved a step ahead into another stage called Isoiqbama (head of boys) in a year or two later. The various age groups had different functions and roles that they played even before they were initiated into manhood. Dawood explained that the primary duty of members of the above-named age-sets was to clear inter-village roads, farms and streams, paths and construct new ones where and when necessary. They also engaged themselves in the cleaning of markets, cleansing of water holes and erection and rehabilitation of public buildings.⁵⁴

The above status, according to Dawood, was usually maintained by members of the Isoigbama age group for about a year or two before they are finally initiated into manhood (Urhuah) by Auchi Council of State during Ekhai festival. Members of this age group who became referred to as Ilarhua (newly initiated) usually ensured the effective execution of communal projects that required the use of much physical strength. They usually constituted the Umarheghe, the defense army of the Kingdom. It should be noted at this juncture that it was the belief that celebrants were virgins who must be pure and this natural bondage was what the manhood initiation was meant to loosen. Thus, in about ten days to the beginning of the celebration cannon and dane-guns were usually heard booming over the entire Kingdom to usher in the initiation ceremony. During the time of the celebration, celebrants would wear costly beads and would be carried shoulder high amidst the heavy venting of cannons, frenzy beats of local talking drum (Okaga) and showering of praises.⁵⁵ The last and perhaps one of the most important aspects of the age grade initiation ceremony was the Onirhuah, which is a marathon race during which participants were made to run without pants but with Agbada (flowing gown) on, to cover them

53. The age grade celebration was one event that everyone in the Auchi kingdom was always looking forward to. It was a very colourful event that attracted visitors from far and wide. It was also a very significant cultural event that involved everybody in the Kingdom in one way or the other. Most parents had children that were celebrating the manhood initiation or had relatives or friends that had children that were celebrating too. See Obomeghie, 78.

54. Obomeghie, *Manhood initiation festival in Auchi Kingdom*, Benincity, 90.

55. Dawood (68), Professor of African History, interviewed at his office at Iyamho, Edo State in Nigeria, interview based on the socio-cultural practices of the Auchi people, 3/4/2021.

from complete nudity.⁵⁶ The race was made to a selected house of an aged woman who must have reached menopause. With her legs outstretched, the celebrants will cross over and run to their various homes upon the payment of some small amount of money. It should be noted that during this process participants are forbidden from looking behind them until they got to their respective homes. No participant was also expected to fall down or come last on the race or he may progressively lag behind his age mates all through his life. Having performed these rites, the celebrants would be automatically admitted into the circle of men and this usually brought pride to their parents who could then be buried among the ancestors. Also, the celebrant would also become entitled to a share of whatever was due to men in the community. Odjugo stated that the entire significance of the whole ceremony was that it was only through this means that seniority in the Family Unit, Quarter Council, Village Council and to some extent the Council of State was worked out or known.⁵⁷

Marital institution, according to Yesufu, was an important feature of the culture of the Auchu people. From the primeval age, the family head exercises much power in addressing marital issues. After observing all the rites as contained in the manhood initiation ceremony, it was basically the duty of the family head to loosen the natural bondage of the celebrant's virginity by marrying for him a young lady. This was done by asking the young man to search for the young girl of his choice for marriage. He was often assisted by his parents and relatives. When a choice was finally made, it was mandatory for the head of the family to relate or negotiate on behalf of their son after which gifts like palm-wine and kolanuts were sent to the future in-laws even before the marriage arrangements had been concluded. Most of the time the family head advised the would-be husband to organize his age group to work on the farm of the girl's family and secretly presented her gifts during private meetings until the date had eventually been fixed for the bringing of the bride to the bridegroom. The family head was usually entrusted with the lavish feast and wining, provision of traditional music and dances that usually accompany marriage ceremonies. According to Yesufu, the family head exerted other socio-cultural responsibilities among which was the naming of the children born after a period of three months. By so doing, the head of the family usually ensured that the circumstances surrounding the birth of children and other natural phenomena in the family, quarter, village and the entire Kingdom were revealed or reflected in such names. When a child was born after the marriage, the child was given an indigenous name. All these changed after the invasion of the Nupe. The indigenous marriage practice was replaced by

56. This practice is age long. On the day of the race, many people are seen standing along the road side to cheer the participants as they race to their various houses. It is basically referred to as a happy day for the participants because this was the height of the celebration. See Arunah, 95.

57. I. K. Odjugo, *Commission of Inquiry into the Otaru of Auchu Chieftancy title* (Report, Official Document No. 1., 5., 1968), 1-20.

Islamic marriage. Children produced from the marriages were given Islamic names and naming ceremonies were conducted after seven days as against three months during the pre-Nupe era.⁵⁸

Omoruan explained that before the incursion of the Nupe and the introduction of the Islamic religion in the Auchi Kingdom the people practiced the traditional religion. The people of the Auchi Kingdom were animist and polytheist. The people worshipped a number of deities which they trusted and reached out to for assistance. Such deities included Uchi (the spirit of the founder of Auchi), Orle (the river goddess) etc. These deities had shrines where they were worshipped by their devotees.⁵⁹ Oseni argued that the people of the Auchi Kingdom had a strong belief in a supreme God. In the local dialect of the people God was called names such as "Oghena" and "Ogie Okuli". The people recognized the uniqueness of a supreme God, as was recognized in their common prayers when his name was mentioned. Idowu stated that the people also had belief in the absoluteness of God's control of the universe and the universality of God. One major proof of the Auchi people's belief in the uniqueness of God was the fact they called on the superior God through the smaller gods to protect them from the hands of the evil doers. Moreover, the people had a strong belief in the absoluteness of God's control over the universe and his universality. The people were convinced that God was the creator of the universe and of whatever human or spiritual power that existed in any part of the universe. Hence, he was regarded as the only God of the entire universe.⁶⁰

Dawood explained that there were divinities worshipped collectively by the people of the Kingdom and there were other divinities that were worshipped by individual members of various extended families of the Kingdom. However, many of these local divinities particularly the clan and village deities represented some of the early Auchi men and women that were deified by their respective families for their phenomenal contributions towards the early founding and contributions towards the growth and protection of the kingdom. Some of these local deities includes Orle, the River Goddess. This deity was known to be the goddess of fertility. Another one was Uchi, the progenitor of the Auchi kingdom. It was believed that Uchi migrated from the Benin Kingdom over five hundred years ago and settled in the present day Auchi.⁶¹

Dawood stated that the Auchi people did not offer human sacrifice to their local deities to appease them. They utilized local certain domestic animals such as

58. M. A. Yesufu, *Bida Invasion and its impact on Auchi and its environs. 1860-1900* (Department of History, University of Ilorin, Nigeria, 1993), 23.

59. J. O. B. Ornoruan, *The Planting of Islam in Afenmai Land: Ihievbe, A case Study* (Department of History, University of Ilorin, Nigeria, 1986), 45.

60. Oseni (72), Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies, interviewed at his residence at Auchi, Edo State in Nigeria, 3/15/2021.

61. Dawood, "The Nupe Invasion of Esanland: An Assessment of its Socio-Political impact on the People- 1885-1897," 80.

goats, sheep, cocks and ducks. Also, they offer certain foods particularly pounded yam and egusi (melon) soup to such deities as sacrifice. Apart from ensuring the wellbeing of the people, it was also believed that the deities assisted in curing women of the problem of infertility of the womb. The deities were also used in performing some quasi-judicial functions. Among such were disputes concerning alleged theft, alleged sorcery, infidelity etc. Accused persons are made to swear to their innocence in the shrine of the local deity and the result is gotten within a very short period. However, despite all these processes and methods of deifying and veneration of the local divinities in the Auchi kingdom, the basic concept of religious beliefs and practices remain very similar within Africa.⁶²

Again, the Auchi people believed in the existence of spirits and ancestors. Oseni explained that there was the general belief that the dead played a very significant role in the lives and activities of the living. They believed that spirits, in some cases, used material objects as temporal abodes to manifest their presence and actions. In most cases, for example, if a person's farm is destroyed by unseen forces, it was believed that the spirits were responsible. It usually resulted to the intervention of certain stronger spiritual forces such as potent native doctors and medicine men to control their activities. Hence, they also strongly believed in their ancestors. It was not every important man or woman that was deified as an ancestor.⁶³ Obomeghie opined that the ancestors in most communities in Africa were usually the founders and progenitors of their villages and communities and this was also the case of the Auchi Kingdom. After the deification of a person, such a person emerged as a central figure in the religious belief system of the people. Moreover, shrines and places of worship are built in their honour and memory because they are highly venerated. It is very important to note that all the ancestors in African communities are addressed in prayers, songs and epithet. In this way, such ancestral spirits helped to ensure peace, good harvest, fertility of women and peaceful coexistence of the people of the Kingdom before the Nupe invasion of 1860.⁶⁴

Additionally, Oseni stated that the Auchi people believed in reincarnation and life after death.⁶⁵ They believed in both the human and spiritual/invisible

62. Dawood (68), Professor of African History, interviewed at his office at Iyamho, Edo State in Nigeria, interview based on the socio-cultural practices of the Auchi people, 3/4/2021.

63. Oseni (72), Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies, interviewed at his residence at Auchi, Edo State in Nigeria, 3/15/2021.

64. Obomeghie (55), Journalist and writer, interviewed at his office at Abuja in Nigeria, 3/4/2021.

65. The belief in reincarnation is common in most African communities. The Auchi people, before 1860, strongly believed in reincarnation, i.e., when a male child is born immediately after the child's father or grandfather dies in a family it is a general belief that the dead man had been reborn. This belief system is still part of the cultural and religious belief system of the Auchi people till the present day. See Seghosime, 28.

worlds. The non-human world is the world which we cannot see. These two worlds are not separated, but connected, and make up one continuous, complete world. This explains the West African belief in the never-ending cycle of life and reincarnation. They believe that when one is born, he grows old, dies, and then is reborn. The visible world is a world of human beings, natural forces and phenomena. The invisible world is a world of divine beings, of good and bad spirits, and departed ancestors. The visible and invisible worlds communicate and interact with each other. The Auchi people believed that there were spirits all around them. The Auchi people had diviners, priests, priestesses to help explain the universe. These were special human beings who were endowed with spiritual powers. They had the abilities to communicate with the dead. They served as the link between the dead and the living. Oseni further stated that if a man dies in a family and a male child is born in that same family during that same period, it was the general belief that the dead man had been reborn. This was also very common in most communities in Africa.⁶⁶ When the Nupe arrived and established their rule over Auchi Kingdom, the Islamic religion was introduced and from that point the belief system gradually changed. Many indigenes still practice the African Traditional Religion alongside Islamic religion. This practice is common in many African countries like Ghana, Cameroun, Togo etc.⁶⁷

Lastly, Binta stated that women were allowed to participate in the running of the affairs of Auchi Kingdom during the pre-Nupe era.⁶⁸ Nwando stated that “it was this remarkable woman who had transformed herself into a man who would, from that point on, consume many of my waking thoughts,”⁶⁹ This was due to the fact that a woman, due to her high personality, was made king in her community. In the same vein, women in the Auchi Kingdom were given administrative and political roles to perform. There were some criteria used for the appointment of women to play some certain roles in the Kingdom and some of these includes age, popularity, integrity, wealth etc. The most important positions, offices, roles, duties and functions were given to the oldest women in the Kingdom. The reason for this was that the people in the Auchi Kingdom at that time laid great emphasis on gerontocracy which permitted the oldest people and elders to dominate the socio-cultural and political affairs of the people. The two most important of the positions for women were the positions of the Ikpotso-

66. Oseni (72), Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies, interviewed at his residence at Auchi, Edo State in Nigeria, 3/15/2021.

67. Obomeghie (55), Journalist and writer, interviewed at his office at Abuja in Nigeria, 3/4/2021.

68. Fatima Yakubu Binta (72), House wife and lived in the Kingdom for a very long time, interviewed at her residence at Auchi, Edo State in Nigeria, interview based on the role of women in Auchi politics, 24/3/ 2021.

69. Nwando, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2011), 2.

Ikpisha (oldest woman) and Ogbachi (woman leader).⁷⁰ It was the duty of these two women to protect the interest of women and mobilise them to achieve their individual, societal goals, destinies and aspirations. Though these women were not in attendance of the Village or Clan Councils meetings which had only men in attendance. Charity stated that these women had direct access to the Otaru (king) to discuss and find lasting solutions to issues and problems concerning women and their children. These women, basically, acted as intermediaries between the authorities and their fellow women. The positions of Ikpotso-Ikpisha and Ogbachi were not hereditary in nature.⁷¹ Binta stated that the demise of any of these women resulted to the appointment of other women from other families within the kingdom. All these were in place before the Nupe invaded the Auchi Kingdom in 1860 and introduced their system of administration which led to the alteration some of the indigenous socio-cultural and political system of the people.⁷² This practice was, however, retained by the Nupe upon their arrival.

Conclusion

The trend of socio-cultural imposition in Africa was very pervasive and prevalent before the twentieth century in Africa, such that activities of imperialists and colonialists had taken precedence over African values and culture. The impact of imperialism and colonialism on social values and cultural practices of the people in the various kingdoms and empires in Africa had occasioned a discontinuity or alteration in their socio-cultural and political system. It was a common trend in Africa that the fall of an empire or kingdom gives rise to another. As a result, kingdoms conquered kingdoms and imposed their own traditions and customs on the people. It led to a cultural dualism that often presented itself as a real dilemma in real-life situations. African kingdoms and empires had established indigenous socio-cultural and political practices that

70. The roles of both the Ikiposo-Ikpisha and Ogbachi were very important roles for women before 1860. It was more like giving the women a voice to speak out and be heard. All issues and disputes that concerned and affected women and their children were deliberated and lasting solutions were arrived at by women and they tried as much as possible not take sides with any of the parties in dispute. These positions/roles are still very much in existence in the Auchi Kingdom till date. See Arunah, 80-81.

71. Charity Momoh (48), Civil Servant, interviewed at her residence at Auchi in Edo State, Nigeria, interview based on the role of woman in the in Auchi politics, April 24/3/2021.

72. Binta (72), House wife and lived in the Kingdom for a very long time, interviewed at her residence at Auchi, Edo State in Nigeria, interview based on the role of women in Auchi politics, 24/3/2021.

was the identity and binding force of the indigenous people before the coming of external forces and influence.

It must be said at this juncture that before the incursion by the Nupe people the Auchi Kingdom had established traditions, cultural values and a functional political and judicial system which were quite similar to that of many other communities in Africa but had distinct particularities. The Auchi people were farmers, hunters, blacksmith, traders etc. They also had an organized system of political administration which was so organized that it started from the family level up to the Council of State which was the highest level. All the five villages under the authority of the kingdom were administered independently under the odufa (oldest man) system of governance. A man's aspiration to the headship of his village depended on being the most senior person in the last surviving age group. But sadly, many African values and cultural practices were totally abolished or modified as a result of foreign influence but some practices, such as the age grade system, participation of women in the running of the affairs of the Kingdom etc remained till the present day. The main aim of the Nupe invasion of the Auchi Kingdom was for exploitative purposes but some of their innovations were very beneficial to the people. These, to a very large extent, positively affected the super structure and the well-being of the people of the Auchi Kingdom because bad and obnoxious practices were abolished.

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