

THE NIGER MIGRANTS

**THE CHANGING PHASES
OF BASSA SOCIETY**

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**Oracle Business Limited
Makurdi**

The Niger Migrants: *The Changing Phases of Bassa Society*

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**And there is hope in thine end saith the Lord; that thy children shall
come again to their own border.**

Jer. 31:17

This is quite a compendium for the Bassa people.

-Gumu D. Mohammed

DEDICATION

For my late Grand-mother, Ine Wodi, who first taught me the power of God's mercy over evil forces of wickedness. I love you profoundly.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Whether by desire, instincts, or diligence, it would have been impossible for me to compile unaided a work of this nature requiring such tradition assiduously put together. I am therefore, pleased, to express my thanks for the value of the enthusiastic contributions, co-operation and loyal support given me by the people acknowledged below:

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I am also grateful to Pastor Sam Tukura for making available to me his archival materials on the Bassa people.

Let me also express my obsessive appreciations to Mr. Titus Yizokwi for ensuring my abilities today by his unwavering concern, prayers and willing assistance. God bless you sir.

The interest to write this book was aroused by the adorning culture and tradition of the Bassa man, which, thankfully, I am by the special grace of God. To Him be glory!

PREFACE

It is difficult to accept such honour, writing a preface on a book like the Niger migrants. Moreso, with a background such as mine, which is not as conversant as it should be with the historical antecedents of the Bassa people, it becomes a herculean task!

This is a book on the history, trials, challenges and tales of the Bassa people of Nigeria. Specifically, the people known as Bassa “Kwomo” who are predominantly found and are settled in Kogi State, Nasarawa State, Benue State, F.C.T and Niger States of Nigeria. The book tells the historical background of the Bassa “Kwomo” right from the time of their migrations across the Niger. Each chapter has its own unique story. However, to say the book is just limited to the Bassa “Kwomo” people is to undermine the extensive efforts of the work. The author has transcended the confines of the Bassa people to their relationship with other ethnic groups that surround them. The title of the Book “The Niger Migrants” is apt and very apposite, as it depicts particularly the situation and plight of the Bassa people and its environs.

The book which has been carefully researched, deals with the history, advent, rulership and communal activities of the Bassa. It is quite riveting in the sense that there is humour and life in the story. Of particular interest is the portion on the “Jassa Utoro” (the war of three pence) as captured by the Author. It evoked quite a lot of historical memories, as it is akin to the Aba women’s Riot of 1929. The chapters on marriage and common sayings of the Bassa people are quite instructive, more particularly to the new generation of Bassa youth who never had the privilege of growing up at home. And I will hasten to add that even the present generations of those at home are not in tune with the

culture and traditions of the Bassa people. However, the author's views as regards the chieftaincy tussle between the Akubas and the other clans in Bassa land are taken within the confines of his opinions and perhaps those who might come across this work. The author who is a political scientist has put many a professional historian to shame by the depth of research he delved into in relation to historical incidents. Many events are so vividly captured that one begins to imagine that the author was there himself. There is a dearth of such work amongst the Bassa people and this book is recommended as must read to all, and should adorn the bookshelves of all Bassa people in Diaspora. It will be a disservice to themselves not to read this work in detail as the book captures vividly so many aspects of our culture that are almost becoming extinct amongst these set of people.

On the whole, the author should be commended for his painstaking effort in bringing to fore the past, and the present of the Bassa people. He has also made a foray into the future of these very unique people.

Mathew Yeri, Gbaje Esq,
Nasarawa State Judiciary,
Lafia.

FOREWARD

Events of history play out themselves while men chronicle them.

The *Niger Migrants: The Changing Phases of Bassa Society*, being a historical document, is a courageous attempt by Mr. S. S. Abu aimed at bringing to the fore the Bassa “Kwomu’s” historical roots, relevance and travails. It is a conscious peep into the Bassa man’s social, cultural, political, judicial and religious past and present in the face of contemporary realities.

Fundamental to this work is a caustic appraisal of not only the relational interplay with other ethnic neighbors, but also the inexcusable socio-political ineptitude of our time.

For the older generation, the book is a renaissance into the past. To the youth it is a reawakening and a heritage of our cultural norms and values. While it is also a conscious attempt at repositioning our collective responsibilities, it is a reminder of our past.

The author’s comments on the Bassa Chiefdom in the present Kogi State is a direct consequence of his research on the issues involved. Records and facts may yet be straightened if reactions yield to more Bassa historical literature.

Regardless of the inherent discussions this book might generate, the older generation of the Bassa prople must be willing to demonstrate commitment towards bequeathing an array of cherishable and variegated literature relevant to the race. The contemporary Bassa generation has long been famished of these. It is only instructive to note that “when an old man dies, a whole library has

perished” risking the extinction of that race and this work should spur the older generation of the Bassa into encouraging this legacy.

While looking forward to more historical and political works from the author, the youth should be more enthusiastic about the culture and traditions of our people. I, therefore, recommend to you ***The Niger Migrants: The Changing Phases of Bassa Society.***

D. T. Allah

University of Agriculture,
Makurdi.

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INTRODUCTION

Following many years of Colonial rule and the subsequent independence that came, the Nigerian State has been grappling with the dire need for national integration. But integration has continued to elude our nationhood on daily basis. The nation state is losing its grip on our corporate entity. The various strategies and policies enunciated to keep the country as one indivisible and peaceful entity are now becoming inadequate and incomprehensive as demonstrated by the glaring struggles, agitations and restlessness of our various communities. The quest for unity and stability which resulted in such national ideals as the setting up of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in 1973, encouragement of inter-tribal marriages among military and civilian personnel, transfer and posting of civil servants to states other than theirs on national assignments, etc, are only structurally designed but fundamentally defective in holistic approach and implementation.

Conflict has become endemic like an epidemic among and within the Nigerian ethnic groups. The various components that make the Federal Republic of Nigeria view one another with suspicion arising from disaffection, dissatisfaction, apathy and sometimes agreed. The feeling of mutual distrust has often led one ethnic group against the other. Consequently, cases of oppositions, agitations, inter-ethnic conflicts, ethnic militia, riots, demonstrations, killings, unrests, wanton destruction of lives and property etc have become parallels in our body polity.

Unfortunately, for a country that is blessed abundantly with human and natural resources, the wealth of the Nigerian nation is concentrated in the hands of few individuals. Individuals who have access to government's positions of authority use same through graft, nepotism, favouritism and other corrupt practices to enrich selves, families and friends. This has not only made even development impossible, but also has deprived the Nigerian citizens the good life. Nigerians have suffered physical deprivation and poverty directly as a

result of these perversions in government offices (CCB handbook: 2). Yet these few individuals also emerge from their privileged positions and continue to fan the embers of hatred and conflicts against other communities in order to remain relevant. These same leaders begin to ask puzzling questions about unity and peace in the country. This is sheer hypocrisy!

The Bassa are a people that have faced a troubled history. In their quest to find a peaceful settlement to chart a destiny for herself faced a history of migration from Zungeru down to the area that was later known as Nasarawa Province and from there, some crossed the River Benue to found Aguma (Oguma). The migrants at Oguma (Kogi State) have never known peace from their neighbours who hurt them politically and taunt them administratively. Their story is not different from those in Nasarawa, Niger, Benue and the F.C.T.

In their quest for peace, they opted for a Local Government of their own. Unfortunately, this aspiration has not been met because they are merged with people from other districts. The principle of administrative cooperation and collaboration (Babangida: 1987) has not augured positively for them. They remain cheated, marginalized and intimidated by their neighbours who have advantages with regard to the positions they occupy in Government and systematically have pushed them to the vagaries of poverty and underdevelopment in a country richly endowed economically.

The country has for a long time neglected its priorities in the provision of social infrastructure such as potable water, electricity and good roads for those residing in rural communities. Their frustrations eventually find a berthing place within the communities who normally resort to crisis and violence against each other.

It is high time government addressed the issue of opening up rural communities by providing them with basic infrastructural facilities to enable them carry out their economic activities in order to meet their social needs, responsibilities, political and other aspirations in life. This will not only tame

the tide of rural-urban flight from many Nigerian rural communities and overstressing facilities in cities but also douse tension arising from hostilities within.

Chapter One

THE PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION

The early written works on the Bassa people, such as A.B. Mathews, Ballard, Temple, Baikie and others are becoming obsolete and remain unpublished. The works of Temple (1919), for instance depicted the period of early migrations of the Bassa people and their later settlements. Writing in the: Notes on the Tribes, Provinces, Emirates and States of Northern Nigeria (1919), Temple carried out both historical and anthropological analysis of the people. The reports of A.B. Mathews, (District Officer, Bassa) which chronicled colonial activities in Bassa Land remain an unpublished work only found in archives.

While acknowledging the efforts of these writers to have put in their best to keep records of the people, they, however, failed to identify some peculiar traits and reasons, associated with their migratory tendencies which revolve around their quest for peace and self determination. Their abhorrence to injustice and domination of any nature by or from any group continually brought them into conflicts with their neighbours including the colonial government. Their humane approach to life, kind and easy going disposition, have been abused and taken for granted by their friends and as weakness by their foes. While their neighbours assume on their natural good disposition, which is more often taken for granted and seen as an avenue to harass, intimidate and cheat on them, their foes want them deprived of political opportunities and economic relevance. Therefore, the battle line has always been drawn when they resist attempts to dehumanize, deprive and traumatize them.

The political and social reawakening have aggravated, intensified and gingered the Bassa man's conflicts with his neighbours who are intransigently bent on maintaining the status quo. One could call it his (Bassa man's) revolution; a revolution that he is not educationally, economically and politically equipped for. Because, in his search for peace, he had neglected education, ignored political offices and has also been deprived economically. He thus became an object of derision. In his desire for honesty and truth he trudged politically and economically behind others. Unfortunately, he finds himself in a country where might is right and ethnic chauvinism had denied him justice and good life from his government; keeping him in perpetual poverty, infrastructural underdeveloped, traumatized by his neighbours, used and dumped by government and politicians.

THEIR LANGUAGE

The Bassa people, according to A.B.Mathews (1934:3), speak a language that has strong affinity with that of the Kamuku and may be regarded as having a "Bantu" connection, originally from Zaria or thereabout. He further stated that they are of the same stock with the Bassa of Zungeru in Niger State. Drawing available records from Captain G.M. Clifford and other officers who visited the people, Mathews concluded that the language has a longstanding history typical of Africans.

The Bassa people of Bassa Local Government Area of Kogi State are of the same stock with the Bassa people of Toto and Doma Local Government Areas of Nasarawa State. They are also the same Bassa speaking people found in Tawari and environs of Kogi (Koton-Karfe) Local Government Area as well as those in Abaji, Kuje, Kwali, Abuja Municipal and Gwagwalada Area Councils of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. Quite a number of them are found in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State and some parts of Niger State.

Their chequered history has seen them as minorities in four states of the federation, namely; Nasarawa, Benue, Kogi, Niger and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). It is therefore safer to avoid the suffix “Komo” or “Kwomu”, which had been adopted for official recognition of the Bassa people of Kogi State. We shall return to this in subsequent chapters.

Students of etymology may readily agree that there is an existent connection between the Bassa and the Hausa languages, most probably as a result of long history of co-existence, which goes to buttress the place of origin of the Bassa. The similarities of the following words and meanings (and many other words) speak of this linguistic affinity.

Bassa	Hausa	Meaning
Lapiya	Lafiya	Health, Well-being
Saah	Sa'a	Luck
Takerde	Takarda	Book /paper
Rombwo	Romo	Sauce (from meat or fish)
Sai	Sai	Till
Ogogo	Agogo	Clock / time
U’kara	Kara	Court summons
U’rogwo	Rogo	Cassava
Bizhinga	Bindiga	Gun
Udenji	Dangi	Ethnic group (tribe)
Rongwemi	Rangwame	Recuperation
Karuwa	Karuwa	Prostitute
Mungunta	Munguta	Wickedness
U’rain	Rai	Life
U’sadaka	Sadaka	Sacrifice
U’jirima	girima	Growth/increase

E'wenche	Wake	Beans
Le'mi	Lemu	Orange
Utogwobi	Takobi	Sword
Anpani	Afani	Usefulness
U'sutullah	Fitila	Lantern
Shuru	Shuru	Silence
E'rikishi	Rikichi	Trouble
Shinichi	ciniki	Trading art
Kezhere	gajere	Dwarf
Yefiyefi/Yeshiyeshi	Yayyafi	Light showers
Sauchi	Sauki	Ease/Better
U'kuroro	Kuroro	Long bag (locally woven)
Seida	Shaida	Witness/mark
I'peppe	Faifai	Hand fan/form of pan
Randa	Randa	Earthen pot[for water]

POPULATION

The Bassa people, having been found in four different states and the Federal Capital Territory, consist of a total population of about 404,777 as at the 1991 census projection figures for 2004 as follows:

Nasarawa State	-	164,178
Kogi State	-	138,998
FCT	-	89,289
Niger State	-	11,788
Benue State	-	524
Total	-	404,777

ORIGIN AND HISTORY

The Bassa people, like many other ethnic groups in Nigeria, had no written records of their origin before the advent of the Europeans. Therefore, the origin of the Bassa people is based on oral tradition and/or from anthropological study of the people.

The above notwithstanding, it is believed that the Bassa originated from Egypt. This tradition, according to Wodi (1979.7), takes into cognizance the similarities in the burial rites of the people. Just like the ancient Egyptians, the Bassa people bury their dead with a lot of ornaments and clothes. This, to them, would enable the deceased live comfortably in the other world.

Some people claim that the Bassa people came from East-Africa because the women of certain tribes, like the Bassa, carry loads on their shoulders. They believe that the hair is the beauty of the woman and the head as the think-tank of the body, is too fragile for heavy loads. Studies are currently going on to ascertain the veracity of claim as to the similarities of customs, culture and other characteristics affinity of the Bassa found in Liberia. This could not be farther from the truth as the Bassa people had their own sad history of being ravaged by a trade that was notorious for inhumanity, raided taken and sold as slaves by the Hausa-Fulani people.

Oral tradition concerning the place of the Bassa people in the 15th century has it that they are from Zungeru in the defunct Niger Province. Others claim they are from Yauri in Kebbi Province. Which ever of these claims is true, the fact still remains that the Bassa are a scattered people till today. According to Wodi (1979.7), the Bassa people migrated from Zungeru in the defunct Niger Province, but that the inter-tribal wars with the Hausa-Fulani forced them to move southwards to settle at Tawari and in places that much later came to be known as Gadabuke, Toto and Umaisha (now in Nasarawa State). Lastly, some crossed the Benue River and settled at present-day Bassa Local Government Area of Kogi State.

The causes of the wars could not be absolutely ascertained but pointers are that the people resisted being captured as slaves and refused the imposition of Islam by the Jihadists who prosecuted the 1804 Jihad led by Usman Dan Fodio. The Bassa people stuck to their own religion and preferred to fight wars against the adulteration of their traditional religion.

Yet, another source of oral tradition has it that the Bassa lived long ago in Yauri in Kebbi State and for reasons of inter-tribal wars with neighbouring Hausa, they fled for their safety. They moved and settled in places like Abuja, Kwali, Kuje, Zuba (in FCT) etc. Others moved to settle at places that are known today as Nasarawa, Toto down to Umaisha and yet still some subsequently crossed the Benue River to settle in present Bassa Local Government Area of Kogi State.

Apart from oral tradition, pertaining to the origin and history of the Bassa people, Temple (1922:41), who did a major work on the tribes of the Niger, has a vivid and documented account of the Bassa people. He found out in concurrence with existing tradition that; “The Bassa people left Gumna in old Habe days and migrated to Nasarawa. They (Bassa) descended from Filane Bororo... South of Zaria Province...”

To him, in the continued Fulani raid, some Bassa people crossed the Benue River: “In consequence of the Fulani raid a proportion of these (Bassa) crossed the Benue and settled at Oguma in the later half of the 19th century”.

As for the settlement in Bassa Local Government Area of Kogi State, he noted

“Other large numbers joined the pioneers that Attah became alarmed and ordered their removal from Igala territory, but he was met with resistance and after six months the Bassa-Komu triumphed and occupied Amageddi...”

The reports of Mathews (1934:2) do not differ much from the foregoing. This is his account;

They are of the same stock as the Bassa of Zungeru... from Zaria; they were driven about 1818 to take refuge in Nasarawa... but it is possible that many of them crossed (the Benue river) to the domain of the Igala, drove out the Igala they found there and settled in what is now Bassa-Komo district. They did not get permission to settle from Ata Igala and indeed they defeated two attempts to subdue them.

Although it is difficult to give a consistent account of the early history of the Bassa people, tradition and documents have not been silent about the people (Wodi 1979:31), as these traditions and documents are consciously stated to explain their indefinite past, ultimate origins and sources of migration especially during the period between the Jihad wars of 1804 and 1805 when the people migrated.

It is worthy of note, however, that in spite of their place and origin, the history of the Bassa people had been the history of a race that had suffered migration as a result of injustice, search for independence and peace, which like a mirage they are yet to find even in modern day Nigeria.

KINGDOM FORMATION

Following inter-tribal wars with the Fulani which subsequently forced the Bassa people to the migration that followed, they founded their Kingdom where they settled and established their political and social institutions until it was destroyed by the Fulani and finally obliterated by British warlords.

According to Baikie (1854:252), the Ikereku Kingdom founded in the Nasarawa province was brought to waste by the Fulani after being invited to

come and aid in tax collection. A quarrel had ensued between the brother of the Bassa King and the leader of the Fulani on the modalities for collecting the tax. As Baikie (1854:252) perceptively puts it:

“Adama, King of Bassa, requested assistance from the Fulani and accordingly, Ama Dogo who led the team of assistance in which a quarrel arose between Ama Dogo and Seneni (Sheneni), brother of the King of Bassa and Chief of Akpata, which led to a general attack on the whole country”.

Other kingdoms were formed but of particular interest is the kingdom formation of those who crossed the Benue.

All traditions and records pertaining to the migrations when five (5) Bassa clans, namely, Akuba, Arisameshe, Ozongulo, Edigeshi and Ashashama who crossed the Benue to settle in their present abode from the 1850s speak of these movements, settlements and crossing the Benue River in very clear terms. Most persistent and consistent, however, is the extent of the tradition of origin and migration, which locate their ancestral home and present settlement.

On the Bassa that crossed the Benue River at a point that later came to be known as Umaisha, there are two explanations for the people getting over the Benue in the manner they did. One tradition has it that, as a result of the Fulani raids and the inter-tribal wars, which the Bassa couldn't avoid, one Bassa man crossed the Benue with his two children to Igala land. He left his children in the care and trust of an Igala man. Unfortunately, when he returned with the rest of his family, his Igala friend told him that his children had drowned in the river. On hearing this sad news, the now miserable Bassa man decided to go back to his old fate, where he came from, as his attempt to safeguard his children had met with disaster. As he detoured however, an elderly woman who had not been

well catered for in the house met up with him surreptitiously and narrated to him how his children had been sold as slaves to some Hausa-Fulani men by the Igala man.

Back home on the north bank of the river, the Bassa man narrated his ordeal and experience to relatives and friends. On hearing this act of mischief and betrayal of trust, they mobilized their forces and crossed over the Benue. They attacked the Igala man and other Igala men that confronted them; driving them southwards and eventually captured the whole area and beyond being presently occupied by the Bassa people of Kogi-East.

The second tradition, however, is more reliable version of how the Bassa migrated from the north bank of the Benue River to Igala land because of its inherent logic. This tradition anchors the origin of this migration in the inter-tribal wars between the Bassa people and the Fulani in which five Bassa clans: Akuba, Ashashama, Arisameshe, Edigeshe and Ozongulo led by Ogbo of the Akuba clan crossed the River Benue after taking refuge in Nasarawa in 1818 (Mathews: 1934:3).

There is, however, controversy over the role played by the Ohiegba of Mozum, a subordinate of Attah, as to how the Bassa crossed the Benue through his aid. It is uncertain whether by coincidence or contract that Ohiegba used his canoe, to assist the Bassa people from the northern bank of the river in crossing the Benue. This is still left to be told to any particular extent (Wodi: 1979:12).

After crossing River Benue they settled at Degbesu, a short distance of about three kilometers north-west of Oguma, the present day headquarters of Bassa Local Government Council. According to the submissions of (Mathews 1934:3), District Officer, Bassa “They did not get permission to settle from Ata-Igala... but does not prove their subordination to Idah.” The Bassa people thereafter lived independently, maintaining their socio-political institutions, without allegiance to Attah.

WARS AND CONQUESTS

By 1870, the headman of Koriko, a prince of the Igala ruling house who lived near Oguma started raiding the Bassa people for slavery activities. His trade angered the Bassa people who organized themselves and led an attack on him and his village. They burnt the village to ashes and booted his slave loots.

But more vividly put is the account of the war by the Temple (1919:41). In his account, Atta Amaga at first allowed the Bassa people to settle but as:

“Other large numbers joined the pioneers he (Amaga) became alarmed and ordered their removal from Igala territory, but he was met with resistance and after six months war, the Bassa-Komo triumphed and occupied the banks of the Benue from Mozum to Amagedi”.

The strong and determined forces of the Bassa drove and pursued them to Abocho and as far as (a few kilometers to) Ayingba “until a deputation of the Bassa met with the Atta Igala for a truce”. Thereafter, the Bassa people have carried on their social and economic activities in peace and amity with the Igala people.

HIS LIVING ENVIRONMENT

The Bassa man lives in simple modesty. This equally reflects in his appearance. His apparels are chosen for different occasions. Casually, at home and within his environment he pulls a locally woven wrapper over his left shoulder with an ash or blue colour tilting cap to match as in Tiv ‘ange’. When he moves outside his environment for ceremonies and occasion, he is adorned in flowing gown (Agbada) and the same tilting cap to match. The women simply wear shirts and tie wrappers on their waists.

Averagely, the Bassa man prefers to live in an environment devoid of the bustle and hustle of life. Consequently, to secure his peaceful environment, he makes his compound at the periphery of the town. This is to enable him dash to his farm at any time without having to walk through the streets with his hoes and cutlasses before arriving his farm.

His house is usually made up of round mud huts and thatched roofs. Other huts form a circle in the compound where each of his wives and dependants stay. In the middle of the compound is the resting place (Udulo) where cooking take place and other vital domestic materials including cold drinking water in earthen pots are kept. Here, refuge is taken from the sun and rain before individuals retire to their huts.

Behind the cyclical compound are the barns (Urubu) where farm products like millet, maize, guinea corn etc are kept. Yams are usually stored in the farm until they are ready for either consumption or sales. Firewood heaps is also stored around the back of the compound. Somewhere behind the man's hut is his shrine, if at all he prefers to own any. Members of the family are usually buried within the compound so as not to let them be lonely in cemeteries as they are believed to still be present with them in unseen form.

The graves are usually in a unique conical shape of a sand mould. The vertical length below stretches to six feet with a horizontal diversion at the base (either to the east or west depending on the sex) where the deceased is laid to rest. After many years such an area could be reclaimed for other purposes such as a building project or another grave.

Trees, including fruits and vegetable are planted around the compound to provide shade and food supplements. The Bassa man likes his environment very dearly.

Chapter Two

POLITICAL AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

INTRODUCTION

An institution represents the composite structure upon which a system of social and political organization is expressed. According to Wells (1970:30), it consists of a group of people on definite legal or customary pattern for the pursuit of common goals. For the achievement of these common goals, there are rules and regulations, which govern the people. They are reverently observed. Leeds in Habib (1987:74) puts it this way: “An institution refers to the established and recognized pattern of behaviours, rules and procedures which give meaning to the activities of a society”.

Therefore, a political institution is a system of government, which embodies the values of any society in varying forms, working towards particular aims and objectives within the society. According to Wells, these systems could be defined as “Established pattern of political action and relationship... found in human society where each pattern tending to have certain normative significance in its society.”

It is this formation that deals with the issues of securing peace and security within any given society and at the same time promotes existing culture and customs. It is fashioned out along societal needs and conditioned in such a manner as to achieving for them constitutional norms, which are transmitted to individuals through political socialization in the form of roles. These particular roles, which relate one to another, are expected to fulfill the needs of a society. (Habib 1987:74).

POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

The Bassa people operated a weak central authority but nonetheless recognized their political system as ultimate. Each Bassa belongs to a clan. Hitherto it was believed that the designs of ones palm indicated the clan to which he belonged. This identification could not be sustained as some individuals outside a clan were either adopted or absorbed. More so, no single individual had the same finger prints with another the whole world.

The Bassa people have many clans, which include, Akuba, Ozongulo, Edigeshi, Arisameshe, Ashashama, Otundo, Ambereche, Ekegiye, and a host of others. However, the first five clans are believed to be the major ones because of their population and the roles they played in the migration exercise, especially for those that crossed the Benue River.

There is a controversy over the Ogbo of Akuba leadership of the clans that crossed the Benue River. The others were Arisameshe, Ashashama, Edigeshi and Ozongulo. Each clan had its head. But according to Mathew's report (1934:3); "...the leader of the migration and the senior clan to this day were the Akuba."

Disputes between villages were settled by a meeting of village heads within a domain or clan. The most senior or most elderly head acted as judge while other village heads acted as court members.

The Bassa community was indeed stratified or organized into hierarchical order on the basis of status and role. At the apex of the pyramid in the community was the chief called the "Aguma" who was the traditional head of the land. Each clan had its "Aguma" who presided over affairs within the area of his jurisdiction. Below him was the Madaki who also, in his own right, headed various villages. He was the mediator between village heads and the clan head.

At the village level, the Madaki is looked upon as the 'Aguma' who in turn appoints a Madaki to act on his behalf on matters of importance. The

general duties of the 'Aguma' are to decide on cases such as land disputes, adultery, theft and other related cases. He organizes communal labour in such public places or functions as market square, construction and clearing of roads, building of bridges etc. He also organizes social and religious functions such as festivals (Kusauye) and rainmaking (Azhiba) and summons village meetings when it becomes necessary.

Below the Madaki is the "Aguma Semberi" who is the chief of the youths. He oversees the affairs of the youths and presides over matters affecting them.

The Aguma also appoints other retainers to assist him in the discharge of his duties. These categories of persons include the town criers who convey any information to the people, the messengers who carry and deliver the 'Aguma's' messages and summonses, the band leader, etc, for the convenience of Aguma's administration.

It is, however, worthy of note that the appointment of any chief is based on the consensus of the people. The Council of Elders of the Ruling House would normally present their candidate for the throne. Such a candidate, if approved by the people, would thereafter be crowned amidst fun and fanfare. Otherwise, the people have the right to reject any unpopular candidate, even before he was crowned. A situation for the rejection of a candidate is very rare as the entire village might have informally consulted with the Ruling House on their choice of candidate. Such is also the case for an 'Aguma' who was becoming unpopular and in such instances would be quietly replaced by the people's choice. No violent demonstrations or riots are necessary because the Bassa people cherish the peace of their community. The pattern of succession in the event of death follows a similar pattern.

At the base of the pyramid is the family circle. The family, recognized as the nucleus of the society, is usually characterized by polygamy where a man, his wife or wives dwell together with their grown-up children, married and

unmarried. Each child has his room(s) with his wife or wives within the compound. In some cases the children moved out to form their individual compounds. Otherwise, they stayed behind to inherit the compound upon the death of their father. The cycle is replicated by the family generation. The family system is “patrilineal” in nature, permitting the married sons to still live under the tutelage of their parents’ control and command, for the purpose of instilling discipline and good conduct in them to safeguard the family’s moral values.

SOCIAL GROUPS

The Bassa people have social structures that organize the people into age groups and religious functions. These groups consist of “Nyare” (elders), “Esembleri” (youths) and “maun” (children). ‘Eribi’ and ‘Awaa’ are religious groups who perform such functions including burial rites for the community.

The “Nyare” (elders) carry out exclusive activities such as performing rituals, village rites, shrine routines and generally oversee the welfare and well being of the community. They commune with deities and find solutions to problems such as epidemics, drought and crimes. They are also involved in the administration of oaths on behalf of the community on the subjects over serious matters.

The “Esembleri”, which is the youth-age group, constitute the labour and military force. They perform and carryout communal labour and form themselves into communal workforces known in Bassa as “itime nyenu”. They are mobilized to prevent any encroachment on their territory or ward off any aggression. The military might of the community is determined by the strength and ability of the group.

The ‘maun’, that is, the children normally assist the other groups in their own capacity. They hang around them to learn and to carry out such messages

as would be necessary to prepare them for succession as youth leaders or elders, subsequently in life.

Male persons of teenage age and adults are conscripted into the “ERIBI”, a kind of cult group whose activities are more or less seclusive. One could liken them to community undertakers. They are responsible for the burial rites of the dead and all attendant rituals. Death in Bassa is both agonized and celebrated. Agonized when a youth dies and celebrated when an elderly person dies. The dead is mourned for a period of seven days except for the death of a chief which may extend to weeks or months when he is said to have, “sojourned to a distant land” such as Kaduna, Lagos, London, America, India or any strange but popular place.

The death of anybody in the village is first of all reported to the chief who then communicates the loss to the entire village, except for small babies. It is an offence not to do so and severe sanctions are meted out to violators. No dead body is buried without the official notice of the Aguma.

The ceremonies differ with regard to the sex of the dead. The male adult who dies demands more elaborate ceremonies and rituals than the female adult. As a rule, no woman is allowed to see the corpse of a man, not even when he is the husband or father of the female. Where this happens by accident, the woman is required to confess and propitiate with a reasonable quantity of wine. The location of the male corpse is barricaded from public glare. Only males are allowed inside this secluded arena.

Inside the secluded area, masquerades decorated colourfully with clay, charcoal, ashes emerge. Women are barred from seeing these masquerades, which are regarded as spirits. Where this happens (accidentally), the woman was expected to pay a fixed sum of money which would be used to buy wine for appeasement or she faces the consequences of the ancestral anger.

Village drummers celebrate death at a certain age with fanfare while the female folks make a caricature of, and mimic the late elder's past life. He is

mimicked according to the life style he lived, either as a drunkard, court jester or as a stern looking fellow. The ladies wear those clothes he was usually identified with and danced round the village community, singing his passing away to the great beyond.

This culture having been acquired from the Gwari (Gbagi) people in a long period of co-inhabited environment had suffered much attack like other practices. Suffice to say that, the rich cultural attributes of the Bassa have been played down with the arrival of western civilization. Christianity, Islam and the incursion of ‘aliens’ appear to oppose the people’s culture, especially where such ‘aliens’ are found in large numbers like Sheria and Oguma, the twin headquarters of the people which represent their commercial and administrative interest, respectively. In 1996, the people protested against the inhibition of their culture by these ‘alien’ communities who openly deride the culture of the people. The Committee set up by the Local Government Council to review the incident and make appropriate recommendations submitted that the appearance of masquerades be banned or restricted to certain areas. This recommendation came against the background of the innocuous disposition of the masquerades that express the peoples’ culture. Occasionally, masquerades are stoned and attacked by these aliens who enjoy the fun of ridiculing the people’s customs and traditions. This should not be allowed to persist and should be discouraged out rightly as a people stripped of their culture are deprived of their humanity.

The “awaa” consist mainly of elderly persons and their young recruits. Being part and parcel of the “Eribi”, they operate a distinct cult and membership is sometimes hereditary and a rigorous initiation ceremony is strictly adhered to. Always present at male burials, they entertain using musical and magical displays. Their instruments include the beaded gourd or ‘sekere’ and the gong. They move from house to house entertaining with music, magic and songs, and receive appreciation in cash and kind. It is claimed that this group could magically make the corpse of their dead colleague walk to his graveside after

the funeral ceremony. This myth is yet to be proven as this cult groups are the only ones responsible for the burial of its member.

THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM

The other important function in the land is the system of adjudication. The judiciary was not perverse because it was a people's court. It consisted of the Council of Chiefs at the clan level; a representation of all village heads. The "Usa'ada" acted as the judge. Land disputes, theft cases, adultery and other disputes among villages were settled at this council (level).

The components of modern judicial system were embedded in the Bassa judicial process. The counsel according to their respective interests represented the prosecution and defense counsels. As such, this guided the pattern of questions, interrogations or cross-examination that preceded any judgment. After hearing the complaint, an accused or defendant was asked to state his side of the case. Thereafter, the Chiefs-in-Council asked the questions to each party. The "Usa'ada" acted as the judge who passed the final judgment as operated in our present judicial system today. But the Aguma, as the Chief Judge, awarded the penalty.

The court sessions were held by open hearing. The side comments assisted the judge and his council in the exercise of their discretion. There existed room for recess and adjournments as was necessary for a speedy but fair judgment. The guilty was fined or penalized appropriately according to the laws of the land; usually in compensation, restitution, apologies and or a giant pot of locally brewed wine.

The penalty for adultery was the payment of certain sums of money to the plaintiff and a large pot of wine for the Council's consumption. For theft cases, according to Elijah Shigaba (a Police Officer) the culprit was to refund the stolen item or paid a sum commensurate to the value of the stolen item, and was

also made to face public ridicule. A bell was chained to the culprit's waist and he was paraded in the village. This acted as deterrence.

A case of murder hardly existed. What obtained (and these in rare cases) were instances of manslaughter, which occurred mostly during hunting expeditions or at funeral rites where accidental discharges of gun explosion killed somebody. The culprit was to cleanse the land with the sacrifice of an adult male or female goat, and a pot of wine. Thereafter, the culprit was also advised to go on self-exile or never to visit, for a long period of time the domiciliary where the victim was accidentally killed so as not to arouse emotions and temptation to avenge. In the very rare event of murder, the murderer was to hang himself on a tree, assisted by executioners in public glare to ensure that justice had finally been done.

It was this system of adjudication that complemented and consolidated the people's attribute to honesty, love, considerate, trustworthy, hard work etc such that an average Bassa man was godly. Those who have had the opportunity to work with many a Bassa-man would attest to this fact. This was because the judicial system did not give room to perverseness; it could not be wholly corrupted, there were no influences of godfathers, bribery and there was no element of wits display, deception, manipulation and misinterpretation of rules.

To avoid perversion of justice at the family level because of emotions and sentiments a neutral arbiter was invited to deliver judgment. A case of bad judgment could be attributed to incoherent presentation, contradictions, conspiracies and/or collaborative statements of a witness or witnesses on a matter.

Where one was not satisfied with the ruling, appeals to higher levels were allowed from the family head to the village head, to the clan head and central authority. But the final appeal of the Bassa man's case rested in the Supreme Court of Heaven; the Supreme God, who knows, sees, feels and hears everything under the sun. He is the ultimate Judge.

In cases where there were strong doubts, accusations and counter-accusations and denials, an oath (known as “Ashimwa”) was administered. This was made up of water or wine, which having been offered as libations to the ancestral spirits is given to both parties as drink offering. A much stronger oath was the “ijile” which could cause the culprit to face consequential calamities or die after all. Consequently, the guilty one or the culprit was haunted until a confession was made and truth was known.

BELIEFS AND DEITIES

Every society has its belief system as a check on its activities. According to Ason Bur (1993: 18), beliefs instill fear, discipline in youths and respect for elders. They act as checks on the moral conduct of such society and could prevent abnormalities. Beliefs place emphasis on the values of any society. Values that are dear and sacrosanct to that society which most often are moral in nature. These are the unwritten constitution of such a society (Ode:2002:1). Such values according to Nnamani (2001:30) are those centrally propped which induce accepted conduct. Violations of such beliefs go with dire consequences. According to Ode (2002:1) beliefs in any society are precise rules and regulations, which guide the behaviours of the people, the things one does and says as well as one’s social relationships. He further states that;

It is believed that in the case of any default, the entire community will suffer and so one is confronted with a situation where the people within African societies in true agreement with gods mercilessly punish offenders.

EDENGU (TWINS)

Unlike in most African societies, the Bassa people instead of killing twins The Bassa people have their own belief system, which is responsible for the moral upbringing of their young ones as well as guide the conduct of adults. First and foremost, they acknowledge the supremacy of the Almighty God who knows, sees, hears and oversees all things. They believe that the sky represents the dwelling abode of God Almighty.

While the Bassa believe in God taking charge of the whole universe and handling matters of injustice between one and another, man to man, the different families resort to the worship of certain deities where sacrifices are offered for the needs, good harvest and general welfare of the family. No form of initiation was necessary but members in the compound were compelled to observe certain rules and regulations, as this was the price tag. It is worthy of note that while performing any libations and or incantations, they more often than not, pray to God Almighty to grant the wishes for the sacrifice being offered.

Below are some of the deities the people believed in prior to the advent of Christianity and Islam.

IJILE

This was a family deity in charge of any act of cheating, stealing, lying, witchcraft and other immoral behaviours. This god struck ill any member of the family that was engaged in any of these vices. Knowing that not every headache or stomach ache was the consequence of *Ijile*, consultation with *Ijile* only became necessary where an illness became protracted; extending in time and intensity. The *Ijile*, through a soothsayer would reveal the cause of the ill-health and recommend appeasement if the victim were to recover his or her normal health. The news was then communicated to the victim and where the victim was too weak to respond, the members of the household performed the rites on

his/her behalf. If no much damage had been done to his or her health, the victim would be well again.

Oaths were also administered under this deity for very serious allegations, counter allegations and denials. This is similar to oaths administered in Israel as found in 2Chronicle 6:22-23. Of course, the consequences, though not immediate, might result in pre-mature death. Thus family members are encouraged to imbibe good conduct, moral behaviours and hard work and shun evil ways.

ASHIMWA

This was basically an oath taking ceremony between two bitter enemies or two bitter rivals in a family. It was administered to ensure that none of the aggrieved parties maintained a rigid, protracted and intense animosity against the other. Both parties were by this oath advised to sheathe their swords and embrace peace in the overall interest of the family. This oath was only administered after having tried to settle, watched and appealed to both parties to embrace peace over a long period of time to no avail. It was used only as the last resort. The obstinate party was to suffer one calamity or ill health for failure to adhere to the oath. By so doing lasting peace and harmony was brought to bear and secured in the family.

worship them. Their early departure (death) meant that they have become deities to be worshipped; fed with wine, water, foods, and even money. The Bassa people believe that these wonderful creatures of God were still very much around in an unseen form and thus their negligence could cause one to lose some fortune in life: poor sales at the market, poor harvest from the farm, home mishap or journey palaver, etc. For instance, the sudden disappearance or misplacement of money or clothing is attributed to them. The people believe that when they are well treated or cared for in that form, they could be a source of well being for the family. Such that two small pots are made (where both

were dead), representing each of the twins are placed on top of a mould positioned in the corner of a house, symbolizing their perpetual presence. Here, they are cared for with different types of foods, wine and money. Because of their enigmatic creation, any set of twins in Bassa that die(s) is/were not considered dead, but were assumed to have only gone to the market or for shopping that they may never return, after all.

AZHIBA

This is a village deity inhabiting huge hills or mighty trees. The elders of the village would consult among themselves when there is lack of rain during the farming season or during an epidemic. The elders would usually decide to celebrate this feast known as “Azhiba” to find solution to a prevailing situation. This is usually preceded by a two-day ceremony. On the third day, they would either move to the hill or to the foot of the tree where, the ‘Azhiba’ resides and perform the ritual. In the case of drought the rains would usually come down in torrents. The ‘coincidence’ is often unmistakable.

This same shrine is consulted in the case of an epidemic such as cholera often believed to have been caused by witchcraft. They would go round each compound invoking the spirit of witchcraft to depart the village amid a form of drumming known as “ogidigbo”, a gong, guttural voice songs and a propelling wooden sling (short of a ruler length), held by a tread and swung in the air producing a vroom-vroom-vroom sound. The effect of which was meant to exorcise the spirits of witchcraft. This may not be synonymous with the witch hunt that took place in Europe in the early 20th Century, but this is a chase for the witchcraft. Such epidemic is usually dissipated and finally dispelled. Although medical science has challenged this practice, it had worked for the people. They conquered their situation by their beliefs. They had no inoculations but their “Azhiba” and herbal concoctions were their remedy and cure for all ailments.

FESTIVALS

(A) Harvest

The Bassa people have a few festivals they celebrate with fanfare. Harvest is one of such festivals. For instance, the new yam festival, unlike the Ibo of Southeast Nigeria and the Igbo people of Benue State, it is celebrated at the family basis only. When they deem fit to commence the eating of new yams between September and October, they would wait for nobody. This usually goes with the slaughter of animals that the family could afford. This could be a goat, a chicken or any farm animal that had been killed from the farm. It is not necessary to invite the public but neighbours may be informed or notified by the rhythm made from pestle and mortar as the women pounded the new yams.

It is unusual for any grown up Bassa male to pound yam. The younger males are discouraged from domestic kitchen chores as it is regarded as a way of placing square pegs in round holes by making the boys train in female chores. As a general rule, but not sacrosanct, cooking is the exclusive preserve of the women folk.

The new yam would first be offered to whichever deities a particular family had embraced. Before now any yam eaten on the farm was in secrecy and was never to be mentioned at home, even though the women who usually stay at home could hold their suspicions. Officially, he could inform his neighbours if the affinity between them permits as he is not obliged to do so.

While the Bassa might not invite everybody formally to eat their new yams with them, it is the tradition that if you went to your neighbour's house you were warmly persuaded (invited) to join in while he was eating.

The harvest of crops such as guinea-corn is done in rolls and sheaves tied in bundles. The number of bundles as well as the number of women who

transported the sheaves home determined the strength and success of the farmer. More often than not, a farmer would leave behind some of the ears of corn deliberately on the farm to enable the disabled, poor, strangers and widows to glean and make a meal. This tradition, though unaware of God's injunction to the Jews in the book of Lev. 19:2 – 10; Deut. 24:19 and Ruth 2:2-3 is consistent with a society that is one another's keeper. A man who couldn't leave some ears of corn on the farm or who seldom received visitors to feed is considered selfish, wicked or poor in magnanimity and compassion.

Removing a piece of yam from another man's farm and roasting it on the spot was never a crime as long as it was meant to satisfy one's hunger and not to be pilfered away. A tale was told of a Fulani cattle herdsman, who abused this practice or privilege by setting ablaze a whole heap of yams to satisfy his hunger. This action of a Fulani herdsman has become legendary in Bassa land for any one who cooked an over-estimated quantity of food that was only meant to satisfy his immediate hunger.

(B) Kusa-uye Festival (Breaking of Thirst)

A festival such as 'Kusa-uye' was usually done at harvest time. A whole week was set aside for the celebration of this feast. It was an occasion in which as many families as could afford it in the village brewed local wine. Villages organized this feast in turns to enable them exchange visits, especially among neighbouring villages.

The brewed wine is offered as libation to the dead who must have been thirsty and to God who had afforded them the health and strength for the farming season. It is a festival in memoriam of all the dead in the village. This feast was celebrated with lots of drumming. It is quite entertaining, and a touristy just as it is a recuperative pastime after seasonal farming.

(C) Ugunu (Festival of Dance)

This festival is celebrated after a major victory in war or after a good harvest. It is also celebrated after a good fortune had been found. The captain (unaba) was usually dressed in leopard's skin. He enters the dancing arena demonstrating how he stormed and broke the gate, attacked and conquered the enemy's camp. And the dance commences in earnest.

While the women prepared the wine, the men went into hiding (seemingly in the bush) for seven days. On the seventh day, they appear in the village square (play ground) in such demonstration of victory, where the "ugunu" dance was displayed. It was believed that any patient who couldn't peep out from the sick bed to the dancing arena was indeed at his or her terminal point, because of the exhilarating, ecstatic performance and the audience it attracted.

Much wine was drunken, it was a carnival-like show. A period every farmer rested and recuperated from the year's hard work. It was a tourist attraction with more visitors from neighbouring villages in attendance. Unlike Kusa-uye, it is dominated with dances and fun-fare.

Notwithstanding the ecstasy of the people at harvest or festivals, women who were in their menstrual periods in every family were not allowed to touch and mingle freely with the others or touch items that had to do with the family's foods. They were regarded as unclean like the Israelis in Lev. 15:19-27. She had her separate cooking pot, fire place, plates, foods and a menstrual stool. The males would avoid any contact with her until her menstrual period was over.

THE DEAD/REINCARNATION

The Bassa people indeed share a lot of beliefs with the Jews. Their belief in the dead (Isaiah 8:19) played a lot of role in shaping the conduct of the living towards life. It helped man's relationship with man, especially within the family

circle. The people believe in life hereafter. They believe there is life after death. Life never just ended after death. It continued in another world. This belief is not anchored on any religious theology but by traditional belief that, the dead live in an unseen form.

Consequently, the people believe the world is being monitored by those they call “the people of the unseen world”. From time to time, intermittently, they pour out libations or oblations to them for the protection of the living. They ascribe to them the angelic function (ozomoyikwo) in the family set up. They are seen as the intercessors between the living and God Almighty. Once in a while, you would see a Bassa man offer sacrifice of goats or chickens to his ancestors whose neglect could make life a night-mare for the son, daughter or brother, while living. It is required that as often as possible, sacrifices be made to departed relatives as the occasion may demand. They believe that the people of the unseen world behold the unseen injustice against any member of the family and would thus intervene in ameliorating the situation.

Death usually should follow the order of age. A death that does not follow a chronology was viewed as unnatural and is suspect of some foul play or witchcraft, which must be investigated by ritual inquest. If two persons in a family had a bitter and protracted quarrel and one of them happened to die and suddenly the other followed suit in death, it was believed that the people of the unseen world had summoned him for judgment. If he had fallen into a coma, everything was practically done to rescue (resuscitate) him/her from lapsing finally to the world beyond. He was expected to give an account of his sojourn; Out of Body Experience (OBE).

At burial ceremonies, the dead is usually invoked to report the cause of his/her death to the people in the other world and where possible make reprisals immediately.

Like the Biblical imagery of heaven (as recorded in the book of Revelation), the Bassa people believe that the people of the unseen world live in

a perfect world of excellence; a paradise of blissfulness. Like in a trance into the world of angels draped in white garments and beautiful scenery, so also the Bassa people see in the unseen world; a clean environment, neat pots, calabashes and family members who had passed on, living in a state of perfection. A scenery devoid of hardships, tears and sorrows.

It is the belief that after many years sojourn in the unseen world, they are reincarnated and born as babies into the family again, especially where such a child displays similar mannerisms and attributes with which a dead relation was noted for. Thus, life and death for the Bassa people is cyclical. Where there is no information, the people wallow in ignorance and stability is threatened. Therefore, the Bassa people device ways of information dissemination is vital for peace, tranquility and unity.

COMMUNICATION/INFORMATION SYSTEM IN BASSA

Communication is vital for peace, harmony and tranquility and unity in any community. Where there is no flow of information, people wallow in ignorance. Consequently peace and stability are threatened. This is why the Bassa people device ways of information dissemination that is both fast and effective.

There are two major/officially recognized ways of information dissemination for different purposes. In cases of emergencies, the town-crier, would announce in the evenings with the gong at vantage positions in the village, for instance, that there would be community work the next day. This could be for market rehabilitation, road repairs or diversion of an overflowing stream causing serious flood or erosion and where not timely arrested would cause serious ecological harm to the community. Buying wine usually sanctioned absentees or in disobedient to this when circumstances determined, they were left to bury their dead being so isolated.

Reported loss of an item was followed by the village crier's announcement that whosoever was in possession of the item was required to kindly, release it to the Aguma or a place where it could be easily found for its owner. One was not necessarily required to give himself or herself up for reprimand but would be personally liable for any adverse consequences that might accompany the threat of harm by the owner. With this threat, more often than moral remorse, the item would be found at a location.

Other pieces of information that required discretion such as crucial discussions and meetings or such as threats to the community, deaths were conveyed or transmitted by relay method to every family compound. The messenger took the message, which usually would emanate from the 'Aguma's compound, to the next compound. This next compound had the responsibility of relaying same message to the next compound and so on until the entire village was informed. Each compound knows its next compound to relay such information. Usually, the message terminates at the 'Aguma's house from the last compound close to him as evidence that the information had gone round. Serious penalty awaited any compound that failed to relay the information to the next compound. Without much ado, information was passed, meetings were convened and matters were resolved.

MARRIAGE: THE BASSA CONCEPT

Marriage between man and woman is defined from various perspectives. Most often, people refer to marriage as the (legal) union of a man and a woman, which transform them connotatively, as husband and wife with all rights and privileges from and to each other.

From the legal perspective, marriage is regarded as the contract between a man and a woman. This contract legally binds the man and the woman together and imposes certain inhibitions or limitations; both parties are subject to some rudiments of law. For instance, one must be of a certain age else they would

need to seek appropriate consent before documents are signed conferring on them the status of husband and wife. Likewise, nullifying this contract requires the adjudication of the courts.

On the other hand, there is the religious perspective particularly in the Christian faith. Marriage, therein consist in the joining of two people (bodies); man and woman to become one (Matt. 19:5, Mk. 10:8-9). The oneness obviously is expressed in the spiritual composition of the two and their capacity to operate in that form.

These two perspectives have overwhelmed the concept of marriage among the Bassa People. Both perspectives believe in one-man one wife. However, the Bassa people are given to marrying polygamously. The limitation to this is ones inability to cater for a large family. Such an individual will settle for one wife. In many cases, the wives would desert a man at the stage of barely eking out a living when survival for them becomes for the most enduring wife or the one who loves most. Generally, it was the norm and a thing of pride to have more than one wife. It was an ego booster and a status symbol; it showed how hardworking and successful one was. The Islamic religion has also influenced many marriages in Bassa for those who embraced it and its perspective.

When a young man desired a wife, he made his overtures to a nubile girl of his emotional, sensual and physical interest. Sometimes he approaches his friends or the girl's friends to approach her where he was either too shy or circumstances such as social and environmental influence prevailed against him to do so. Hereafter, the man starts making visits to the girl's house to consolidate his interest.

The girls are encouraged to bring in their suitors into the house. This would enable the parents or guardians to assess the virtues and vices of the suitor(s) such as humility, mannerisms, egotism, talkativeness or loquaciousness, gluttony, shyness, respectfulness, braggartism etc. These visits

by the suitor(s) may extend to passing nights though in a separate (guest) room of the girl's family. The next day he may assist the parents of the girl in their farms. His hard work as demonstrated might become an added advantage to his interest and application.

The entire household sometimes determined the choice of a suitor. A generally and well-accepted suitor in the house even if not the girl's choice, wins the approval of the parents. Every insinuation was made to discourage the girl from perceived bad suitors. Family background also account for choice of suitors. A good suitor from a family with a known history of witchcraft, theft, laziness, pride, dishonesty, flirtation and other social vices was likely to lose out in the screening process.

The voted suitor was given encouragement to send his elders for the settlement of bride price (paid by the suitor), which more often than not ended up as a free gift to the suitor for having appreciated the worth of what (the daughter) God had given them as parents. The men usually held discussions; the mother was involved for her information only. Thereafter, wine was drunken with the entire neighborhood being part of this ceremony to foreclose any neighbors from further receiving messages of marriage proposals to the girl. Doing so after such ceremony, was usually frowned at.

From this moment, the suitor was welcomed for frequent visits and intimacy with the girl. He is expected to bring his age group to assist in the girl's parent's farm. This continued annually or biannually by the son in-law as long as the marriage lasts.

When the groom was ready to take home his bride, he did so modestly. The bride never walked to the groom's house. She was compelled to go to the husband's house by 'force' else it would give the impression that she was eager to consummate the marriage after all. The groom will arrange an ambush and the bride would be swept off and carried away by the friends of the groom. This is done either on her way from the farm, market, and stream, or when an in

house accomplice had sent her on an errand. In most cases, the girl was taken unawares. Though she might have an idea of her being taken to her husband's house, she might not know the date. Even if she knew, she is expected to feign resistance.

The bride having been "caught in marriage" is kept in a friend's house or the groom's neighbor's house. In the evening, she is transferred to the groom's house away from glaring eyes. At the wee hours of the next morning, the women will beat pots with calabashes and sing indicating the arrival of a new bride, a way of informing neighbours of this event and if they should get to see her at all in daytime. At dawn, the women signifying a welcome into her new home washed the bride's feet. That night the groom's friends will gather to play; singing, dancing and have fun till daybreak. At daybreak, the bride is dressed in her best apparel and presented to the public. She is then showered with gifts. Amidst this ceremony, water by an unknown arrangement was splashed on both the bride and the groom with cheers from the public. Marriage had taken place!

The couple remains bound to each other. She would be allowed to go for her belongings afterwards.

In some cases, where the bride had not properly made up her mind, as she seeks permission to go for her items in her house, she may never return or took her longer than necessary to do so. Where this was envisioned, emissaries would be sent to persuade or convince her on the propensities to oblige the wholesome arrangement! If she wanted to return, the women folk after a little while would go to the bride's house to fetch her back home. Where she accepts, her female siblings and friends would accompany her to her new home.

Another form of marital tie was "Marriage by Exchange" known as "Tushomu". This consisted in exchange of sisters between two male adults. A man admires a girl and gives in exchange his sister to the other family for marriage. The sister was not compelled to marry the other family but was

persuaded for the love of the brother or to enable the lonely, ageing or disabled brother to raise a family of his own. The arrangement failed where the girl was not interested and a new arrangement would be made until the right choice was found for the sister. In some cases she accepted contractually or conditionally for some years and thereafter, returned to her home to find a more suitable husband. But where her conditions became better or blessed contrary to her imaginations, she simply stays put or she rather prevails against all odds to form a family there.

Marriage by inheritance was also condoned as in Jewish custom and tradition as recorded in Matt. 22:24. If a man died leaving behind a wife, the immediate younger brother was encouraged not to let her go home to her parents, but to continue the marriage with the family for either the sake of the children, to raise children for the family and or for the love of the company and joy they had all shared together. She stayed if she liked. There was no compulsion compelling her to marry any brother of the late husband.

The woman's first marriage in Bassa is considered the most valid till death even after a legal divorce had taken place, especially where she had a male child with the first husband. This however, precludes conjugal relationship between them except after a reconciliation had occurred which traditionally nullifies such divorcement. At death, the first husband or her son(s) brought the wife's remains back to be interned in the family house.

Marriage in Bassa has a far-reaching relationship than the ordinary, as there was no permanent divorce but separation. She could be welcomed back into the matrimonial home as a wife even after a long period of separation if both parties so desired.

DELICACIES

The average Bassa man indeed is hard working. He abhors laziness. St Paul admonishes that he who does not work should not eat (2Thes. 3:10-11). In

his letter to the Hebrews 6:12, St. Paul admonishes against being slothful just as the Book of Proverbs 10:4 warn that lazy hands make a man poor. The Bassa man labours hard all year round for the upkeep of his family.

But the Bassa woman is even more resourceful and enterprising in the domestic affairs of her home. She complements the adage that “beside every successful man is a woman”. When it matters most she could make out a meal simply out of nothing for her family to survive.

While it is the tradition that the Bassa woman does not go to farm except to bring in the harvest, the Bassa man naturally labours from sunrise to sunset to provide for his family and dependants as the breadwinner. Predominantly, as a farmer, he ensures that food was available throughout the year. His major crops are yams, cassava, maize, millet, guinea corn, beans, rice, and at seldom times plant melon, okra, pepper, and recently Beni-seed etc. As a hobby he sets traps in the bush and fishing nets in the river to provide both meat and fish in the home. With these he provides foods and is economically empowered to run the home.

Though the Bassa woman does not go to farm, she is not only resourceful but also industriously works hard. While she remains loyal to the man and relies on him, she complements the man in many ways. She does not just sit at home while the man is on the farm. Her domestic activities are more tasking and demanding and complementarily rewarding. She rises up very early like the Jewish woman (Prov. 31:15), warms the food, and goes in search of firewood, which is also sold to earn her some money. She picks pepper, okra, vegetables (including mushrooms) and other food condiment from the farm. She fetches water from its source (wells or streams) for all domestic use; cooking, washing, bathing etc.

The Bassa woman's ingenuity at culinary activities is amazing as she could churn out a variety of cuisines from a single crop. From okra; leaves and flower, she could make a delicious meal of vegetable soup (odowuno &

tutsumbo) respectively. From yams, cassava and corn the Bassa woman could create more than thirty varieties of mouth watering and tantalizing cuisines. This could range from solid/molded food (tuga) to porridge; jollof, pap and stews. Her cooking place (kitchen) is made up of a couple of tripod pots to enable two or more cooking activities go on simultaneously. The dry wood is her source of energy for cooking.

The major staple food of the Bassa is pounded yam. The soup may vary from okra, egusi, yam flour (white soup) and or vegetables. Other staples include corn, millet and cassava flour. The Bassa people have little appetite for rice. Ordinarily, the seasoning is the locally processed locust beans.

Occasionally, she brews her soft drinks (kunu), fruit wine (tuwumo/tichina) and other forms of beverages from African berries, fruits, millet and corn. She also brews alcoholic wine (pito and burukutu) for commercial purposes, festivals and other occasions for recess and relaxation.

The Bassa woman recognizes the age long aphorism that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. This she does superbly by ensuring that the meals are properly cooked, appealing and tasty. The man reciprocates by expressing appreciation, love and sustained hard work. On the contrary, and by nature, Bassa men are polygamous and as such the wives have to contend with each other as this gives birth to keen competition among the women for either the affection or the affectation of the husband for a healthy family life.

NAMING CEREMONY

The Bassa people cherish and value the arrival of new born babies but do not hold elaborate naming ceremonies for them. He believes that babies are the embodiment of confidence for a sustained family generation and community in general. He is excited when his wife is pregnant and at birth, he is full of happiness and proud at the product of his manhood.

After delivery, usually assisted by local midwives (which could consist of both specialized men and women) the mother and child are kept in their room until the eighth (8th) day. On the eighth day, the child is brought to the eldest member of the family for naming.

Several factors, situations or circumstances determine the elder's choice of name for a new born baby. Names are not just given to babies but reflect circumstances, events and situations; days of the week or market days and sometimes positional placement of the baby at birth, or if death had recently occurred in the family of a person (elderly or not), if the woman had given birth to children that did not survive, or had had many boys or girls, or given birth after a long period of waiting etc. As such, you would hear the following names:

BOYS

NAMES		MEANING
Sheneni	-	Lack of males
Huleji	-	Too many males
Gbaje	-	Earth mound (are you another to die)
Daku	-	Ant hill (same as above)
Tashelane	-	Still waiting for (God, you, love, something)
Gwatana	-	God's gift, God's power, God's love etc
Chabane	-	Where are you from (if fatherhood were disputed), surprise birth of a male child
Yizogembi	-	The world is big
Jassa	-	Warrior (born during battles, skirmishes or quarrels between families, villages or societies).
Shaba	-	Chief's right hand man/Chief of the House

GIRLS

NAMES		MEANING
Ine	-	She missed road (to the house)

Zebiye	-	I have no luck (with having boys, people, my husband)
Helechi	-	Deceiver (you have come to go again!)
Zhenambe	-	Going to the bush (to die again)
Zhanane	-	She will go again
Chibe	-	This is a lie! (Never thought possible)
Ndane	-	He (God) did it for (me, us, them)
Dukwo	-	Born on a market day/Connotatively, to gather a crowd
Laruba	-	Born on Wednesday
Shiriya	-	If fatherhood were disputed or born during a major dispute.

Chapter Three

COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION IN BASSA LAND

INTRODUCTION

The era of British colonial rule in Nigeria started with the conquest of various communities and regions from south to the north. This meant that they confronted the natives, some of whom resisted the destruction and take-over of their kingdoms, adulteration of their culture and social change expected to take place thereafter. Subsequently, they had to give in to British Administration and policies: policies that lumped different ethnic groups together and paradoxically divided them.

Colonialism, a system of imposing the civilization of one race on the other, took place in America, Latin American countries, the Asian continent, India and almost all of Africa. It was the economic and political domination of one race over the other in which the resultant effect was the cultural and social transformations or strangulation of the latter by the former. According to Winslow in Chandra (1979:127-128),

“Colonialism is the natural outflow of nationality; its test is the power of colonists to transplant the civilization they represent to the new national and social environment to which they find themselves”.

Winslow recognizes the power to change and influence the nationals by colonists. It was simply the conquest of national territories and oppression of the people watered down by Winslow.

For various but obvious reasons, Europe decided to resort to land acquisition, especially as they did in Africa. Economically, socially, politically and militarily, the problems that engulfed Europe in the 18th century made it necessary for them to carve lands out of Africa as part and parcel of their imperial interest. They faced many oppositions, obstacles and stiff resistance from the African natives. When they finally overwhelmed the natives by superior weaponry, the adopted system, policies and administration were to adversely affect the indigenous population. This clearly explains political formations and system today in Africa and Nigeria in particular. Consequently, this has affected the nature of national integration as practiced today in Nigeria.

Prior to the 10th century, Africa had established contacts with Europe through their kingdoms at friendly and ambassadorial levels, coastal resting places and expeditions. They exchanged commodities such as hides and skins, salt, gold etc. By 1742, the Portuguese had arrived Lagos. This relationship changed with the discovery of the “new world”, the Americas and establishment of Agricultural plantations, which enhanced the tempo of slave trade. Gradually, British colonizers in Nigeria moved into the hinterland signing treaties with African chiefs without regard to their cultural and linguistic differences.

NATURE OF BRITISH OCCUPATION OF NIGERIA

The British government, after the Lord Mansfield judgment of 1807 spearheaded the campaign against slave trade and made it illegal. It was not a coincidence of humanitarianism, that slave trade, which continued for over a century, and suddenly was found to be illegitimate. The British interest in campaigning against slave trade must be appraised against the purview of the Industrial Revolution, which took place in Britain and the rest of Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries. It was found to be economically expedient to abolish slave trade to allow for inflow of raw materials from Africa than the importation

of Africans themselves who now constitute selves into a nuisance in the environment.

In the raging crusade to abolish slave trade, the campaigns and slogans of morality alone were not sufficient to curb this evil. Britain, particularly, had to move to Africa in order to police the coastal waters and deal with recalcitrant African chiefs resistant to the new economic policy objectives. Eventually, they began occupying African territories and establishing “legitimate” trade where the practice was very much prevalent. They exchanged African raw material such as gold, cotton, cocoa, tin, rubber, etc. for European goods such as clothes, mirrors, umbrellas, walking sticks etc. whose values were far less than those of African raw materials. Therefore, as legitimate as the new trade was explained to be, yet it was unequal. Competition among trading Companies pushed the colonizers further into the hinterland.

The wars in Europe made the acquisition of Africa’s land intensively competitive. Defeated French soldiers found moral booster in conquering African natives and territories as annexure of the French Government as in Algeria and other places. So did the Germans, Italians, Portuguese and the Belgians.

But most fundamentally, were the crises of capitalism in Europe, which made the occupation of African Land imperatively sought after. The development of automations along monopoly resulted into the organic composition of capital. Less human labour was required in industries. Since less human labour was required, few workers were employed. Subsequently, goods produced couldn’t be consumed by its immediate environment. This led to the fall of interest rates. There was, therefore, need to seek imperial environment; outlets outside Europe to sell finished goods, source for raw materials and outlets for remunerative investments as the bourgeois class increased.

These driving factors made Europe to scramble for African soil in the zealous manner it was carried out with all skirmishes, scheming and deceptions.

Thus in the same spirit, Britain sought, conquered and occupied Nigeria. As Kingly (1964:248) puts it; “There are two reasons, distinct class of reasons that justify one race interfering with another race, the religious reasons... and the presumed reasons...”

The presumed reasons she explains in the context of economic enterprise and social forces. According to Awolowo (1968), when Britain decided to annex Nigeria, her motives were to advance her economic interest, gain strategic military position and enhance her political prestige. Selfish imperial interests were, therefore, the paramount and primary motives. Abolition of slave trade, civilization of natives and the gloss over religious motivations were secondary.

By 1807, the British had arrived the coasts of Nigeria and by 1857 they had embarked on treaty signing with King Kosoko of Lagos. By 1861 Lagos was practically being run by the British and administered as a colony in 1862 (Howard: 1960). British paraphernalia and institutions of office were strongly entrenched; Governor, Courts, Legislative Council, etc. were firmly in place. Henceforth the occupation of Nigeria expanded up north with Companies such as the National African Company in the forefront exploring virgin lands and forming trading partners. They were vested with authority to sign treaties with the chiefs and administer justice. They were to help in discouraging slave trade and human sacrifice (Fajana and Biggs: 1969). They raised Police and courts of justice with a frontier force that made conquest more expedient.

By 1900, the British government was ready for the complete take over of Nigeria through the Royal Niger Company. The Union Jack was hoisted thus establishing full colonial government. Fajana and Biggs (1969) also report that Kano and the whole of the North of the Niger surrendered by 1903 and 1906 respectively. And by 1914 the South and Northern protectorates had been merged as one territory called NIGERIA.

BRITISH ARRIVAL AND RESPONSE IN BASSA (KOGI)

British colonial era in Nigeria, as earlier stated, began with the conquest of various communities from the South to the North. The Bassa people were part of this conquest that witnessed the demise of their kingdoms, culture and social order. They gave in to British administrative policies. Policies that lumped different ethnic groups together and paradoxically set them against each other.

The Bassa people of Kogi State became part of these parodies. No sooner had they settled after the wars with Hausa/Fulani and the consequent migration, than they were confronted with European interference. They had to succumb to superior British firearms, which subsequently subdued them. Until the middle of the 19th century, British activities were limited to the coast but for reasons proffered earlier, they moved into the hinterland.

By 1918, Captain Wallace William had been appointed Provincial Resident for the Bassa people, answerable to Lokoja as headquarters. It was at this period that the Bassa people came into contact with the Europeans as visitors to the land. The remoteness of the land from the bank of the River Niger did not allow for immediate economic, political and religious activities. By and large, Idah and the riverine areas of Bassa-Nge benefited from British activities as churches, hospitals and missionary schools sprang up along with economic activities in these areas. This gave the background to the educational advancement and advantages the Igala and Bassa-Nge people have over the Bassa people till today.

By 1900, when it became evident that the British government, of a necessity, was interested in the complete annexure of Nigeria as part of imperial Britain, British residents were appointed all over the country to implement British policies. These conflicted with the people's political, cultural and social institutions. It was in the wake of this that the Bassa people met the Europeans

with a strong determination to resist the eroding of their cherished values against the intransigence of the former.

In 1903, the people attacked and killed the British resident of Bassa province along with his Police Officer when they attempted to impose on them a chief that had been popularly rejected by the people. According to the account, Charles Orr (1968.70);

In December 1903, the resident of Bassa, a pagan province to the south of Benue, while proceeding with an escort of soldiers and a Police Officer to install a chief, was set upon by a savage tribe (Bassa) in the thick jungle and killed together with the Police Officer who was accompanying him.

Another attempt at resisting British policies was recorded by Captain Bynghall (1911) when the system created an alien chief for the people. In his letter to Cowper (D.O., Bassa-Nge, west of Bassa-komu district), Captain Bynghall had written thus:

Unfortunately, the Bass-Komu are out on the war path. I don't think I could go a hundred yards without being shot at... the Alkali and his followers appeared to have succeeded very well in upsetting the province. The Bassa-Komu are seeing red, and murder, brutal of its sort is their only delight. I shall go back tonight having failed to pacify them... a strong patrol will have to go out...

According to a later explanation, the brutal murder of the resident was necessitated by the attitude of the appointed Alkalists who the British had placed

to oversee the activities in the land. Such rulers became autocrats, engaged in unnecessary extortions, seizure of people's wives, horse-whipping them and all manner of abuse of power as done to slaves. All complaints against these ill treatments fell on deaf ears and availed nothing. It was such behaviour that compelled the 'savage' tribes, so-called, to revolt in defense of their human rights and dignity. Captain Bynghal (1911) added in his letter: "I hear all Hausas, Nupes, Yorubas, etc have been killed, Numbers vary from 20 to 100."

The resistance also persisted against forced taxation. Woodhouse (1911) in Heussler (1968.40) wrote that:

...to the south in Bassa where the British had to work without benefit of strong political institutions, pacification was still more important.

Having arrived there in 1911, Woodhouse found villages that still resisted assessment in tax since there was no strong central authority yet. Heussler (1968.40) expressed Woodhouse's narration (1911) as:

...a typical engagement described by Woodhouse resulted in the deaths of forty villagers and the razing of the village.

This incident as noted was rather the provocative manner in which those tax officials conducted themselves that resulted into the tragedy. Tax officials had gone out for their function and most probably, without adequate information about their itinerary. When they arrived Parau village, 18km east of Oguma, the Bassa villagers, predominantly hard working farmers were still on their farms, obviously struggling to meet the tax demands of the colonialists. The district chief who led the team of Tax Collectors ordered that tax money

should be collected from women in place of the ‘evaded’ men. One of the women who couldn’t pay on behalf of her husband had her hands bound behind her back with her baby strapped along. She was then left in the scorching sun obviously for being too poor to pay the husband’s tax.

Eventually, the men returned from their farms and one after the other beheld the cruelty. There was no stoicism left in them. Unlike the Aba Women’s Riot of 1929 against women taxation, the men in Bassa fought for their wives as they communed discreetly, attacked and murdered all the officials except the alien chief who was said to have mysteriously escaped. The report got to the District Officer who mobilized his patrol team. The villagers, though determined to resist this dehumanizing act, were overwhelmed by superior arms to which many lost their lives. The survivors fled and the village was razed down. All domestic animals were killed in this reprisal attack that followed. This incident had been described by the Bassa people up till date as “Ujasa Utoro” (the war of three pence). Three pence was all that was required to save the dehumanization of a woman and her baby from the blazing sun and to have stopped the callous and insensitive murders, mayhem and arson that ensued. Five years after, the deserted village gradually picked up to start life afresh, from the scratch of ruins and ashes.

THE INSTITUTION OF CENTRAL AUTHORITY IN BASSA LAND

One of the methods of administration, which the British used in Nigeria was the Native Authority System otherwise called ‘Indirect Rule’. It guaranteed the continued existence of the traditional system of government through chiefs. While the system was ‘celebrated’ in some quarters, such as in the North, it was just ‘tolerated’ in other parts of the country.

This system became necessary, bearing in mind that Britain had conquered and subdued an entire land mass that was many times larger than itself. For financial, personnel costs and having a large native population to

contend with, it was administratively convenient that the people should be governed by their chiefs. More so, Fredrick Lord Lugard had found that the Fulani emirate system of government as operated in the North, suited this arrangement and made the collection of taxes easy (Takaya and Tyoden: 1987. 115). Lugard was impressed by the quality of their administrative machinery and ability (Cooker: 1936.11). He had to improvise administrative personnel for the territory and there was no hope of getting out such number of officers as would be required for the time being from Britain. Therefore, Lugard did the inevitable by allowing the emirate system to continue, subject only to certain broad limitations, modifications and supervisions by District Officers from whom the Emirs received command and responsibility.

Native authority was also necessary in view of the fact that the areas were unmapped, unexplored and practically unknown to the British. Clearly, the only possible option was to adopt native machinery, retain the chiefs with British officials guiding and advising, to see that its broad principles did not transgress modern notions of justice and clemency (Orr: 1965. 226). This system had earlier been experimented by the British in India. Lugard was to conclude his preference for this method when he stated in his work entitled *The Dual Mandate* (1923):

“There was no desire to impose on the (Nigerian) people any theoretically suitable form of government, but rather to evolve from their institutions, based on their own habits of thoughts, prestige and custom, the form of rule best suited to them and adopted to meet the new condition”.

He was convinced that if people were given some degree of local autonomy over their territory, they would be contented and peaceful, and loyal to the government. Heusler (1968:11) agrees that the system was based on

general principles, designed to adopt for the purpose of Local Government, the tribal institutions which the native people had evolved for themselves. The native institutions, therefore, became an integral part of British government policies (Fajana and Biggs 1964.57).

By 1907, there was the enforcement of the Native Authority system of administration. The chiefs were to give orders, judgment and inflict punishment or sanctions thereafter. This was followed by the 1910 ordinance. Rules were enunciated which were embodied into letters of appointment to residents. One was that all de'facto chiefs, reinstated after British conquest should be supported and their authority upheld by government.

By 1914, after the amalgamation, Lugard decided to extend the policy southwards to replace the confused, ill-defined and complicated arrangements by numerous written agreements and treaties. He believed that since the application of this system worked in the North, it would equally apply in the South. But Lugard never took into cognizance the indigenous political entities, structures and cultural difference. His urge for the study of social organization (Lugard: 1919) of the area was rather slow in coming. He went ahead and introduced the system without any intelligence report. The government ended up creating warrant chiefs and district heads in areas where there existed no such traditional system and this became problematic in implementing British policies. The relationship between the chiefs and their subjects was undermined and strained to the detriment of the entire system.

In Bassa Land, especially for those that crossed over the Benue River between 1850 and 1860, each of the major clans was an autonomous political entity with their respective clan heads and headquarters.

Though they recognized the 'Akuba' and Oguma as their senior and rallying point, the authority (central as it were) was loose. The British met the following arrangement in place.

<i>S/NO</i>	<i>NAME</i>	<i>CLAN</i>	<i>AREA HQ</i>
1.	Dangara	Akuba	Oguma
2.	Kpanache	Akuba	Edenye
3.	Tamazhe	Edigeshi	Kekure
4.	Zhimada	Arisameshe	Ayede
5.	Hulobu	Ozongulo	Kpanche
6.	Za'agbe	Ashashama	Odugbo

Table (1) clan heads and area of jurisdiction

Source: A.B. Mathews' notes on the Niger province 1911

Although each clan thrived independently of the other without any form of central organization, chief or authority, they all respected, recognized and owed allegiance to the Akuba clan (A.B Mathews: 1934). The reason for this was that the Akuba clan was the first that moved or led the migration across the Benue. It is only natural that in many communities, that allegiance and loyalty is paid to the pioneer settlers and founders of any settlements as they did.

By 1900 when British influence began to extend to Bassa Land, there was a need to create a single or central authority under a paramount chief who would monitor and give direction to all other chiefs as subordinates rather than the former arrangement. The Bassa people found this phenomenal development strange. A development they couldn't comprehend with the existing status quo. This was the cause of the initial misgivings and rejection of the system. In the intervening period, aliens (non-Bassa speaking) were appointed into the central authority in Bassa land. The British entrusted Friends, who were given the responsibility of exercising their administrative policies as chiefs, were imposed on the people and paid by their tax money. In 1912, Ndama, a Nupe speaking man, who played diplomatic roles with Idah (Headquarters of Igala Native

authority) was invested with the paraphernalia of office and was installed as the Chief of Bassa in Oguma.

By 1912 therefore, it could be authoritatively said that the institution of the Bassa traditional council or Native Authority had been formally instituted and recognized. Chief Ndama was succeeded by his son Abu. Abu, though a non-Bassa was courageous in opposing the appointment of Kwasau, an Hausa man as Alkali in Bassa. Whether or not it was for personal reasons, it is yet to be known. But Abu, for being that stubborn and courageous, lost his seat and Kwasau supplanted him as chief of Bassa. This same Kwasau was dismissed by the British authority for extortion after only eight (8) months on the stool. Mallam Mammam from Lokoja replaced him.

In the wake of failure of leadership by non-Bassas which was compounded by cruelty, extortion and dehumanizing punishments, the Bassa revolted in 1918 and a military patrol was dispatched to the district (Mathews, 1934). These non-Bassa leaders had capitalized on the people's lack of exposure to administrative norms under the British colonialists. Abu, who was earlier deposed, was reinstated and he ruled as chief until he died in 1926. Some Bassa men decided to name their children (like the genealogy of the author) after this man to immortalize his name for his great courage in opposing wrong decisions of the British and for his friendliness to the Bassa people. Ndako, his brother succeeded him but was removed in 1928 for his worthlessness and embezzlement. Mesenzhe followed, but he was also removed for the same reasons.

After considering the number of failures and revolts by the indigenes, it was discovered that alien leadership for the people had a lot of adverse effects, and consequences. So, the British officials decided for the first time to appoint a Bassa man to the throne. They found a fitting and suitable candidate from the senior clan of Akuba. Thus, in 1929, Kpanache, who until then was the clan Head of Akuba of Edenye area, was appointed the 'Aguma' (chief) of Bassa.

Kpanache proved his worth until he was murdered in 1931 by the Arisameshi clan of Eyede. But, contrary to the notion, speculation and British inference in the investigation that Kpanache was murdered as a result of outright inter-clannish rivalry, it had all along been established that Kpanache's murder was as a result of misinformation and inflammatory rumours concerning the Arisameshi chief who had been under detention during the reign of Abu for said embezzlement. The Arisameshi chief had been sentenced to ten years' imprisonment for allegedly embezzling tax money collected under his area of jurisdiction. The rumours reaching the Arisameshe clan on a Sheria market day was to the effect that, Zhimada their clan head had been sentenced to death and had already been executed. Kpanache who was the current paramount chief, therefore, became a target of misplaced reaction. He became a victim of circumstance in what the Bassa today refer to as "Ujasa Kpanache" (Kpanache's war) attempts were made to chase and apprehend those murderers in scuffles.

Tamazhe of the Edigeshi clan was chosen as the next 'Aguma' of Bassa. According to (Mathews: 1934) Tamazhe was one of the most courageous among the clan heads interviewed and found fit for the role. On 26th March, 1934, however, Tamazhe was dismissed from office for extortion. Gberigu Kwana of the Akuba clan at Oguma took over from Tamazhe in 1935 and he reigned till 1948. The next Aguma was Sokwo Kurubua also from the Akuba clan. He reigned from 1948 to 1966. After his death, and after series of controversies and schemings, Mr. Joseph Dodo Alagani of the Arisameshe clan was installed the 'Aguma' of Bassa in 1968. He ruled till 1995 when he died. What ensued was a protracted legal tussle between Mr. Joseph Daku Kpongbo of the Ozongulo clan and the Akuba clan led by Alhaji Isah Sokwo over the legitimacy of the former to ascend the highest Bassa traditional throne. In the controversy that lingered, which resulted in the suspension of Mr. Kpongbo from office, appropriate support for the Akuba clan was overwhelming, but Mr. Kpongbo of the Ozongulo clan was eventually installed as Aguma of Bassa.

This issue shall be revisited in subsequent chapters. Below is the genealogy of Bassa chiefs since 1912.

TABLE 2:
THE GENEALOGY OF CHIEFS IN BASSA LAND SINCE 1912

S/NO	NAME	PERIOD	REMARKS
1.	NDAMA	1912 – 1914	ALIEN (NUPE)
2.	ABU NDAMA	1914 – 1916	“ “
3.	KWASAU	1916 – 1916	ALIEN (HAUSA)
4.	MAL. MAMMAN	1916 – 1918	“ “
5.	ABU NDAMA (2 nd tenure)	1918 – 1926	ALIEN (NUPE)
6.	NDAKO	1926 – 1928	“ “
7.	MASENZHE	1928 – 1929	“ “
8.	KPANACHE JISU	1929 – 1931	AKUBA CLAN
9.	TAMAZHE	1932 – 1935	EDIGESHI CLAN
10.	GBEREGU KWANA	1935 – 1948	AKUBA CLAN
11.	SOKWO KURUBWA	1948 – 1966	AKUBA CLAN
12.	JOSEPH DODO ALAGANI	1968 – 1995	ARISAMISHE CLAN
13.	JOSEPH DAKU KPONGBO	1997 – 2012	OZONGULO CLAN
14.	WILLIAMS KEKE JIMBA	2013 – DATE	ODUGBO

Table2: Genealogy of chiefs in Oguma, Bassa.

Source: Reports on Bassa-Komo District of Igala Division
(SNP/17/3/2175) Lokoja/current records

Chapter Four

NATIVE AUTHORITY: STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION IN BASSA LAND

INTRODUCTION

Colonial Government used the Native Authority system maximally to achieve its administrative expediency. At best, it appointed their friends and cronies who were more disposed to implementing British policies on the people. At worst, it alienated the people from their chiefs who needed to rule in order to remain relevant in British eyes than the people.

RE-ORGANISATION

After centralizing the political structure of the Bassa people, the Native Authority grouped the more than twenty one (21) clans into eight (8) clan areas under one district: Oguma, Edenye, Kekure, Kpanche, Odugbo, Ikende, Enyede/Ubutu and Kporo. All these areas had their clan heads under the paramount ruler at Oguma and earned their salaries from British Administration for collecting taxes and overseeing the affairs of these areas.

By 1935, the various clans became independently responsible “Sub Native authorities” to the District Officer until their council and authority were reconstituted in 1956 as part of general reorganization of native authorities in the country. A.B. Mathews, the District Officer had recommended that each of these clan heads should “have his Dougari (Police), a messenger and the assistance of a tax scribe” (Mathews: 1934). What he recommended was the position of 2nd class chiefs for the clan heads while they owed allegiance and

received orders from the paramount chief (1st class) at Oguma, the headquarters of the district.

At the Native courts, the clan heads had their delegates who participated in court sessions. A. B. Mathews designed to have a replication of the British Crown court at district level. Members resided at Oguma and drew a salary of £1 per month and were responsible to their clan heads. The court itself was headed and presided over by the 'Aguma', the paramount chief with a scribe. Litigants were sentenced according to the discretion of members relative to the magnitude of their offences which varied from sums of money, months and or years of imprisonment.

Taxation, in any form was never in practice in Bassa land like many other communities in Nigeria before the advent of British Colonial rule. Taxation was, therefore, introduced by the British Administration. But direct British involvement was avoided as such responsibility was placed in the hands of clan heads that brought their money to Oguma from areas of their jurisdictions and accounted for every penny before the scribe and the 'Aguma'. At the end of counting, the scribe issued a note of total money collected to the clan head for payment into the treasury.

This was when mischievous practices were schemed as the scribe connived with the treasurer, altered by manipulation and inflated the figures in the paper issued against actual figures in the amount of money counted without the knowledge of the illiterate clan head. The clan head was always made to pay for the inaccuracies (inadequacies) recorded by the scribe who corruptly enrich himself with the difference. The case of alleged embezzlement for which Zhimada, the Enyede clan head, sentenced to imprisonment was a good example of the kind of manipulation being discussed.

Revenue and expenditure estimates revealed that between £1,215.00 and £1,250.00 were collected between 1933 and 1934 respectively. It was this impressive record that informed the building of a Native treasury in 1942 at

Oguma. In 1948, the Native Authority School (founded in 1942) was also rebuilt at Oguma. Other infrastructural developments were stalled with the forceful merger of the Bassa Native Authority with the Igala Native Authority with headquarters at Idah. Before 1942, the Bassa people paid their revenue at Dekina which was used to fund the expenditures of Dekina district. Such method of exploitation was later redressed with the autonomy that was given to Bassa Native authority in 1943.

It was this arrangement that made A.B. Mathews to give his eventual opinion/report on the people, that:

“Bassa-komo Native Administration; after many years of troubled history, it would appear that a satisfactory solution to the administrative problem presented by this small independent area (Bassa) had been found”.

But the problems continued to stare the people in the face, arising from its subsequent affiliation or merger with Idah. The creation of Local Government Areas in 1968 and 1976 did not quite address the lingering problem of self-determination for the Bassa people. They were again grouped with other ethnic groups which compounded the age-long issue of independence and self-determination.

BASSA DISTRICT AND IDAH NATIVE AUTHORITY: THE MISCHIEVOUS MERGER

It had been noted that the Bassa people crossed the Benue into the present day land mass they occupy known as Bassa Local Government Area. They remained independent until the British colonial administration altered this status. The amalgamation that took place at the national level found its root at the local level (Habib: 1987.46). It was meant for administrative convenience

without taking cognizance of the consequences it had on the desire and the aspiration of the Bassa people.

At best, it could be a policy of local political organization adopted by the British Colonial Administration for unifying diverse ethnic groups for administrative convenience. In this regard, many ethnic groups comprising chiefs of areas which were too small to be “viable in themselves” were merged with other larger ones to form the conceived notion of Lugard’s “viable political units” (Habib 1987:46).

It was due to this arrangement, and that of giving prominence to viability that the Bassa Native Authority was merged with Igala Native Authority, formally administered from Onitsha and later as part of Kabba Province under the Northern Provinces in 1918. This development incorporated Bassa Native Authority and other Native Authorities into the Igala Native Authority under the paramount leadership of Atta Igala.

As part of the general administrative re-organization, the Bassa Native Authority under “Aguma” (chief) Abu resisted the merger of his authority and area to Atta. Habib (1987:44) noted this:

In that year (1918), the colonial provincial administrator, Captain Bynghal, called together the Chiefs of Dekina, Ankpa, Bassa-Nge and Bassa-komo at Idah. After some diplomatic prologue, the administrator indicated that the government wanted these chiefs to cooperate administratively in one Division with Attah Ataboh of Igala as the head. All the chiefs accepted, except Aguma Abu of Bassa-komu (sic) who rejected the idea there and then.

However, Captain Bynghal shrewdly, convinced the chiefs that each of them would have control over his area and people without interference from Attah, the head of the Igala Native authority. Eventually, the various chiefs who attended that fateful meeting including Aguma Abu of Bassa Native authority signed the merger.

For numerous but obvious reasons, the amalgamation of various Native Authorities into one became necessary for the British Colonial Government. In the first place, it was their desire to create a sort of federated independent districts of Native Authorities and, secondly, to create a unified body with one paramount ruler. And, thirdly, it was an effort to establish one strong Native treasury for the whole area for financial stability and easy fiscal system (Habib: 1987:45).

For these reasons, central Native Authorities were formed and in Igala Native Authority the Atta became the Head of Administration at Idah (Habib: 1987:45).

He believes the yardstick for merging Bassa land and Idah was borne out of economic viability and administrative convenience. Consequently, there were, therefore, social interactions between the Bassa people and the Igala people. But for the mere fact that the Igala was the dominant group in terms of population and education, the interaction was characterized by inequality, and this was perpetuated by the dominance of Headship of the Native Authority position. This domination over the Bassa people made them suffer structural effects in terms of negligence and deprivation of social amenities and political autonomy. The district heads or chiefs were reduced in power and status to that of subservience.

According to Habib (1987), the recognized chief by colonial administrators was the Atta Igala. Powers were delegated to him to appoint and issue letters of appointments to subordinate chiefs within his area of jurisdiction. In the judicial sphere, Atta was given every legal status and also

vested with such powers to enforce justice in the land. Financially, he became the custodian of all revenues accruing from taxes, tributes and levies which were paid into the treasury. In his capacity he was empowered on how to allocate these resources to social services like schools, clinics, roads etc. Indeed he executed British colonial policies in his area of domain, more to the advantage of his people.

This administrative marriage of convenience between these two diverse groups took the Bassa down the path of retrogression and under-development. Soon, the image of Bassa people became dwarfed, suppressed and inconsequential, their aspiration subdued and their traditional institution and people became derided. These and other injustices made the people suffer criminal neglect and abject poverty.

Educationally, the Bassa people under the Native administration at Idah were with all intents and purposes ignored. While schools were built at Idah by 1909, Ankpa 1915, Egume 1930, Dekina 1931, no school was built in Bassa land all these while. This explains the backward educational background of the people today as they had to trek 47 kilometres' distance (to Anyigba), to go to a missionary school. The only primary school built then was the Native Authority junior primary school in 1942. The first Secondary School, Government Secondary School, Oguma, came after thirty-four years, in 1976.

It was out of this growing disaffection, dissatisfaction, neglect, domination, deprivation and frustration that the Bassa people opted the agitation for a separate Native Authority since 1929, to be free from Idah's authority. In the re-organisation that followed, Bassa Native Authority was distinctly recognized as a sub-native authority, Aguma of Bassa regained partial sovereignty, had power to discharge justice in his domain, looked after the treasury and became a member of the council of chiefs of the Northern Provinces and attended their meetings in Kaduna. Though some administrative procedures were still processed at Idah, the chief had much autonomy within his

domain. This surrogate relationship between Bassa and Idah was responsible for the handicapped developmental efforts of the people at various levels.

THE CONSPIRACY

From the period when chief Abu in 1916 reluctantly, signed the merger treaty with Idah, the independence of the Bassa people was at stake. The Bassa people fought tooth and nail to be recognized independently of Idah as a district people. This dream was realized in 1929 when a full Native Authority, affiliated to Idah for some common decisions, materialized. This partial independence was considered gratifying. For one, they were no longer under Atta Igala wholesomely. They rather federated their various clans into a stronger central administration at Oguma and would not want to go back under Idah in any form. According to A.B. Mathews (1934) who conducted interviews among major Bassa clan heads, he had it that, under no circumstances or condition were the Bassa people to go back under the leadership of Atta. He wrote in his reports;

It only remains to say that the Bassa themselves emphatically will not hear of alternative; an alien district head or some form of subjection to Idah... Infact, they are firmly against any idea of being fiefs of Idah in any sense or form.

But, Atta more than determined wanted the subjugation of Bassa people as his subjects, under his tutelage. Moreso, Atta was propelled under the notion that the land upon which the Bassa people now inhabit hitherto belonged to him. Moved by this anachronistic desire, he persistently urged the Chief Commissioner, Northern Province Mr. T.S. Adams, when he visited Idah, to bring back Bassa under him. Part of his report reads:

Next morning, I met the Atta and Council and was at once asked for (a) the return of Bassa-Komo to the administration.

The Atta was desperate about the return of the Bassa people to be his subjects. The visiting Commissioner asked in return what administrative justice and financial gains would the Bassa people stand in advantage? There was no answer to this poser. This unraveled and projected the selfish desire, contempt and ill-will which the Atta held for the Bassa people.

In the same visit, E.K. Featherstone reported that Atta merely wanted political recognition from the Bassa people.

The Atta first of all raised the question of status of Bassa-Komo which split off from the Igala Native administration some years ago. He wished that the Bassa Komo people should recognize him as their overlord; they were surrounded by Igala territory; they were ill-governed by their clan heads; and they did not obtain justice in their courts.

How could Atta administer justice better for the Bassa people? Atta didn't give up even though he knew the Bassa people stood to gain nothing from his scheming.

In 1957 during the reign of 'Aguma' Sokwo Kurubwa, the Resident, Kabba Province, invited him to Idah, and in a deceitful language and manner persuaded him to sign a certain document of 'cooperation'. Little did the 'Aguma' know that it was a document of legal erosion of his sovereignty and autonomy; a surrender to administrative subservience. Unlike in previous cases, the illiterate Aguma was not given the privilege of having the document

translated to him, nor was he allowed to first of all discuss the matter with his Council at Oguma. It was urgent! It couldn't wait! Else it would deny the people the badly needed development. But the result was that the District promptly became known as "Bassa Komo Sub-Native Authority".

There was wide spread indignation in Bassa land against the Aguma whose ignorance and illiteracy had plunged the people into yet another era of local administrative tutelage. Mr. J.D. Alagani, then a Forest Guard, who later became the Aguma was interrogated for his role in the incident. Several members of the Bassa elite of that time were also interrogated as they were suspected to be the brains behind the protests. That notwithstanding, the Bassa wrote a strongly worded letter to the Government of the Northern Region, Kaduna, protesting against the mischievous subordination of their Native Authority to the Igala Native Authority. The Government responded by the visit (in 1962) of the North Regional Minister for Local Government, Alhaji Sule Gawa, to Oguma and Idah, respectively.

The visit resulted in the arrangement in which Bassa Komo Sub-Native Authority was to have a resident portfolio councilor in Idah to take charge of Bassa Komo affairs in the Igala Native Authority. This arrangement fell far short of expectations as the people had demanded the full restoration of their autonomy. But the Bassa had really found themselves in a helpless situation and had no choice but to abide the unwholesome arrangement. Mr. S.W. Shigaba of blessed memory was nominated to fill the post.

This situation obtained until 1967 when the Military Government of Lt. Col. (later General) Yakubu Gowon created 12 States in place of the 4 Regions.

Chapter Five

POST-INDEPENDENCE BASSA

INTRODUCTION

Like other communities, the Bassa people welcomed Nigeria's Independence with joy and good faith. Most probably, their headache had not been colonial administration per se, but the conspiracy that had put them under a tutelage that was interested only in the peremptoriness of power without responsibilities. The Bassa people looked forward to redemption from bondage now that they were free from the administration that had plunged them into the domination of Idah.

THE RESTORATION

Some relief came in the arrangement that followed the creation of States in 1967 and boundary adjustment in 1968 when the Bassa found themselves as part of Kwara State.

A solid foundation, which would ensure stability of government at the grassroots, was now the prime objective of the military in which viable local government authorities were to be created. The state Military Governor, Col. David L. Gbamigboye, in October, 1968, set up an Advisory Committee on the administration of Kwara State in order to meet the aspirations and demand of our people". To this end, the Committee was charged to look into, among others, the following:

- a. To examine and make recommendations on the need for altering the boundaries of existing Native Authorities by merging or splitting them to form more viable units so that no native authority was too large or too small for efficient administration.
- b. To examine the powers, functions and machinery of operation of subordinate Councils and their relationship with the main Native Authority particularly on the mode of existing power of financial control, etc.

The result was that from the single Igala Division and Native Authority, emerged three administrative divisions, namely, Idah, Dekina and Ankpa. Dekina Division comprised; Dekina, Okura, Bassa-Komo, Mozum and Bassa Nge Districts, with Dekina as headquarters. The Bassa paramount traditional ruler (the Aguma, who was the only staffed chief in the new Division) was elevated to the Second Class status.

CREATION OF BASSA LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN BENUE STATE

Although the dispensation of 1968 ameliorated a sickening situation, it was by no means unsatisfactory. In 1976 the General Murtala Mohammed regime increased the number of States from twelve to nineteen.

The three Divisions (Idah, Dekina and Ankpa) were excised from Kwara and merged with the newly created Benue State. More than ever before, individual ethnic communities agitated for separate States of their own. The Bassa people wanted a situation where they could be found together with their kith and kin in the present-day Kogi, Nasarawa, Niger, Benue, and the Federal Capital Territory (F.C.T) instead of a decimated merger with other groups.

The Nasir Commission on boundary adjustment however, recommended the creation of an autonomous Local Government Area for the Bassa people to assuage, once and for all, their fear of domination and marginalization by the

Igala. The Igala vehemently opposed this creation of autonomy for the Bassa people.

The pressure from Bassa was tense as Mr. Michael S. Allah, then president of the National Association of Bassa Students (NABS) in a memorandum submitted to the Panel on Local Government Creation, stressed the Bassa position on the matter:

The creation of an autonomous local government for the Bassa people was more than necessary, and a necessary decision in the right direction to solve once and for all the domination and marginalization which the people have long suffered.

This request for an autonomous local government ‘for the Bassa people’ was not granted according to the people’s expectations. The new local government was a merger of Bassa-Nge and Mozum District with Bassa-Komo. Ordinarily, the Bassa people should have assumed their rightful place compared to the other less populated Bassa-Nge and Mozum districts. But this was not to be. Notwithstanding that the headquarters was sited at Oguma, shrewd acts of victimization continued. Leadership and staffing of the Local Government were highly lopsided and detrimental to the Bassa people. Less than five members of staff were employed into the Council administration as cleaners, messengers and clerks. What this meant was that the Bassa people had a Council in their land but without authority to influence and meet their political, social and economic aspirations. The people continued to despair as they suffered marginalization right in their own land!

“THE PEOPLE CALLED BASSA-NGE”

The people called Bassa-Nge constitute a district. They are one of the three major ethnic groups that make up Bassa Local Government Area in Kogi State. The other district is Mozum, made up of the Egbira (of Koton-Karfe

stock) people. The Bassa-Nge people who today find themselves in Bassa Local Government Area of Kogi State have both cultural and linguistic affinity with the Nupe in Niger State.

Their District Headquarters is Gboloko, while another prominent town is Shintaku, whose location was so strategic during the civil war (1967 – 1970). As a town with a harbour facility on the eastern bank of the River Niger (and almost opposite Lokoja) it greatly facilitated the movement of Nigerian Federal troops into secessionist eastern Nigeria through liberated Obollo-Afor. Another important settlement is Kpata where many of their prominent sons and daughters come from because of their early contact with the white-men.

The Bassa-Komu people also suffered marginalization from the Bassa-Nge people because, according to Habib (1987:61-62), Bassa Local Government was “created to satisfy the age-long aspiration of the Bassa-Nge people who had long suffered subordination under the Igala”

Rather than conceding a Local Government to the Bassa-Nge District alone, it was joined with Bassa-Komu and Mozum, and above all, the headquarters being sited in Bassa-Komu District at Oguma. By this design, the development progress that would have been brought upon Bassa-Nge from sitting of the headquarters in the land has been denied them... Notwithstanding this deliberate persecution, the Bassa-Nge as peace loving, have accepted this arrangement and thence rendered all available resources for the success and progress of the local government.

In the context of this review, the “peace loving Bassa-Nge people” vehemently agitated for the relocation of the local government headquarters to Gboloko many years after its creation. It took only men of reason, sympathizers,

pleas and strong-willed pressure to prevent this request from being implemented. According to Habib (1987) “this was a shrewd act of victimization said to have been nursed and nurtured by the time immemorial foes of the Bassa-Nge people”. These “time immemorial foes” are certainly not the Bassa Komu people!

This characteristic feature of tribal chauvinism and assertion is not peculiar to the Bassa-Nge people alone, and they are not to blame. It is a colonial heritage enhanced by political subjugation of our present polity. The kingdom and institutions of the Bassa-Nge people had been subordinated to Idah following the amalgamation of Native Authorities for viable “political units”. The tutelage of Attah over a large territory of land, subjected the Bassa-Nge people to a lot of miseries even more than the Bassa-Komu people ever had. Attah found his authority exercised more in Bassa-Nge land as he imposed and deposed chiefs at will as posited by Habib (1987) in his work, “The people called Bassa-Nge”. This common historical experience explains the attitudes of these groups towards integration, that is, towards each other.

However, this does not provide the ground for the treatment being meted out to the Bassa-Komu people. The position by Habib (1987) is not the case as the Bassa-Nge people have benefited more in terms of government patronage at the expense of the Bassa-Komu people and as well influenced appointments at the Local Government level and filling the quota for Bassa people at the State level. The headquarters at Oguma was left undeveloped for the impending relocation to Gboloko. Rural roads in Bassa remained ungraded for a long time except for Alhaji Nda Haruna Mohammed of Bassa-Nge provenance who, as an appointed Chairman in 1986 gave the Local Government Administration neutral attention. He provided facilities unequalled in the history of the Local Government such as the Social Centre, VIP Lodge, rehabilitation of roads and boreholes and equipping the Local Government Education Hall with furniture

and had no proclivity to any particular district. Since then, these facilities have deteriorated to non-existent status.

Since the creation of the local government in 1976, only Nine (9) Bassa-Komu sons with cumulative Eleven years and five months tenure (only) of the thirty-five Chairmen that have served in the administration as either chairmen or sole administrators so far with a dwindling data as at late. These are late Domozu Jimba (appointed/elected in Jan. 1981 – Sept. 1983), Peter A. Dogwo (elected Jan. 1991 – March 1991), Isaac T.R. Jimba (appointed April, 1996 – Aug. 1997) and Jeremiah Daku (March, 1997 – July, 1998). Others include the brief tenure of Paul Maiwada (appointed March 2002 – June 2003) and subsequently, the late Luke Shigaba (appointed August 2003 – Feb. 2004) who was assassinated in cold blood on March 4, 2004 at his residence in Sheria. His younger brother, Bako Shigaba stepped into his shoes to head the Local Government in Dec. 2004 – August 2005, but was impeached after only eight months in office by forces opposed to the Bassa people. More recently Hon. Sunday Shigaba, (appointed 2006 – 2007) and later Late Musa Gwatana (elected 2008 – 2011).

But for these exceptions, the Bassa-Nge people and others appointed from outside the local government by the State government had administered the local government at various times. The Ebira of Mozum, of course have had even a competing tenure with the Bassa people irrespective of their numerical disadvantage. Thus, we can understand why the Bassa-Komu people have felt marginalized, neglected and cheated. The late Aguma of Bassa, Mr. J.D. Alagani, in 1987 was reprimanded by the Military Government of Benue State for voicing his opposition to these forms of marginalization, especially in terms of appointments and posting of personnel to Bassa Local Government Council which were all against the Bassa people.

The demographic structure of the Bassa-Komu people shows a progressive superiority over and above other districts and ethnic groups. This further reflects in their taxes and agricultural products.

Table 3: BASSA-KOMU DISTRICT:
Population in relation to other districts in Bassa Local Government of Kogi State.

<i>District</i>	<i>Population</i>
Bassa-Komu	80,195
Bassa-Nge	43,037
Mozum	4,803
Total	128,035

Source: Bassa Local Government Tax Assessment, 1987
(House hold and Tax payer).

From the table above, it could be seen that, the Bassa-Komu people constitute about 62.6% of the population. It would have been a misguided judgment and unfair decision not to have conceded to them the sitting of the local government headquarters in Bassa District, aside from their historical struggles and as former headquarters of the Native Authority for the area.

THE BASSA-KOMU AND THE BASSA-NGE SPEAKING PEOPLE IN BASSA LG OF KOGI STATE

These two peoples share a common migratory history, contiguous territories and colonial heritage. The Bassa-Nge however, suffered a more sustained and prolonged subjugation under Idah. In 1976 however, the two began to share a common local government area and supposedly, bore the same name that is prefixed with “Bassa”. But nothing in terms of culture and language seem to suggest any affinity or similarity between the two. The public ignorantly believe that since the two share the same prefix to their names, they

are likely to share common words or language or are the same after all. But nothing is common, not even in terms of greetings and mannerisms between the two ethnic groups.

This Nupe speaking group was not known as Bassa-Nge prior to the coming of the British colonizers, nor was the Bassa-Komu originally known with the suffix ‘Komu’ or any other additive for that matter. But while the Bassa Komu simply call themselves ‘Bassa’, the colonizers (in what is now Kogi State) named them ‘Bassa Komu’. The ‘Komu’ suffix had raised controversies, refusals and rejection from the Bassa people. It is a colonial imposition that had unnecessarily separated the Bassa people of Bassa Local Government Area of Kogi State from the same Bassa-speaking people located in other areas of the federation, such as Nasarawa, Niger and Benue States and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and even those in Koton-Karfe Local Government Area of same Kogi State! From time immemorial, the Bassa in these various locations have been correctly known and called ‘Bassa’ without the derogatory suffix “Komu”.

On the other hand (and even as a prefix) the name Bassa had erroneously applied for an entirely different tribe in the Bassa Local Government Area of Kogi State. Our fellow victims in this game of prefixes and suffixes are, by and large, of the Nupe-speaking stock, who crossed the River Niger and settled along the eastern bank.

In our case, the ‘Komu’ is morning salutation (greeting) to one’s mother; mother-in-law and elderly women generally. How the colonizers chose the suffix ‘Komu’ has not been ascertained, as they could have as well chosen “Kwada”, the form which the women folk use to greet their male in-laws and elders, and we would have been called “Bassa kwada” or any other funny stuff that suited the white man’s fancy.

In the same manner, they now called the Nupe-speaking group “Bassa-Nge” which was a complete misnomer. “Nge” is a common word by this group

meaning: “I say”, while drawing the attention of the listener. The white man did this without first of all identifying who they were but christened them after the Bassa people with whom the former shared boundaries. Thus, everybody was either Bassa ‘this’ or Bassa ‘that’. People are often told that suffixes were (and are still) necessary to differentiate the two groups. But such a simplistic explanation would be sustainable only if the two groups really shared the name “Bassa”.

This suffix ‘Komu’ has not gone down well with the Bassa people all over Nigeria. The Bassa people in other places in the country find it strange that their kith and kin in Kogi have been tagged with such objectionable suffix. It is demeaning to label human beings with funny additives without their consent. The suffix is being jettisoned by the Bassa people of Kogi State who simply wish to be known and called ‘BASSA’.

It is also important to note that this Bassa-Nge too are opposed to the name (Bassa-Nge) in its entirety and are will to adopt a “Ba-age-Nupe” (Habib 1987 : 23), a people with whom they share linguistic, cultural and institutional affinities. It is better if they (“Ba-age-Nupe”) shed and left the name “Bassa” to its authentic owners in order to stop the confusion they application of “Bassa” generates between the two ethnic groups whenever and wherever they were mentioned. According to Habib (1987:25), on 19th July, 1986, the Bassa-Nge Development Union held a meeting and agreed to implement this decision. This would be the right process for correct ethnic identification.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Underdevelopment had tragically cut off the people of Bassa. The abundant resources in the area remain untapped and unnoticed. Some areas in the country today are provided with certain basic amenities because of their strategic locations; centrality advantage or geographical endowment. Lagos, for instance, with the harbour facilities cannot be denied certain amenities. Kaduna

has the advantage of being a regional headquarters of yore. Abuja is centrally located to accommodate Nigeria's administrative headquarters. Jos has the advantage of weather and Tin mining activities. Port Harcourt produces oil.

Unfortunately, for the Bassa people, they are located in the hinterland of Nigeria along the Rivers Benue and Niger and do not attract such attention for development. Their economic and agricultural potentials have not been recognized and have since remained un-tapped. They do not share common boundary with any country where, probably, prevention of smuggling activities could have drawn needed attention to them. They are left to rot away in decaying status. In fact, the people were better off during colonial government in terms of infrastructural facilities than at independence. The people drifted to abject poverty, neglect and destitution by the day.

Through development, man should be able to improve his environment and equip himself to satisfy his needs for food, clothing and shelter (Rodney 1967: 27). The Colonialists developed places that were instrumental for improving the economic image of Europe and other areas for their administrative convenience and tranquility. For example, Lagos and Port Harcourt, which facilitated the exportation of raw materials, were given utmost attention for development. Same for Enugu and Jos for mining activities, Lokoja for administrative convenience and pacification of the hinterland but Bassa was not strategic for their interest except to collect taxes to run their business. Independent Nigeria could not break from this unhealthy heritage. It was rather a galloping degeneration into destitution; instead, attention was paid to personal aggrandizement and place of ethnic domicile of government officials, and the Bassa people had no representation in government. In some cases, government for lack of foresight on what it ought to do with its money squandered it away in father-Christmas-like manner and the citizens wallowed in poverty. If solid structures were laid for the provision of potable water, good roads and electricity in our rural settlements in the hey days of oil boom, the

poverty and restlessness of our various communities would have been assuaged and our economy generally would have been better for it.

Since the creation of the Local Government in 1976, the Bassa people have had to contend with bad roads both during dry and worst at rainy seasons even to the local government headquarters until 2002, when Prince Abubakar Audu, then Kogi State Governor asphalted the road from Odenyi to Oguma. The rest of the road, consisting of 43 km hinterland where majority of agricultural activities take place has remained un-motorable and has become a death trap. Consequently, this has over the years dwindled the production and transportation of agricultural produce to other parts of the country. Electricity has remained a mirage. Of the few towns in the local government area that had been linked to electricity in 2012 hardly saw light. The hope of attracting the attention of the Federal and State Governments since 1979 to this deplorable plight has remained a wishful thinking. The only borehole at Oguma, headquarters of the Local Government, sunk in 1976 is no more than an artifact. The Bassa people depend on stagnant waters, dug wells and streams for their water supply. The people are grateful for divine protection from any outbreak of epidemic emanating from total lack of potable water.

This criminal neglect has forced the Bassa people to once again migrate in large numbers to places where their farm produce could easily be transported for better sales; Kwara, Ondo, Oyo, Oro and many other places. Because the politicians come, they make their campaigns and take the peoples' votes but forget them as soon as they assume office.

ELITE/POLITICIANS IN BASSA

In spite of the marginalization and seeming deprivation of the Bassa people, it has not been a story of woes all through as they have been able to produce some elites that cut across politicians, financial businessmen, paramilitary personnel, administrators and the academics.

The elite in any community constitute the vanguard of that community. They have the capacity to shape the growth and development of that community. Failure in their leadership role to transform the community would result in utter neglect of the community and its people. As pacesetters, they encourage and spur the younger ones to positions of authority and responsibility. This list however cuts across the geo-political landscape of Bassa Local Government Area of Kogi State to include Nasarawa State and FCT. The following few are hereby mentioned:

KOGI STATE (BASSA LGA)

I.R. Jimba

The first ever Commissioner to emerge from Bassa-Komu land was Hounourable I.R. Jimba who was appointed by the N.P.N. Government of Mr. Aper Aku of Benue State in 1981. Born in Parau village near Akakana town, Honourable Jimba was also appointed Chairman, Bassa Local Government Council in 1996. Because of his political clout, he became the first Bassa to be elected into the Federal House of Representative for the Dekina/Bassa Constituency in 1999 and got re-elected in 2003. As a businessman, he ran successfully the J.Z. Hotels with branches at Oguma, Lokoja and Gwagwalada, FCT. Hon. Jimba passed on in 2007.

P.A. Dogwo

Hon. P.A. Dogwo became the Commissioner of Works and later Agriculture under Prince Abubakar Audu in 1991 – 1993. Having been elected Chairman of Bassa Local Government Council in 1990, Hon. Dogwo consolidated his political hold in Bassa land as a close ally of the then Governor, Late Alh. Abubakar Audu. An astute politician, Hon. Dogwo was appointed member of the Governing Council, Federal Polytechnic, Offa, Kwara State, in 2000. He hails from Wusa town.

As Commissioner of Works in Kogi State, he embarked on the construction of Dekina-Oguma road. He fell short of completing it before General Sani Abacha toppled the government in 1993.

D.D. Sheneni (MNI)

Mr. D.D. Sheneni, retired Permanent Secretary is reputed to have been the first Bassa man to graduate from any university in 1967. An Ahmadu Bello University graduate, he is the first to rise to the level of Permanent Secretary in the Civil Service in the early 1980s from Bassa land. A seasoned administrator, he has worked in both Federal and State Governments since 1968. He does not abhor politics, but he is unlikely to be drawn into politicking where merit was not respected. Throughout his career in the Public Service, he was often referred to as an epitome of public morality and accountability; a man who respects his name more than what (fraudulent) wealth could offer.

A member of the National institute, Mr. Sheneni is an ambassador of the Bassa people any day. He hails from Enyede village.

Prince Idris Yusuf (Koton-Karfe LG)

A Tawari-born Banker/Businessman is said to be one of the fore-most elite in Bassa land. Prince (as he is fondly called), hails from Koton-Karfe Local Government Area of Kogi State. He has held managerial positions in many banks and industries in Nigeria.

Jerry Daku

An intellectual cum politician, he got elected as chairman, Bassa Local Government Council in 1997 and served only for sixteen months. He is a foremost educationist who had stirred the education revolution in Bassa land. The education Bassa enjoys today is owed (thanks) in no small measure to Hon. Dr. Jerry Daku. He hails from Uzugbe village. Hon Daku has held several

political appointments under various governments both at Federal and State levels.

J.A. Zhizhi

The first Bassa man to have risen to the position of Registrar in any tertiary institution in Kogi State: Having risen to the position of Deputy Registrar of the Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi, Mr. Zhizhi was appointed Registrar of the Kogi State University, Anyigba in 2005. He is reputed to be a man of high integrity in all his dealings in public service life. He hails from Kpanche village.

Mrs. Tawani Alagani

The first woman politician to have been appointed Kogi State INEC Commissioner under the Government of Prince Abubakar Audu in 1999 from Bassa hails from Odugbo and married to the late Aguma of Bassa, His Royal Highness, J. D. Alagani. As a foremost female Educationist, she had influenced many girls to embrace early education.

Mrs. Ladi Dogwo

She is among the first female Bassa to graduate from the University. She rose through the ranks of a male dominated environment to join the league of directorates in Kogi State Civil Service, Lokoja. She hails from Ogodo and is married to Mr. Alex Dogwo.

Late A.D.A. Sekpe

The first elected member of a State House of Assembly under the banner of Great Nigerian Peoples Party (GNPP) in 1979 against an all powerful

National Party of Nigeria (NPN) of the Shagari regime. He was full of charisma, kind and loving disposition. Among his children is Gloria Lindwall (Nee Sekpe), a Barrister and Mrs. Joy Maka of Radio Nigeria, Abuja. He hails from Kpanche.

Late Adams M. Jimba

Assistant Comptroller General of Immigration, Mr. Jimba was the first to have ever risen to the top echelon of any Para-military position from Bassa land. He was depended upon as far as loyalty to the Bassa cause was concerned. He accounts for some of the Bassa people in the Nigerian Immigration Service today. He passed on in April, 2004 at the prime of his full potentials. He hails from Enyede village.

Late D.Z. Tukura

The first Bassa man to become a Local Government Secretary in the early 1970s: Rising through the ranks, late Mr. D.Z. Tukura achieved an unparalleled feat in the land as a career civil servant. He is father to the internationally acclaimed preacher, Pastor Sam Tukura. He is a native of Kpanche.

Monsignor (Very Rev. Fr) Abel Bida

The first Bassa man to be ordained a Catholic priest: Born at Edenye village, Fr. Bida was ordained in 1978 under a vocation dreaded by many Bassa Boys and Girls. Until twenty years, later when Rev. Fr. Timothy Mejida (Abu) broke the jinx and got ordained in 1998 under the same vocation of celibate catholic Priesthood at Sheria, Bassa Local Government Area, Fr. Bida had remained the only one in the Diocese of Idah, Kogi State. Venerated Fr. Bida rose to become a Monsignor before he passed on in 2010.

NASARAWA STATE:

D.Z. Tukura

Hon. D.Z. Tukura is one politician of repute north of the Benue River. He hails from Toto Local Government of Nasarawa State. He was elected into the Plateau State House of Assembly in 1979 under the platform of NPN representing Nasarawa Local Government even when the Plateau State Government was of the NPP led administration.

Hon. D.Z. Tukura is father to Dr. David Tukura a Don in the Sociology Department, University of Jos, Nigeria. He also fathered Victor Tukura, a Barister at Law who runs successfully, the Missions Chambers in Jos and has been appointed at different times Special Assistant to two honourable ministers for his versatile knowledge. While Dr. Alagoni Sokwo who grew under him is admired for his surgical skills in medical practice is also one of the first in Bassa land as a Medical Doctor.

FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY:

Augustine Agaba (Abaji)

The first Bassa man to rise to rank of Warrant Officer 1 in the early 1970s before he voluntarily retired from the Nigerian Army. Upon retirement, he went back to school and graduated with a Bachelor of Education degree. Before retiring from public service, Mr. Agaba was one of the principals in the Federal Capital Territory schools. He hails from Abaji Area Council of the FCT and holds the “Gborofu” (the strong youth) chieftaincy title in Bassa land.

This list is by no means exhaustive as there are various Bassa people that have excelled in their chosen careers, but time and space would not permit all of them to be mentioned in a work of this nature.

Chapter Six

THE THRONE OF THE AGUMA OF BASSA LAND IN KOGI STATE

This chapter is not intended to stir up a hornet's nest. It is nevertheless generally acknowledged that the distortion of history constitutes a grave injustice, particularly to posterity. Whilst it may be expedient to tamper with truth for whatever reason, it still remains impossible to vitiate truth. In all honesty therefore, it would do no harm to put the record straight.

It is common now for the issues of traditional rule to generate controversies, conflicts, confusion and even the break-down of law and order. This is why any responsive government exhausts avenues of investigations (with historical antecedents) towards the enthronement of peace and fair play in any given polity. The Bassa case is not different. Because, only themselves reserved the right of choice of their traditional rulers, how and when they deem necessary.

As earlier discussed in preceding chapters, the establishment and recognition of central authority in Bassa land came in the wake of 1912 when alien traditional rulership was imposed on the people against their will until 1929 when they effectively took control of their central administration. The dominant clans of Akuba, Arisameshe, Ashashama, Edigeshe and Ozongulo (who crossed over the Benue River to their present settlement) recognized each clan leader distinctly. However, Temple's (1965), Edited works: Notes on the Tribes, Provinces, Emirates and States of Northern Nigeria added that though

there was no central authority, “all the clans in Bassa province acknowledged the Akuba as their chief with the single exception of Gwari” (who were not Bassa people). The Gwari (Gbagyi) people had mingled and related peacefully and more friendly with the Bassa people than other ethnic groups in all their settlements. This accounts for the strong cultural affinity between the two till today.

The reasons for this acknowledgement by other clans of the Akuba as their head are not far fetched. Firstly, it is believed that the Akuba clan was the first that led other clans to cross over the Benue River under the leadership of Ogbo. According to Mathews (1934) report on Bassa-Komo District of Igala Division of Kabba Province (SNP/17/3/21756, Lokoja) “the history of migration shows that Ogbo of Akuba led others, namely, Arisameshe, Edigeshe, Ozongulo and Ashashama and crossed the river Benue after taking refuge in Nasarawa in 1818”. Mathews further made this attestation buttressing Temple’s submissions above and below:

Although each clan lived independently, they all respected, recognized and owed allegiance to the Akuba as the Leader of the migration and the senior clan to this day...

Today, this incontestable claim has been vitiated. It is not an accident of history that whoever founded a settlement or community became its head. Invariably, this explains why Kpanachi of the Akuba clan from Edenye was appointed the first indigenous Aguma of Bassa land in 1929, following the uprising and opposition against alien leadership.

Consequently, among the five (now six) Bassa paramount traditional rulers, three of them have been of the Akuba clan with a total of thirty-seven (37) years in office. These are Kpanachi Jisu (1929-1931), Gberigu Kwana

(1935-1948) and Sokwo Kurubwa (1948-1966). The interrupting appointment of Tamazhi Edigeshi clan came amidst the circumstances surrounding Kpanachi's murder in 1931 and the faulty criteria of succession used by A.B. Mathews who found him very amenable to British interests as a trusted friend and confidant. This colonial officer had held the mistaken belief that Kpanachi was murdered because of inter-clan rivalry. But this was far from the truth as already deposed by investigation in the preceding chapters. This was the only interruption of Akuba succession to the throne until the appointment of Mr. Joseph Dodo Alagani from Arisameshe clan.

It should be noted that Mr. Joseph Dodo Alagani was an arbitrator, in the struggle between the Akuba and the Edigeshi clan which wanted to ascend the throne for the second time. He, Mr. Joseph D. Alagani was to hold brief until a truce was reached. He was, however, able to manipulate his way and remain in office for twenty-nine years.

Numerically, of the six clan areas, only the Akuba clan occupy two administrative areas namely, Akuba I and Akuba II with headquarters at Edenye and Oguma respectively. The Akuba also comprises the largest land mass from Orokwo-Bassa to Esule. This further buttresses the logic of leadership of the Akuba clan over the others.

It was not by coincidence that Oguma of the Akuba became the headquarters of Bassa Local Government Council as its primacy had been recognized by all other clans before, during and after the establishment of Native Authority administration.

Since the institution of central authority in Bassa land and the enthronement of Bassa natives, the Akuba rulers had proven their worth in rulership (see A.B. Mathews reports on Kpanachi). He (Kpanachi) was mourned for his integrity, intelligence and honesty. So were Gberigu Kwana and Sokwo Kurubwa. But within two years of his appointment (1933-1934), Tamazhi of the Edigeshi, who took over from Kpanachi, was found to have embezzled money

from tax collection, besides other extortions and so was unceremoniously removed from office.

In barely two years of Mr. Alagani as the Aguma, a very serious crisis engulfed Bassa land, which was at that time in the former Kwara State. The crisis arose as a result of allegations of embezzlement of community collections for the construction of a bridge across the Yimoah Stream to link Oguma headquarters and the eastern part where the majority of the people live. The many petitions and representation from the people to the government authorities that were responsible went unheeded.

When, belatedly in 1971, some government functionaries were sent to Oguma to 'settle the matter' the people were so angered by the shabby proceedings that they resorted to manhandling the chief who was then bundled into a police van that drove him off to commence a brief exile. Without establishing the truth or falsity of the allegations, the police embarked on a mass arrest of people the chief had compiled and forwarded names of all imaginable souls with whom he had ever had any grouses. The prisons overflowed with Bassas 'awaiting trial'.

The outcome was the jailing of over 15 of them. Other persons such as the late Mr. Joseph Gberigu Wumani (a staff of the local government who was fingered to have opposed the chief) had to leave the area to be employed elsewhere. Two young intelligent school teachers, Messrs Innocent Tegeri Gwatana and the late Augustine Kuba Sekpe (who suffered persecution because of their stand on the issue) also had to flee their fatherland to seek employment outside the local government area. This crippled and ended the promising various career of many ambitious Bassa youth in the land.

It was a popular grassroot revolt against a perceived mal-administration and a real or imagined embezzlement of community funds from which the Aguma remained to be exonerated. It is pertinent to state that Mr. Alagani survived the crisis only because of some non-Bassa backers who were holding

powerful positions in government. The land went through a period of stagnant growth and a somber socio-cultural existence that spanned three decades with the bridge constructed in shabby condition.

A related, noteworthy incident during the tenure of Mr. Alagani as the Aguma of Bassa involved a Canadian missionary of the Catholic Church. Brother Conrad had painstakingly assessed the plight of the people and decided to construct a bridge across this notorious impediment called Yimoah Stream. But the Aguma effectively thwarted the resources, time and energy he invested into the project. Instead of the normal expression of gratitude and commendation that were due to this missionary, a detachment of policemen was sent to interrogate him over his 'source of authorization' to execute the project for the people! The work was discontinued, and that marked the end of this solo effort of a compassionate missionary. Today, there is no bridge across the Yimoah stream creating a deep gulf dividing Bassa land from engaging in smooth economic and socio-cultural activities.

The restiveness and open crisis that marked the administration of these two non-Akuba chiefs and the actions of subsequent rulers is sufficient proof (if proof was needed) that the clan (Akuba) knew the art of governance and would not have wasted such opportunities for development. After all, that is what they had laboured for as the pioneer settler and leader of the other clans.

ADDENDUM

There is no doubt that history and the logic of tradition had legitimately bestowed the Agumaship of Bassa in Kogi State on the Akuba clan. But the ignorance of history (and probably the deliberate assault on revered tradition) has generated a needless controversy and confusion, and made truth to stand on its head.

The way out of this unhealthy situation is no other than that which A.B. Mathews (District Officer in charge of Bassa Kwomu) proffered: Clan Heads

should be elevated to the status of second class chiefs with full entitlements. This would discourage illegitimate claims and manipulations to which the throne of Aguma of Bassa in Kogi State has been subjected. This is what will restore harmony and development to the land.

Chapter Seven

SOME WORDS OF WISDOM OF THE BASSA PEOPLE

The famous Chinua Achebe, a prolific writer of our time, in his hey days did say in one of his books; *Things Fall Apart*, (1958) that proverbs in Ibo, were the palm oil with which words were eaten. So also, would you hardly find a gathering of the Bassa people in which any conversation, meetings, judgments, musical concerts, jokes or any sermons that proverbs are not often used. They are used to convey meanings and messages or mitigate emotions, which direct expressions could not have had the desired effect. It is part of the people's culture as they express themselves daily. The list of wisdom lines or proverbs in Bassa is inexhaustible. Here are some of them:

1. The name you give to your dog, that's what people will call it. (Izechi na a'bu po u'wewe bu, ibe e'zhe a'suyana en).
2. You don't sever a limb because a baby has defecated on it. (E'jeji she u'wunto u'wene yeu nyizhi tuwin nu bwe-o!).
3. When you have not attained full growth, call no one a dwarf. (A'buta huwi she u'wana ta swana butu u'kazhere-o!)
4. If one bird had its beak broken should others not eat? (U'nono uko vwadu unu, a'nave su zha she a yayi?)
5. A day's sunshine does not render rotten a dead toad. (U'wana uko, fo'shishinje she u'kuto-o!)
6. The size of a ghost is determined by the size of the corpse of the dead person. (U'baratu, ya gombo no ru'wo)

7. A stubborn tsetse fly shall be confronted with the tip of the broom.
(Bi'shi na u'hwuje u'we, bizhe ba twah nu bu'humbo bu sheshe!)
8. A fly enticed by the savour of a dead body, would end up in the grave.
(Bishi na u'wa uwa Latu ru'wo buzhe ba ku'nanga nu uye)
9. If you were addressed as "Mr. Big head," you needed to nod it. (A'bu hien u'huhu kpoku, a'sha zhinginto no un!)
10. A man walks in shorts where his thighs/legs are admired. (O'fona a'bu dumanga adamashe a'pata o'bo rungo nu ogutu).
11. He who is dissatisfied with the size of his testes may be contented with an over-bloated scrotum. (E'bu hein a'vula bu twasu, a'sha manga no opo)
12. He who declares another person's child ugly should give birth to his own.
(E'bu hien yeu butu zhe she-o, asha mata unebi!)
13. If you visited a village and found monkeys excitedly jumping from tree to tree, do not conclude that there are no hunters there. (E'bi zhe nu u'wapa a'bu kube ta a'womo a'hila, ta hien a'jala zaba apata-o!)
14. A woman who divorces her husband should not destroy the pawpaw trees in the house in case she might return afterwards. (Bu yikwo na zhe tu bana, kede ba jayaga tu komburu hwe-o, noko beyi be gure-o!)
15. An old woman may desire to die, but not the death by the blow of a pestle. (I'denwu ba'jala tu'wo a'maa she tuwo ta alala-o!)
16. If you were given the powers of magic, you needed self-wisdom. (E'bu peni a'gumah, a'hansa she anabu!)
17. A hunted sparrow that flies into the forest/jungle is gone/safe (u'jeje na leyi nu uwapa, buji-o!)
18. A chase for the kite, a caution for the chicken. (A'hien u'chepi heiy, a'hien a'luma heiy)
19. The grave yard admonishes thus: If you were close, come closer fast but if you were far off, better run faster away. (Uwuye hien, o'bu gumonu, zhe kakai, ya she abu dulumu gozhigo duwa!)

20. You may borrow things desired, but you don't borrow a desired face.(A'lupa i'yi, ama a'lupe she u'pushika-o!)
21. A bad mortar has its bad pestle.(O'nunu uwu, na a'lala uwu)
22. You (could) kill an elephant with attempts. (A'kuna u'dagba na tu makana)
23. You can clean dirt with water but you don't clean water with water. (Ba nyan'shinga tiri nu meni, bu yerri ba nyashinga tuba meni?)
24. What a child likes is what takes away his money. (I'yi na kulani yeu, i'be ya yabu u'kuribi)
25. If your father has no sister who do you call your Aunt. (Bishi bu za sa bu ngofu a'sha gaba she u'shumwa bu?)
26. Once it is dark you need no cover of shade. (U'jita shi'wo, bu zaya u'hunu tu rungo-o!)
27. A friend of a thief is same a thief. (Bo'jilo bu zundo she du bu'zundo-o!)
28. The throat does not divide its portion with anyone. (U'roro dwo nu su u'sunda-o)
29. The poor man is a patient man. (Bu kofo, she butu bu ankuri)
30. A little red oil does not spoil the soup. (Muzhimi chikure ma na'ganna shipa-o!)
31. The river dries but the sand remains.(Meni ma hwan, e'zhete hwun she-o)
32. People from afar off (unwittingly) eat the rotten of the land. (A'twa u'dulu aba ya bindo bu weh)
33. When the fire goes out the ashes remain. (U'lwa weji, ma'alu ma va)
34. Catarrh can only claim the voice but not the senses. (I'lipe ya zugo run'hun, i'suji she a'hansa-o)
35. If you could not resist being blind, how could you refuse optical blightness. (A'bu lache she u'lubo bu yeri bal aka u'ngwu e'she kah?)
36. No matter how someone's mother loves you, she cannot be compared to yours.(E'hien bine butu bu lupi, a'menji shi na bunabu-o)

37. If you got erotic desire in a distant land you must be prepared for flamboyant outfits.(E'yeji bu zhe tu jama nofo dulu, u'mama yime nu i'feli tu'zhigba)
38. A duck walks lamely, but not devoid of its majesty. (Kazaruba kereme-kereme, ta'hanu tu yangana tu zha she ta vunga-o)
39. If a Grass-cutter had no wisdom, it cannot attain old age where it is eaten. (Bu'yipa nyinche she bu zha she ba sha u'gwore-o)
40. Even though the eye does not eat, it knows what can fill the stomach. (Kwo e'she yishe i'yi, i'mepi iyi ne shijii ame!)
41. A thief who had been admonished to stop stealing can't be devoid of finding items.(E'hien bu zundo ganga i'zunde, ama e'me gbe zha she ya vunga-o!)
42. No matter the darkness, the hand knows the way to its mouth. (Gana elele, u'juta shii, u'yala mepi u'huana u'nu vwa)
43. The vulture's pepper is in its stomach. (O'kpokpo u'gulu name na a'me va)
44. A portion of meat in a slaughter slab is no longer afraid of a knife. (U'sunda na name nu u'palu za ya i'yense u'gushi-o!)
45. The blacksmith makes the hoe the scrubbing is the farmer's responsibility. (Bu'luuma bu ndane i'gewe, tuluba tu'she i'nebu-o!)

Chapter Eight

CONCLUSION

In considering the fact that chronicling the chequered history of the people called Bassa, scattered around the Rivers Niger and Benue especially in modern-day Nigeria, a lot of issues had to be grappled with. One of such is the much travail of the people which revolve in their migratory antecedents. This does not allow for stable economic and social activities for physical development of the land.

However, this should be a thing of the past if such matters as raised here were forensically looked into. A time cometh in the life of a people when relief should come from any quarters to assuage their oppressive conditions! A time when unnecessary migrations would cease, when marginalization and deprivation would give room to morals and conscience, when communal trepidation would give way to confidence and poverty paves way to prosperity.

One of such ways is that independent cultural groups should be identified, recognized and given autonomy to shape their destinies. In a polity that is marred by greed, graft and ethnic chauvinism, the citizens are the ones paid with transferred aggression the disaffection of other stronger ethnic groups. Wholesome integration therefore, becomes necessary for a country in search of peace and unity. Though a Herculean task, but nonetheless this is important for improving life in the rural areas which is home to majority of Nigerians through a well-orchestrated policy and implementation.

All poverty eradication programs of both the Federal and State Government should focus attention on providing facilities at the rural areas as a way of empowering citizens at the grassroots. This would ease the stress on existing facilities at our over populated cities for efficient and optimum

performance and for the peaceful settlement of those in our rural communities. This way, the problems of integration in a multi-ethnic country like Nigeria would be redressed.

Our cultural norms and values should be revisited especially those that prop us into hard work, honesty, integrity, respect for elders, of justice and fairness and such traditions that instill morality in individuals and corporate bodies.

For our revered traditional institution, Bassa land is in dire need of second class chiefs at the various clan chiefdoms to restore its former glory of respectability and responsibility. It is an over due desire. A.B. Mathews (District Officer for Bassa Native Authority) saw this desire and recommended it since 1934.

The whole history and lots of cherishable and adoring norms, values and culture of the Bassa people cannot be captured entirely in this content. There are still many more desiring to be told.

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ABOUT THE BOOK

This is the story of the Bassa people of Kogi-East, Nigeria: Their History, migrations, Wars, Conquests and victories. Their culture and traditions, Political and social institutions, administrations; colonial and post colonial. Literarily presented for; Researchers, Scholars and Entertainment.