



## CONQUEST AND THE IMPOSITION OF CHIEFTAINCY IN EGGON LAND AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

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### Abstract

*This study is centred on the socio-political history of Eggon land and seeks to critically examine the stages of transformation, from the colonial subjugation to the advent of a centralized political authority with the entrenchment of colonial rule in the area, especially from the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> twentieth) century. The paper therefore contends that prior to the colonial imperial contact; indigenous African societies have evolved a dynamic socio-political system and boisterous institutions that ensure adherence to cultural values and orderliness for the enthronement of a peaceful and harmonious society, contrary to the Eurocentric view of a stateless society without a centralized authority. Thus, the Eggon evolved several of these institutions that invariably shaped their rich cultural heritage. The paper also examines the pattern of colonial conquest and enthronement of colonialism and its consequent implications, as well as post-colonial developments in the area that triggered a series of socio-political changes, especially the transformation of the traditional decentralized political authority to the indirect or emirate model of a centralize political authority. This gradual transformation however, gave rise to the emergence of chiefdoms that eventually crystalized in the creation of the “Aren” Chieftaincy stool. More so, the ensuing political changes at that period reinforce the consolidation of the Aren chieftaincy institution and the profound impact it exerted in the society.*

**Keyword:** Colonialism, Traditional Authority, Indigenous Governance, Political Centralisation, Chieftaincy Institution, Eggon Land

### Introduction

Prior to the advent of colonial rule in Eggon land, there was no centralized political authority, but there were various house-hold heads or elders who controlled autonomous villages, and political authority was vested on them. However, colonial rule necessitated the creation of a centralized political authority (Aren Eggon) through the model of indirect rule which was apparently introduced to serve the administrative requirements of the colonial government that has

exerted profound impact in Eggon society. Thus, the nature and success of colonial administration in their bid to create an indigenous central administration has adversely affected the existing traditional political structure. Therefore, the juxtapositions of the two forces and the eventual outcome form the basic part of the colonial legacy in Eggon society.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, the colonial experience in most African societies had added significantly to the myriads of sociopolitical and economic quagmires. However, the most prominent feature of most African societies was the introduction of western-styled political structure that was totally strange and alien to the people, which triggered a preponderance of socio-political and economic instabilities, especially after attaining independence. In fact, Nigeria is not an exception to this colonial impasse. The emergence of democratic governance in Nigeria after numerous years of military interregnum did not seem to provide the panacea in spite of the various socio-political reforms introduced to that effect. Rather, Nigeria became plaque with mounting developmental issues, which is characterized by institutionalized corruption and poor management of its vast mineral wealth, resulting in high scourge of multi-dimensional poverty and underdevelopment.

Consequently, despite Nigeria's global image of a prosperous country with abundant human and material resources, majority of its citizen's live in abject poverty and deprivation. It is against this backdrop that the study intends to proffer alternative panacea footed in traditional political leadership. In the past, traditional leadership has showcased the distinct qualities of cultural, moral values and equity especially in the distribution of resources which enhance its longevity.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, in Eggon and, the concept of political authority has been an integral part of its socio-cultural structure and belief system before the advent of colonial rule. It is on this premise that the study justifiably countered the claims of Eurocentric proponents such as T. J. Bowen, who asserted that African societies prior to contact with Europe did not evolve a capable political class independently.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, this baseless assertion by Eurocentric proponents identified African traditional values as sufficiently backward, and advocated for the introduction of western-styled

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<sup>1</sup> E. D. Anzaku, D. M. Enna, V.S. Dugga and K. A. Kigbu, (Eds), 'The Eggon of Central Nigeria, Andex Press, Jos, Nigeria, 1996, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> R. Cohen, 'Borno and Nigeria: Political Kingdom in a Trouble Nation, cited in P. F. Wilmot (Ed), *Sociology in Africa; A Book of Readings*, A.B.U Press, Zaria, 1973, p. 252

<sup>3</sup> w.w. Rostow, et al (Eds), cited in J. J. Onoja (Ed), 'How is Development and Underdevelopment Related', Post – Graduate Seminar, University of Jos, 2007

modernization pattern. They absolved western imperialism from blame and heaped it on the victims. Indeed, Eggon society, like most African societies evolved a traditional political leadership system that helped to maintain law and order and ensure harmonious coexistence and progress of the society.

The study is a modest contribution to the current challenges of socio-political developments in Eggon land influenced by colonialism, and it intends to add impetus to the political history of the Eggon through the three historical epochs, and the fundamental changes it brought to bear in the society. The study aims to increase the range of strategies required in dealing with mounting challenges emanating from chieftaincy phenomenon.

### **Methodology**

The study derived its sources from oral interviews and archival materials relating to the history of the Eggon. These interviews and documents were resourceful and of immense benefit to the study as they contain first-hand oral account as well as official colonial records and reports on the Eggon society.

Secondary sources were also widely consulted, which are physically derived from libraries, online sources, which gives an insight of the existing views and general knowledge on the chieftaincy issues in Eggon land and elsewhere. The sources are categorized into two, published and unpublished works. The published materials include: textbooks, journals, and gazetteers, newspapers, and magazines; while the unpublished sources range from manuscripts, unpublished thesis, dissertations and project works, online articles, and editorials, seminars and conference papers, as well as personal diaries. The methodology adopted and articulated for this work are critical and broad-based analysis of the general themes, specifically the tradition of origin, geography, economy, socio-cultural organization relating to the Eggon. There were also concepts derived from other disciplines relating to linguistics, social science, geography, archeology etc., used in the compilation of this study where necessary.

### **Key Concept**

#### **Colonialism**

Several literatures on colonialism exist and propounded the social structure it engendered and the enduring legacy in the wake of its encounter with the indigenous people. The concept is founded on Eurocentric perspective, which view the colonial encounter as a mere period or episode that brought transformation to the people, their institutions and society. The crux of the Eurocentric

argument according to Ekeh was that colonialism brought quick fixes and repackaging, as well as redrawing of the colonial landscape during the encounter between the colonialist and the native.<sup>4</sup> This aptly implies that in the encounter, the native was not just a passive receptor of colonial crafting, but became an active participant whose attitudes or responses had imposed a degree of restriction on the resourcefulness of the colonial overlords.<sup>5</sup> Thus, Spears posited that “*Colonialism was not simply a unilateral political phenomenon... attempts to invent tradition were thus complex and dynamic processes within ever changing fields of colonial conquest, rule and exploitation*”.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, while the aforementioned view does not deny the existence of social change in the sphere of human development, it however asserted that colonial experience was a mere episode, and the impact of which does not “tame, discipline and order” society in an explicit and predictable manner.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, these changes do not create a sharp and perceptible demarcation between the past and the future and while this persists, it perhaps was immediately felt or recognized. This is, for instance, assumed that colonial authorities were believed to have merely sought to incorporate pre-existing polities... into colonial structures’, not much cataclysm was needed to enforce that and, in the process, colonialism changed very little of the institutional and cultural artefacts of the natives in pursuance of its objectives. This however has been the crux of the underlying debate during the prosecution of colonial administration where it is widely agreed that the colonialists used the pre-existing traditional institutions to reorder the colonial landscape through the introduction of indirect rule. Therefore, it is pertinent to state that colonialism did not craft a new the various traditional institutions, and identities that took centerstage in the political space, but only ‘redrew’ or ‘repackaged’ the existing institutions and identities in the light of colonial demands.<sup>8</sup>

The colonial experience therefore experienced an unsettling current of events that uprooted existing traditional social order hitherto developed by the indigenous peoples and unleashed a confusing condition for the African society and its future direction. By that, colonialism can be

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<sup>4</sup>Ekeh Peter ‘Colonialism and the two Publics in Africa; A Theoretical Statement’, *Journal of Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1975, 17(1): 91 - 112

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Spear. ‘Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa’, *Journal of African History*, 2003, 44 (1): 3 - 27

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Spear. ‘Neo—Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa’, *Journal of African History*, 2003, 3 – 28

<sup>7</sup> Ekeh Peter, ‘Colonialism and Social Structure’, Ibadan University Inaugural Lecture, 1980

<sup>8</sup> Ekeh Peter et al, *Social Anthropology and the Two-Contrasting use of Tribalism in Africa*, *Journal of Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1990, 32 (4): 660 - 700

ascribed as a process of epochal dimension that intensely shake up the existing social structures through the introduction of a new and more permanent social forms and process whose effect permeate the society. Therefore, colonialism was an unparalleled force of change that made the native, institutions, and socio-cultural artefacts defenseless from its defenseless onslaught. Thus, in the process of reordering ‘whatever colonialism touched, it must have distorted and debased.’<sup>9</sup>

In the case of the perceived ‘Stateless’ societies of Northern Nigeria, colonialism redesigned the pre-colonial socio-political structures, which ended up altering the direction of history, impacting the constituted elements therein and laying the base for the growth of a rigid dividing walls around different cultural clusters that once interacted, and thereby inventing a highly distinct identities for the various groups. Hence, it has been conceded that the new cultural identities it generated became potentially more extensive and expansive that excluded and displaced small-scale pre-colonial loyalties. What these portends is that it deliberately prevented some communities from intensive missionary activities and allowed others to be profoundly affected by it, thus colonialism simultaneously created a wall of differences by neutralizing the prospect of an integrative effect that might have ensued. Since colonialism generated the situation for the emergence of a relatively larger cultural clusters, it actually fictionalized an identity for those groups into existence.<sup>10</sup> This is more evident during the colonial administration of the so-called stateless societies of the defunct Akwanga Division in northern Nigeria. During the colonial period, the British administrative policy fragmented the Eggon political space along cultural enclosures that it administratively christened districts.

### **British Policy of Indirect Rule**

Indirect rule was a British policy of local administration which is based on the search for identification, or the fabrication of a native agency and a reliable agent that gave credence to colonialism in its attempt at establishing law and order and tax collection. Essentially, such an agent must be willing to assume a subordinate status and displayed an unquestionable loyalty to the British overlords. Consequent upon swearing an oath of allegiance and loyalty to the British

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Robb, ‘The Colonial State and the Construction of Indian Identity: An example on the North – East Frontier in the 1880s, *Modern Asian Studies* 1997 31(2) 245 - 283

<sup>10</sup> Terence Ranger et al, ‘The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa: In the Invention of Tradition, Eric Hobsbaw and Ranger Terence (Eds) Cambridge University Press, 1984

crown and colonial government, “....to obey the laws of the protectorate “... and the lawful commands of the High Commissioner and his Residents”. This agent was issued a warrant of Appointment.<sup>11</sup>

In this case, authority was derived not from any traditional or pre-colonial source, but purely from the British administration whose rule was based principally on conquest.<sup>12</sup> The British also appointed agents from a class of aristocrats in places where such classes were available. Similarly, in places where a reliable agent could be found, administrative responsibilities, together with the requisite coercive instruments of state, were entrusted in it to administer, and often, adjudicate matters according to the dictate of local customs that were not repugnant to humanity.

However, in the decentralized (stateless) societies where authority structures were not immediately available, Lord Fredrick Lugard, the principal architect of the indirect rule system instructed that ‘the first step is to endeavor to find a man of influence as a chief, and to group under him as many villages or districts as possible, to reach him to delegate powers and to take an interest in his Native Treasury, to support his authority and to inculcate a sense of responsibility.<sup>13</sup> In a nutshell, the Lugardian principle was to either find the chief or make the chief that is capable of taking certain decisions and implementing them without reference to the central colonial administration.

Thus, in the attempt by the British to create or establish a reliable agent, such a person needed not to be an indigene of that area, the ethnic group or the clan which the agent was meant to oversee, since the British obsession was with a ‘competent’ agent that could effectively operate the colonial administrative structure and not necessarily a search for an indigenous or traditional character. This colonial trend was applicable in other British protectorates, the stateless societies of Northern Nigeria and among some ‘Pagan’ groups even at the clan level.<sup>14</sup> In order to achieve the colonial objectives, the status of the traditional ruler where such exist, eventually lost its traditional values in the service of colonialism, as the core cultural bond that perhaps existed

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<sup>11</sup> Sa’ad Abubakar, ‘The Northern Provinces Under Colonial Rule: 1900 – 1959’, in *Ground Work of Nigerian History*, Obaro Ikime (ed.) Historical Society of Nigeria, 1984

<sup>12</sup> Yusufu Bala Usman, ‘Beyond Fairy Tales: Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria Centre for Democratic Development, Research and Training, 2006

<sup>13</sup> Anthony Hamilton Millard Kirk-Green, ‘The Principles of Native Administration in Nigeria, (Selected Documents) Oxford University Press, 1965

<sup>14</sup> Tosh John, ‘Colonial Chief in a Stateless Society: A case study from Northern Uganda, *Journal of African History*, 1973, XIV (3): 473 - 490

between the chief and his community were destroyed.<sup>15</sup> The reason was that this traditional ruler was stripped from hitherto societal moral restraints that defined and diluted his authority, and now derived his authority from the British enacted Native Authority Ordinance, and therefore stopped being the embodiment of his people's sacred authority, as his appointment, recognition and deposition are largely determined by the British colonial authority. However, it is expedient to note that throughout the colonial epoch, Lugard never referred to this agency as traditional but rather as a native ruler.<sup>16</sup> In this regard, the myth designed by the British indirect rule was purely a British administrative creation which emerged during colonial conquest and replaced the pre-colonial existing traditional institutions.

### **An Overview of the Eggon Society**

The Eggon are predominantly found in central part of Nigeria (North Central), some one hundred and fifty kilometers from Abuja, Nigeria's Federal Capital. The heart of the Eggon settlement is Nassarawa Eggon, a town on the flat plain flanked by the Akun Eggon, or literally Eggon hills. The Eggon hills are however located along the corridor that connects northern and eastern Nigeria, which passes through the Makurdi–Jos–Abuja axis, and historically served as a bulwark for the Eggon in the past. The peak or highest points of the hills stand at over 100 meters high, which create the headwater of the Mada and Arikya Rivers that served as the tributaries of the Ibi and Benue Rivers. The banks of the smaller rivers provided the Savannah plains with water which complements terrace cultivation by the people.

The tradition of origin of the Eggon during the pre-colonial period is surrounded in contradictory and scanty evidence. A pioneer study by Kasimu Kigbu that documents some of the oral history, indicated various accounts which ranges from myths of creation to several migration theories.<sup>17</sup> The first account claims that the Eggon were created by God (Ahogbre) in their present location among the hills which avoided the logic and complexity of evolutionary arguments. Thus, this claim like the Yoruba myth of Oduduwa in South Western Nigeria, is illogical and unsubstantiated.<sup>18</sup> The second mythical claim explained migration from an obscure land in the

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<sup>15</sup> Tibenderana Peter Kazenga, 'The Role of the British Administration in the Appointment of Emirs of Northern Nigeria, 1903 – 1931: The case study of Sokoto Province, *Journal of African History*, 1987, p. 231 - 257

<sup>16</sup> Obaro Ikime, 'Reconsidering Indirect Rule: The Nigerian example, *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 1968, Vol. IV. P. 421 – 438

<sup>17</sup> Kasimu A. Kigbu, 'A History of the Eggon People from the Earliest times to 1960', Unpub. M. A. Dissertation, Bayero University, Kano, 1984

<sup>18</sup> Micheal Crowder, 'The Story of Nigeria, Faber and Faber Publication, London, 1962 p. 37

South East to Agunji under the leadership of a man called 'Abro'. The legend claimed that Abro found a strange wandering boy in the forest, which he adopted and named him Eholo. The boy grew up to adulthood and was given wives in marriage that later bore him several children in his foster father's house. Consequently, Abro grew old and frail and was stricken with blindness. Eholo then sought to swindle his foster brothers of their birthright in order to assume the leadership of the household. When this treachery was uncovered, Eholo fled Agunji to Wana where he founded the Eholo clan. His two foster brothers who remained in Agunji founded the Anzo clan. Hence, variations of these myths exist in several tales and are frequently used to explain the clan division and other aspect of Eggon history. These sources are however fraught with conjectures and distortions from the oral tradition for retrieval and transmission.

Therefore, the pre-colonial Eggon history, like several stateless polities of Central Nigeria, are shadowy and scanty. Many claims migration from the Jukun factor of Kwararafa confederacy. However, efforts by a European Anthropologist, Hunter Shaw, to refabricate and document the tradition of origin and early history of the people in 1934 was wholly frustrated with a myriad of conflicting accounts, which forced him to conclude that: *"The Eggon remember little of their past. Descent from a common ancestor is claimed... the exodus which took place in 1700, a date which approximate with the date of Idoma fight from Apa (Kwororofa) as well as with the Lindri flight from Wukari.*<sup>19</sup>

It is pertinent to note that most ethnic groups in Central Nigeria claim Kwararafa (Jukun confederacy) as their point of diffusion to their present domains. This seems more probable considering the linguistic evidence that support the migration theory of such groups as the Goemai, Tarok, Rindre, who were classified under the Benue–Congo language groups.<sup>20</sup>

However, during the entrenchment of colonial rule in Eggon land, the area fell under the purview of Southern Plateau Division (Later Akwanga Division) administrative unit under the then Plateau Province in the defunct Northern Protectorate. Further changes in the political structure of post-independence Nigeria precisely in 1967 states creation placed the Eggon in Benue–Plateau State, then by 1976 to Plateau State, and from October 1996 to the present Nasarawa State. These changes enabled the Eggon to diffuse to various locations and form a bulk of numerical strength in different locations such as Obi, Doma, Lafia, Kokona, Keana, Keffi, Akwanga and Awe Local

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<sup>19</sup> J. Hunter Shaw, 'Intelligence Report on the Eggon Tribal Area; NAK/Prof 488, No. 2, 27<sup>th</sup> January 1935 .1.

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, 'Studies in the History of Plateau State', Nigeria, London, Macmillan Press, 1982. P. 11

Government Areas in Nasarawa State, with Nasarawa Eggon Local Government Area remaining as the administrative nucleus of the Eggon.<sup>21</sup>

In terms of their population, the first census was conducted in 1917 by the British apparently to delineate the Eggon for effective tax collection strategy. Only a population of 16,848 adult males were recorded.<sup>22</sup> This number however, did not take into cognizance the difficult hilly terrain and the British inability to penetrate many isolated Eggon hills settlements and beyond. There were also problems of census evaders, as the exercise was ultimately tailored to gather data for effective taxation, a period when an effective colonial administration was not yet fully established in the Eggon area. The 1991 census estimate recorded a population of 183,499 for only the Eggon in Nasarawa Eggon Local Government Area, and with half of Akwanga Local Government Area, and with half of Akwanga Local Government Area, 366,998. At present, the total population including those in Diaspora could be projected to about 1,000,000.<sup>23</sup>

The name 'Eggon' literally means perception ability or 'hear', and it is often used to refer to the speakers of the language. They consist of three major clans of Anzo, Eholo and Ehro, and have similarities in customs, values and religious practices with an autonomous social structure. The political structure is based on the homestead as the smallest unit, where the head of the family or 'Adan Odne' is in charge of affairs. Next is the 'Kpazhi' or small family unit, where the male adults constitute the members of council, presided over by the eldest member of the eldest member and other elders as advisers. Similarly, there is the larger extended family group called the 'Ogu' which consists of twenty-two sub-clans that shared a common progenitor, and the 'Kusku' which made up the three major clans. The social system is organized along patriarchal and gerontocratic pattern, and the administration of the Eggon society is centred on religious belief in a supreme God or 'Ahogbren', surrounded by other lesser deities, spirits and ancestral beings.<sup>24</sup> The mode of worship, offerings and ritual sacrifices is exclusively channeled through 'Ashum' masquerade society. There was also the initiation of virile males into the Ashum society which signaled entry into community leadership.

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<sup>21</sup> Micheal A Manga, 'Christianity Among the Eggon People of Nigeria: with Reference to the Work of the Sudan United Mission (SUM) from 1925 – 1945, (Unpub.) M. A. Dissertation, Presbyterian College and Theological Seminary, Seoul, South Korea, 1988

<sup>22</sup> J. Hunter Shaw, 'Intelligence Report on the Eggon Tribal Area', NAK/JOS/Prof. 488, No. 2, 1935

<sup>23</sup> 'Refine the Gold': An Anthropological Survey of the People of Nasarawa State, CAPRO Research Department Publication, Rukuba Road, Jos, Nigeria, 2009 p. 81

<sup>24</sup> J. G. Poole's Report, dated 21<sup>st</sup> May 1912 NAK/SNP/20/79 P. G. 1913

The Ashum society, a male-only initiates fraternity, is responsible for the judicial and religious functions, and had the exclusive reserve of masquerading or 'Ashumshun', and the daily running of the community affairs as well as adjudicating in legal disputes.<sup>25</sup> The Ashum is perceived as a spirit medium, which reincarnates the progenitors and therefore could be trusted with the most onerous tasks because of its ability to transverse between the spirit realm. Moral leadership is however vested on the most elderly man in the society or the 'Adan Ubein' or head of the land, but it is the Adan Ashum (chief priest) head of the Ashum society who wielded both political and spiritual authority. Although being the head, he however executes the collective decision of the council of Ashum elders called the 'Moa-Andakpo Ashum'. Collectively, they enacted laws and decided punishment for offenders, which in some cases can be ratified and in rare cases modified by the Adan Ubein. The Eggon did not developed written laws but were governed by cultural norms and values which formed the base of the legal framework. However, every Eggon community is guided by its standards that can be modified or stuck to as they deemed fit. This is common to all Eggon communities, but yet practiced with several variations in the aspects of marriage, religious rituals and inter-clan relations. Their predominant occupation is farming of several cereals and tuber crops. They also kept livestock as an important aspect of their domestic economy, and were kept as pets or as a means of exchange for dowries or payment of fines. There was also the existence of complementary local industrial production such as pottery, weaving, and later blacksmithing, which were exchanged at the major market outlets of Wana and Akpata.

Meanwhile, prior to the arrival of the British, the Hausa/Fulani Jihadists from the Sokoto Caliphate had made inroads into neighboring land and established their base at Nasarawa, Keffi and Lafia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But they succeeded in converting only a handful of Eggon to Islam, whom later migrated to Lafia and Keffi Emirates. Hence, their failure to penetrate the Eggon hills settlements on horseback to convert them to Islam precipitated in the adjoining vulnerable lowlands a wave of slave raiding. This greatly influenced the pattern of relationship based on mutual distrust between the Jihadists and the Eggon who retreated permanently into their hill refuge throughout the period.

This pattern of resistance was extended to the British colonialists shielded by their difficult hilly terrain, which had earlier provided a bulwark against the Jihadists. Thus, with several

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<sup>25</sup> William D. K. Mair, 'Repot to Resident, Nassarawa Province', 19<sup>th</sup> May 1912, NAK/SNP/520/1913

autonomous community-based administration, it became increasingly difficult for the British to entrenched colonial rule with the conquest of just one of the sub-clans. Therefore, the Eggon maintained their independence until the Wulko Incidence of 1912.

### **Background To Colonial Conquest and The Emergence of Chieftaincy Institution in Eggon land**

From the beginning of the imposition of British Colonial rule in Nigeria, the colonialists ensured the removal of all visible opposition and resistance to the imposition, expansion and entrenchment of British suzerainty over all the territories that made up the protectorates.

The recorded first visit of the British to the heart of Eggon land was in 1907. This was in preparation for the extension of the North–Eastern railway line. However, it was not until 1911 that an attempt was made to established an ‘effective administration’. Thus, this was followed by the emergence of several mining prospectors, notably Mr. Campbell Irons and Mr. Poole, representatives of the Benue Alluvial Company in May 1912. In the ensuing events, Mr. Campbell was killed by the fierce Eggon warriors in Wulko which set the stage for the eventual conquest and occupation of the Eggon polity by the British.

Campbell’s arrival into the Eggon area to prospect for solid minerals coincided with bad harvest experienced from the previous year due to inadequate rains, and the beginning of the new rainy season had not been impressive. The Eggon considered the presence of the ‘white man’ as a bad omen, especially when they attempted to erect beacons at a time when the people were observing a moment of ritual prayer for appeasement. The people accused the British of making bad Juju or medicine in their country.<sup>26</sup>

Mr. Poole, Campbell’s partner who narrowly escaped made a report to Wamba, and a patrol was immediately dispatched under the command of Mair who eventually found Campbell’s trunk, but with missing body parts.<sup>27</sup> This provided the grounds for the British invasion, as Resident H. D. Larry more in a message to A.S. Lawrence declared thus:

*‘... The enormity of the crime, and the entire district must learn once and for all that the white man shall be regarded as a sacred. To tie a European up, who has harmed them in no way, who is moreover not even assessing them and to formally murder him cannot be permitted to pass without the severest punishment. It is reported that other villages, besides the one which actually*

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<sup>26</sup> H. D. Larrymore’s Report to A. S. Lawrence, NAK/SNP/2726/ May 1912

<sup>27</sup> D. C. Dorward, ‘Ritual Warfare and the Colonial Conquest of the Eggon’, La Trobe University Press, 1984 p. 91

*attacked, gathered and witness the orgies held while the unfortunate white man was tied up in their midst, and these must suffer as well'.<sup>28</sup>*

The British immediately launched a punitive expedition against the Eggon, and the people's inferior weapons consisting of spears and bows and arrows were not a match to the European maxim gun. The Eggon put up a fierce resistance but was not effective enough, and a British officer, Lt. Garnier was fatally wounded by the Eggon poison darts. The Eggon recorded 125 casualties on the first day, and eventually six of their villages were completely burnt down with an uncertain number of deaths.<sup>29</sup> By 1921, the British launched a massive onslaught against the Eggon under the command of Lt. Grande, which finally subdued the Eggon. The warriors put up an enduring resistance that lasted for about nine years before they finally surrendered to the more sophisticated British military.

On the whole, the various attempts to subjugate the Eggon polity for economic exploitation was vehemently resisted. The Eggon who earlier resisted several invasions by the Jihadist raids from the sub-emirates of Keffi, Lafia, and Jema'a refused to be conquered. This can be attributed to their hilly settlement and their war-like disposition, which made attempts to incorporate them unsuccessful until their final encounter with the British which forced them to surrender and submit to the new colonial overlords.

### **Beginning of British Administration and its Impact on the Eggon District**

Although the Eggon were successfully pacified by the British, there continued to be occasional resistance by the people against imposition of colonial rule until 1917, when a system of colonial administrative officers. Thus, a quasi-British administration began from 1911 with Mr. M. E. Campbell as the District Officer. The district was then divided into South, North and Central Mada districts. But due to shortage of British administrative manpower, the three districts were subsequently merged in 1922. However, when earlier attempts to administer the districts became increasingly difficult, the District Officer invited missionaries who had earlier established a Mission House at the Centre of the Eggon hills (Wana). They became responsible for training the colonial officials in the local language, and also provided expertise for the construction of government buildings. More so, when the British military might subdued the Eggon, and established law and order through the native administration, comprising of native courts and native treasury,

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<sup>28</sup> H. D. Larrymore, 'Statement to A. S. Lawrence', NAK SNP 2726/May 1912

<sup>29</sup> D. C. Dorward, 'Ritual Warfare and the Conquest of the Eggon, La Trobe University Press, 1984. P.92

the missionaries followed instantly to Christianized the people for ease of administration. Boer observed the gratitude expressed by the British government that “If it had not been for missions, the empire would not have been kept together for twenty years. In fact, it would not have been acquired at all. They (the missions) have often done what armed forces could not do”.<sup>30</sup> The missionaries were fully protected by the colonial government where they felt threatened, and also extended to the joint use of assets such as missionary school buildings for colonial administrative functions, while they also helped in the conveyance of mails among other things.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, the first step towards effective administration was to find a man of influence as Chief, and to group under him as many villages and districts possible to teach him to delegate powers, and to take an interest in his ‘Native Treasury’ to support his authority, and to inculcate a sense of responsibility.<sup>32</sup> Thus, by 1922, South and Central Mada districts were merged and renamed South Mada District. It was however a Fulani man from Keffi emirate, whose mother was said to be Eggon, named Bashayi Yamusa that was appointed as the first Warrant Chief. This came at the backdrop of Lugard’s earlier writings on colonial policy that: ‘... to maintain the independence of free pagan races, not to place them under Moslem rulers, and to gradually form them into tribal and racial units under paramount chiefs of their own race and their own selection’. In the case of the Eggon however, forced socialization and integration with other ethnic groups was made possible.<sup>33</sup>

Although colonialism acknowledged the structures of existing political institutions in Eggon land, it however explores the absence of cohesion between the clans, and in their bid to maintain peace and stability, the clans were merged together, and consequently the forty-four villages that made up the clans were amalgamated into eighteen administrative units mostly from Anzo and Eholo clans. This led to the emergence of Ambi Ebuga, a Wana elder, who was saddled with the overall supervision, while Idde Abe from Anzo clan became his assistant. At that period, the major villages comprised of Wana (administrative headquarters), Wangibi, Wulko and

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<sup>30</sup> J. H. Boer, ‘Missions: Heralds of Capitalism or Christ?’, Ibadan, Nigeria: Daystar Press, 1984 p. 53

<sup>31</sup> Micheal A Manga, ‘Christianity Among the Eggon People of Nigeria: with Reference to the Work of the Sudan United Mission (SUM) from 1925 – 1945, (Unpub.) M. A. Dissertation, Presbyterian College and Theological Seminary, Seoul, South Korea, 1988

<sup>32</sup> D. C. Dorward, ‘The Development of British Colonial Administration Among the Tiv, 1900 – 1949, African Affairs, 1968 – 1969, p. 316

<sup>33</sup> Lord Fredrick Lugard, ‘The Dual Mandate in Tropical Africa, London, Frankcass Publication, 1965. P. 222

Unguwasheru for the Eholo clan and Galle, Alogani and Wakama for the Anzo clan. These two indigenous supervisors were officially referred to as chiefs.

With this arrangement, Bashayi Yamusa was given the privilege to administer the Eggon area perhaps because of his maternal connection, and he was also slightly literate (being a former interpreter for Akwanga Division) with some basic knowledge of the workings of colonial administration was appointed as Chief in 1919.<sup>34</sup> During his reign, some obvious peace and order were achieved in Eggon land. A grade B (Native court) was established to try cases, Native Treasury was created under the newly established Native Administration, as well as a modern tax system, which finally brought the Eggon into contact with western civilization and modern economy.

After the emergence of the new centralized administration, Bashayi operated from Akwanga and only took occasional four of the Eggon districts. Also, a grade 'C' court was set up at Wana district under Ambi Ebuga as President and assisted by the village chiefs of Alogani, Galle, Wulko, Wakama and Wangibi. They all reported to the President, Ambi Ebuga who supervised and report to the District Head, Bashayi who was in turn accountable to the District Officer who resides in Akwanga Division.

In the course of time, Bashayi's performance in office was characterized by some negative and positive features. Although he was able to stabilize the Eggon polity, his parentage was widely criticized and resented by the people and the village heads. More so, he surrounded himself with Hausa/Fulani lackeys or 'Jakadu' (tax collectors), who were experienced in local administration. With their support, Bashayi became despotic and embarked on a reign of oppression and extortion, which further heightened the atmosphere of resentment and occasional riots, when he obliged to supply forced labour or 'Diban Gwamna' for the British during the construction of roads and the extension of the East-North railway line that passes through the Eggon nation. The labour supply estimates ranged from "... 700 people in 1925 to 1,050 people in 1926. Besides these figures, 283 people were reluctantly conscripted as, labourers, porters and carriers under the Public Works Department from Eggon districts with its attendant hardship on the labour camps.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Philip Adiidzi, 'Evolution of the Chieftaincy Institution', cited in Ayimom Magazine, Publication of National Union of Eggon Students (NUES), University of Jos Chapter, 1986. P 25

<sup>35</sup> A. A. Alaku, 'The Discovered Chieftaincy: A case study of Nassarawa Eggon District', B. Sc Project, Department of Government, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 1974. P. 14

Consequently, Bashayi's high-handedness in the collection of poll tax coupled with the repressive, exploitative and dictatorial tendencies of his administration opened a floodgate of general resentments and vociferous calls for his removal and his cohorts. Thus, in tandem to the public outcry, the colonial administration became increasingly aware of Bashayi's ineptitude and corrupt tendencies. Therefore, in June 1925, Bashayi Yamusa was deposed from office for flagrant misrule and gross abuse of office with preference for an indigenous Eggon to rule the people. Even though Bashayi Yamusa's administration was fraught with numerous shortcomings, he nevertheless contributed significantly towards the modern socio-political developments in Eggon land.

### **Colonial political re-organization and centralization of the chieftaincy institution**

Beginning from 1926, the deposition of Bashayi and his subsequent exile to Keffi created leadership void in Eggon districts, as the apparent indigenous successor, Ambi Ebuga the chief of Wana was already deceased. Thereafter, the colonial administration began the search for a capable person to fill the vacant position. Meanwhile, the supervision of the Eggon district was entrusted to the council of elders (Moa Andakpo). At the same time the colonial administration proposed the reorganization of the village groups. These consists of six groups with the various villages merged into one district. The proposed composition was designed as follows:

- (a) Wana: Consists of villages of Ekpon, Wolon, Ogbagi, Wata, Endehu, Angbaku, Lambaga, Arikpa, Kudugba, Bekeno, Bissa and Wagana.
- (b) Alogani: Consists of villages of Asapa, Agunji.
- (c) Galle: Consists of Villages of Ugba, Suba, Fizum, Lenyu=Bissa, Lenyu – Kassa, Andasa, Atanga and Fiko-Lega.
- (d) Alizaga: Was made up of villages of Umme, Bekeno–Kassa, Angbaku, Karama and Alushi.
- (e) Wulko: Was made up of villages of Ende – Manyu, Wana, Garko and Gaji.
- (f) Wangibi: Consists of Wakama, Ungwasheru, Ugba, Ekke, Izi, Lezzin-Keffi, Eva and Washo.

With the composition of these groups, the first electoral committee was set-up among the three major clans. This forceful integration of independent groups however ended decades of inter-group frictions and opened a vista for the emergence of a centralized king makers comprising of about

21 villages, who became responsible for the selection and appointment of an indigenous District Head or Chief (Aren) to rule overall the autonomous groups.

Thereafter, Idde Abbe the village head of the Anzo clan was appointed as Supervisor of the district (Wakilin Eggon). But due to what the colonialist regarded as administrative ineptitude he was removed after three months in office.<sup>36</sup>

After the dismissal of Idde Abbe (the Headman), some village elders formed a council to search for a capable candidate to filled the vacant position. Thus, Alumbuğu Otsahwe from the Anzo clan and a man of impeccable character was chosen. Alumbuğu, though popular with the elders was not acceptable to the colonialists. To established his natural claim and capability, he was genealogically traced to Ambi Ebuga, and also had a stint as messenger during his administration. Consequently, the British became aware of his pedigree and by 1926, every skepticism raised about his integrity and natural claim was settled with strong colonial support, and thus, he ascended the chieftaincy.

Furthermore, with the previous prevailing unresolved issues and frequent infighting among the Eggon clans, Alumbuğu who was made President of the Native Court on provisional basis was recognized and upgraded to the District Head position by the colonial administration, with a Third-Class Status and was allowed to continue as president of the Native Court with an annual salary of 150 pounds.<sup>37</sup>

Alumbuğu Otsahwe, though not literate in western culture was a charismatic leader who pragmatically united the three major clans to whittle down the grudges of under representation. He was on ardent traditionalist norms and values. The high point of his administration was the restoration of relative peace and order as well as social stability, cohesion and unity of the Eggon.<sup>38</sup>

Conversely, Alumbuğu was indifferent to modernization and westernization of Eggon society. He was on epitome of Eggon nationalism and was widely referred to as the 'First Indigenous Chief' of the Eggon from whence the contemporary 'Aren' chieftaincy evolved. In spite of his laudable contributions, Alumbuğu resigned on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 1942, after he was

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<sup>36</sup> Philip Adigidzi, 'Evolution of the Eggon Chieftaincy Institution' cited in Ayimom (The Light) Magazine, Publication of National Union of Eggon Students (NUES) Unijos Chapter, 1986. p. 26

<sup>37</sup> Philip Adigidzi, 'Evolution of the Chieftaincy Institution' cited in Ayimom (The Light) Magazine, Publication of National Union of Eggon Students (NUES), Unijos Chapter, 1986, p.27

<sup>38</sup> Oral Interview: Usman Jatau, 72yrs, Hakimi Alushi, Akun Development Area, June 2011.

accused by the colonialists for disregard to authority, maladministration and misrule. His administration was dissolved and he was deposed and exiled to Lafia.<sup>39</sup>

The dissolution of Alumbuğu Otsahwe's administration created a void in leadership. By 1943, Abimiku Alumbuğu, the first son of the deposed chief was appointed the provisional head of the Native Authority. The British officials were dissatisfied with his choice and the chieftaincy issue was thrown into turmoil. However, in 1944, it became increasingly difficult to appoint a chief for the Eggon, and Divisional Officer, Mr. Philip assumed direct control and introduced a native administration based on the three clans to take charge and bring peace to the communities. These were established after the brief caretaker administration of Abimiku Alumbuğu was dissolved on the ground of inefficiency. The three clan heads in turn collectively allowed the rotation of the Native Court presidency among themselves to foster peace and unity.

Furthermore, the chieftaincy experienced a decade of political instability which is attributed to their perception of centralized authority as an alien invention to their autonomous society. Even then, there was a slight delay in the selection of a chief as the British officials were cautious of imposing a chief as a result of previous experience.<sup>40</sup>

Consequently, the Macpherson constitution of 1951 paved the way for the emergence of ethnic based political parties such as the Northern People's Congress, National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons and Action Group etc. This opened a chapter in regional politics from that period up to independence and the dethronement of the first republic in 1966 by the military involving the three dominant ethnic groups of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Thus, the colonial administrative arrangement created an elitist and dominant group that controlled the regional government against the disadvantaged ethnic minorities.

The trends of constitutional developments in Nigeria were plagued by preponderance of socio-political agitations, which include the creation of Middle Belt Region for the non-Muslim groups of Central Nigeria. By 1957, the Macpherson constitution provide for the creation of House of Chiefs and House of Assembly for Northern region. The membership criteria were stringent and seemed to favoured only Hausa/Fulani elites. Many local chiefs from the Plateau Province fell short of the requirements to qualify for membership, but in their quest to qualify, they devised several ways of producing indigenous chiefs of similar status to those of the emirate model. This

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Andakpo Audu Sheri, 71 years, Community Health Supervisor (Rtd), Alushi, December 2010.

<sup>40</sup> A. A. Alaku, 'The Discovered Chieftaincy: A case study of Nassarawa Eggon District', 1974 p. 14

prompted many Plateau polities to form ethnic solidarity forum as the basis for the creation of paramount chiefs.<sup>41</sup>

In the proceeding events, a group of self-nominated contestants emerged in Eggon land. They include: Abdullahi Idde (Former Treasurer of the Native Authority) or ‘Ma’aji’ and son of the former village head of Anzo clan, Idde Abi, Anwre K utsa – the Village Head of Wana (relation of Allu Agbi), and Musa Galle – an Anzo clan elder. However, the British relied on the sterling pedigree of Abdullahi Idde, an impeccably outspoken and educated man. He was appointed as the second indigenous chief (Aren Eggon) on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1953 with Third Class status and the official recognition of the appellation ‘Aren or Oren’ or Head (formerly associated with the Queen of the ant colony).<sup>42</sup>

It is pertinent to note that this period was characterized by agitations from different ethnic nationalities for a district identity, which became a platform for rural mobilization against underdevelopment and oppression by the ruling class. Prof. Mwangvat, against this backdrop stated that “... while the Middle Belt Movement was construed by colonial officials and their successors or Hausa- Fulani political leaders alike, as an ethnic movement against socio-economic deprivations of the areas involved; a demand which transcends mere ethnic nostalgia. It was these unpopular policies of domination pursued by the British and their collaborators that led to the formation of the United Middle Belt Congress in 1957.<sup>40</sup> The pioneer political leaders from Eggon land were Anwre Kutsa, Asoloko Alu, Akolo Aludzi, Umaru Embugadu, Enjugu Ehwla among others.

However, it was during the administration of Abdullahi Idde that succession to the throne became hereditary, and also to rotate between the Anzo and Eholo sub-clans. He also improved the status of the chieftaincy and chart the roadmap to the democratization of the institution. Also, he attempted the unification of the Egon clans through the establishment of Eggon Cultural and Development Association (ECDA) in 1974, with the slogan ‘Eggon Kyenkyen’ (meaning One Eggon). Abdullahi Idde also represented Akwanga Tribal Federation in the Lagos House of Parliament from 1955 – 1958 and later stepped down to become a member of the House of Chiefs in Kaduna on non-party basis.

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<sup>41</sup> J. A. Ballard, ‘Pagan Administration and Political Developments in Northern Nigeria’, in ‘Savanna’, A Journal of the Environmental and Social Science, ABU, Zaria, June 1972. P. 4

<sup>42</sup> A. A. Alaku, ‘The Discovered Chieftaincy’: A case study of Nassarawa Eggon District’, 1974. P. 15

In the ensuing political events, the spirit in UMBC and the failure of Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) to form coalition with the UMBC led to the merger between UMBC and AG, with the historic visit of Obafemi Awolowo to Akwanga Division in 1958 as AG leader to strengthened the Eggon-led UMBC. The benefits of this visit include the election of Yakubu Idde to the House of Parliament in Lagos in 1959 representing Akwanga Federation, Mathew Enna (Councilor of Education) and Abubakar Enjugu (Councilor of Finance) between 1955–1960 respectively. Therefore, to maintained their position, they defected to NPC which was introduced in Eggon area in 1954.

However, Idde's administration was fraught with allegation of nepotism and high handedness, but on the whole, he was a dynamic leader who was able to restore some measure of political stability as well as socio-cultural and economic growth during his reign.

Furthermore, the inability of the First Republic (1960–1966) to address the myriads of colonial political hangover contributed immensely to the political imbroglios that engulfed the country leading to a protracted political crisis that culminated in military intervention of 15<sup>th</sup> January 1966 and the counter coup of July 1966. Thereafter, the military government created twelve states in 1967 to replace the regions. Thus, Benue–Plateau was created and prominent Eggon sons were appointed as Commissioners. Akwanga was also split from Wamba on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1972.

During the Second Republic (1979 – 1983), the Eggon area witnessed the workings of political parties and the demise of Abdullahi Idde (Aren Eggon) in 1981. Therefore, several contestants emerged to contest for the vacant stool and they include: Bala Angbazo, Jatau Anga, Ali Idde, Abdullahi Angibi among others. In July 1981, Mr. Bala Angbazo was selected by the kingmakers and emerged as the third indigenous 'Aren Eggon' after defeating other contestants. He was elevated to Second Class Status and presented with a staff of office by Governor Solomon Lar of Former Plateau State in February 1983. He hails from Wakama of the Eholo sub-clan, and was versed\_in public and private sectors with relative educational background and a status politician and a leading advocate of Eggon Unity through the Eggon Cultural and Development Association (ECDA) a Pan-Eggon and branches all over Nigeria and the Diaspora.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Government Printer: Programme for the Official Installation, His Royal Highness, The Aren Egon, Mr. Bala Abaine Angbazo, As First-Class Chief on 11<sup>th</sup> February, 1983

## **Implications of colonialism on eggon society**

The contact with Europeans impacted on the Eggon traditional society from the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century when it became deposed to various influence of westernization. Missionaries from the Dutch South African, Sudan United Mission (SUM) provided the earliest health services and three schools in Alushi, Kagbu and Awonge villages in addition to a church network education therefore became a powerful tool through which social changes and global integration transformed the Eggon society profoundly.

Similarly, colonialisms ideals of modernization were demonstrated by the construction of railways and motorable roads that linked the administration centres with the internal commercial hubs and the introduction of mechanical means of transportation such as lorries, trucks, and the erection of a durable and modest types of houses and one infiltration of many other European manufactured articles.<sup>44</sup>

On the other hands colonialism was widely condemned as it resulted in the spread of European institutions and culture, thus disrupting traditional lifestyles, cultures and the subjugation and impoverishment of the indigenous people. Colonial policies introduced a literacy class without scientific or technical knowledge, but who served as carpenters, teachers, clerks masons etc, for the colonial administration on unequalled wages with their European counterparts.

Colonialism dismantled the extant traditional political institutions of decentralized authority and replaced it with western model of indirect rule through the creation of Warrant Chief which rendered the functions of the village council subordinate. The younger people took over leadership roles from the Moa Andakpo Ashim, health workers replaced traditional medicine men and even Adan Ashim's role in the dispensation of justice was replaced by the Native Courts through the Alkali (Judge) and Yan Doka (Police).<sup>45</sup> The aftermath was that the greater part of the traditional political institution lost its influence. some of the new chiefs were unlettered, unprogressive and corrupt whose success depended on his acceptability not to his people but to the colonial officials, whom could not understand the intricate system of checks and balances that existed before them. However, subsequent chiefs brought about profound changes towards the democratization of the chieftaincy institution.

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<sup>44</sup> E. A. Ayandele, et al (Eds) 'The Growth of African Civilization, The Making of Modern Africa', Vol. 2: The Late Nineteenth Century to the Present Day' London, Longman Group, 1971. P. 277

In conclusion, the traditional Eggon society from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century became exposed to the different influence of western civilization. Many people began to adopt western education that was introduced by the early Christian missionaries of the Sudan United Mission and government agencies with the establishment of schools and healthcentres. Thus, education became a powerful tool through which social change transformed the society profoundly.

Colonialism also implanted the idea of modernization and was demonstrated by the construction of railways and motorable roads, which revolutionized transportation. The colonialists also introduced a new kind of law and order supported by the colonial army and police upon which the new centralized political authority relied on to ensure peaceful co-existence, centred on the concept of a new society run on modern lines and the ideals of indirect rule.

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