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Migration as a Response to Environmental Push and Pull Factors: A Case Study of the Shuwa Arab Migration into Borno

Modu, Ibrahim A., Mohammed, Abubakar & Warasini, H. Tsingari

Abstract

The Shuwa Arab movement out of the states of the Chad Basin area such as Wadai, Kanem and Baghirmi into Borno from the 14th century onwards was perhaps occasioned by the environmental push and pull factors as well as a result of actions of individual rulers. This paper examines the causes, pattern of migration and settlement of the Shuwa Arabs into Borno. The paper contends that the whole scenario of migration of the Shuwa Arabs into Borno can be understood better, if viewed within the context of the pull and push factors of migration, a phenomenon which seems to have continued deep into the colonial and post colonial periods. Analytical method was adopted in writing this paper. Keywords: migration, response, environmental, push and pull factors, Shuwa-Arab

Introduction The Shuwa Arabs are a nomadic ethnic group and so called because of their racial affinity with the Arabs. It is generally believed that the present day Shuwa Arabs of Borno are descendants of Arab immigrants who found their way into Kanem in the late 14th century, (Fadl-Hassan, Y. (1992:1). The term Shuwa is derived from shawa a Kanuri root word meaning handsome or beautiful.

Since that period, it has been suggested, they came to be locally called as Shuwa Arabs (Tijani 1979:416). In this paper, we are essentially concerned

with the causes of migration as well as the pattern of settlement of the people in Borno. One may ask, what induced the migration of the Shuwa Arabs into Borno? In answering this question, it is perhaps appropriate to start with the penetration of Arabs, the supposed ancestors of the Shuwa, into Africa and the central Bilad-al-Sudan; but before discussing the penetration of the Arabs into Africa, a conceptual framework for this study is being attempted.

Conceptual Framework

The push and pull factor theory of migration posits that when conditions become adverse in a given polity, individuals or groups could be forced to migrate into areas with relatively favourable conditions for human existence. The push factors refer to the adverse conditions for human existence. These conditions interalia include famine, population pressure, drought, cattle epidemics, war, etc, necessitating the movement of people from their original home. The pull factors, on the other hand, refer to the factors of attraction such as soil fertility, availability of pasture, peaceful environment, economic opportunities, and others in a new environment.

In the case of the Shuwa Arabs, it has been suggested that they immigrated into Borno in search of new suitable grazing areas west of river Shari (Braukamper, 1994:46). River Shari is located in Chari-Bagirmi area in present day Chad Republic and flows into Lake Chad. Apart from the grazing sites of Borno which served as a factor of attraction, (pull factor), the military conditions in the predatory States of Wadai and Baghirmi pushed the Shuwa Arabs to look for peaceful lands which Borno offered at the beginning of the 19th century. Borno also offered favourable conditions for human and animal habitation unlike Wadai, Baghirmi or Kanem (Zeltner, 1967: 132; Tijani, 1982:62; Levzion & Hopkins, 1981:346).

Arab Penetration into Africa

There are several literatures on the penetration of Arabs into Africa Nachtigal 1967; Zeltner 1970; Saleh 1970 Mukhtar 2002; Fadl Hassan 1973; Al-Qalgashandi (1913-1919); and Abun Nasir (1974) are some of the wellknown writers who wrote on the Arabs in Africa. The general position is that Arab's penetration into Africa started with the conquest of Egypt in 639-642 under the command of Ami b. Alas a Muslim army General, with an army of over 50,000 composed of pure Arabs (Fadi Hassan, 1973:88). In the words of Yusuf Fadl-Hassan:

The flow of immigrants continued without restriction and was stimulated by frequent changes of governors, each of whom brought his own tribesmen or guards, who might have numbered as many as 6000, 10,000 or even 20,000. (Fadl Hassan, 1973:89).

Some of the Arabs, it is suggested, intermarried with the local population while a substantial number migrated from Egypt to Sudan. What brought about this

migration? We may assume that the Arabs, being principally nomads had always the interest of their livestock at heart. We are, for instance, informed that one of the Arab groups, the Judham, from whom the Shuwa Arabs came to the limelight of history in Borno, migrated from Egypt in the 11th century to the Central Bilad-Sudan (Algalgashandi, 1913–1919:214). The out-movement of the Judham Arabs from Egypt Southwards to the Central Bilad al-Sudan was perhaps as a result of the environmental push and pull factors as well as the actions of the rulers of Egypt. We can illustrate the situation as follows. First and foremost, as nomads, the Judham had never had an easy time with the various succeeding dynasties in Egypt. Although, initially, we are told, the Judham Arabs had been in control of some provinces in Egypt, but as soon as the Bahariya Mamlukes, one of the dynasties, came into power in Egypt in the middle of the 14th century, this new regime developed a hostile attitude towards the Bedouine Arabs and eventually forced the Judham to migrate out of Egypt (Braukamper, 1993:18). It has also been suggested that when the strip of land for grazing in Egypt became overgrazed, the Judham were faced with shortage of grazing areas in Egypt, and therefore had to look for alternative lands for grazing their herds of camels (Braukamper, 2004:2 12). Again, there is evidence to suggest that the Banu Hilalian invasion of the Maghreb in the 11th century, which was commissioned by the Fatimid dynasty of Egypt, forced the Judham Arabs to relocate their lot from Egypt Southwards to the Central Bilad al-Sudan ultimately reaching Kanem in the late 14th century (Alkali, 1978:218). In all the three instances cited above, one can clearly see the interplay of the push and pull factors as well as actions of ruling dynasties as accounting for the migration of the Judham Arabs from Egypt into the Central Bilad al-Sudan.

The action of individual rulers as a factor of migration of Arabs becomes apparent when one considers the movements of the Banu Hilal and Banu Sulaym into the Maghreb. Abun-Nasir (1974:85), for instance, indicates that, the Banu Hilal and Banu Sulaym were authorized by the Fatimids, the ruling dynasty of Egypt in the 11th century to invade the Maghreb. Thus, the source continues, the Banu Hilal, Bani Qais chiefly the Fezara and Banu Salem “Swammed like locust” to the northwest overrun provinces of Tunis and Libya intermarried with the local population and settled down (Aun Nasir (1974:86). Apart from the Banu Hilalian invasion of the Maghreb in the 11th century, there was also an eruption of another Arab group, known as the Juhaina, in the 14th century. Some authorities are of the view that by the 14th century, the Judham who had invaded Kanem, had become a spent force and were now replaced by this new group, the Juhaina Arabs (MacMicheal 1922:181). Yusuf Fadi-Hassan, on the other hand, is of the view that the Juhaina were the allies of the Judham Arabs who traversed the desert immediately west of the Nile to the region called the Baggara (Fadl Hassn, 1973:90). Our investigation in the

field, however, tend to give more credence to the Juhaina Arabs as many Shuwa Arab groups claim ancestry from this branch and not the Judham (Hamiad oral source, what year); Abubakar oral source, what year);, isa oral source, what year?: Khalid, oral source; Al-amin, oral sourc what year?; and Nur oral source). What is important is that the migration of the Judham as well as that of the Juhaina was conditioned by ecological and political pressures e.g. cattle diseases. The Judham, it is reported, were initially forced to move southwards along the Nile Valley and then westwards into the Lake Fitiri, Bahr al-Ghazal and Lake Chad areas (Mukhtar, 2002:2). While environmental push and pull factors are important yardsticks in the migration of the Arab nomads, political events also merit some consideration. For instance, the fall of the powerful Nilotc Christian Kingdoms of Nubia and Alwa in 1316 and 1504 A.D, respectively opened

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the way for Arab migration westwards (Mukhtar, 2002:2). As soon as the westerly direction was secured, the Arabs moved towards Darfur, Wadai-Fitiri, Kanem and Baghirmi. This migration was also influenced greatly by the predatory nature of these governments (Mukhtar, 2002:5). Adam (1977:12) maintains that because of the pure nomadic nature of the Arabs, the authorities failed to hold them to a regular obligation and this necessitated their movements from one place to the other in search of pasture or to evade exploitative taxation.

Shuwa Arab Movement into Borno Proper

The Judham Arabs had reached Kanem in the late 14th century. The movement into Borno can be regarded as a steady but slow process of the initial migration. Many sources suggest that the Jawama, Sarajiyye, Bakariyye, and Ma'in groups migrated into Borno with the Saifawa rulers at the very end of the 14th century (Adam, 1977:12). Furthermore, Patterson (Year?), relying on oral sources, suggests that the Banu Malik, Ajaini, Wulad Mihilit, Wulad Telel and Wulad Jellah also migrated together with the Saifawa rulers into Borno in the late 14th century (Patterson, quoted in Adam 1977:14). It is also important to note that the partition of Kanem in the late 16th century brought in a substantial number of Shuwa Arabs under Borno's administration (Adam, 1977:15). Furthermore, the overthrow of the Tunjur dynasty by the Maba or Abbasid dynasty in Wadai during the early 17th century led many Tunjur groups to migrate out of Wadai. Some groups settled in Kanem and later moved into Borno, (Adam, 1977:15). The 18th century saw a period of demographic transformation with major population movements of Tubu, Kanembu and Shuwa Arabs into Borno, (Adam, 1977:15). The push and pull

factors were again at display. The trouble in Baghirmi and the expansionism of Wadai forced the Shuwa Arab groups to relocate their lot to Boro, (Adam, 1977:15). This happened because the armies of Baghirmi in the reign of Mbang Mohammed Alamin who was noted for militarism raided the Shuwa Arabs possibly to force them to settle and to collect more taxes from them (Lavers, 1976:12; Adam, 1977:15). The Salamat and Baniset, it appears, migrated from Baghirmi into Borno on account of the predatory nature of this State. The State of Wadai was no better. The harsh government of Wadai and its policy of expansionism towards Shari (a base of the Shuwa Arabs) also accounted for the migration of some Shuwa Arab groups from that area into Borno. For example, the Dagana Shuwa Arabs, under the leadership of Sheikh Ahmed, migrated west for the fear of being plundered by the rulers of Wadai or by the state, (Denham, 1822:52). There was much exploitation which created a constant state of fear and insecurity, thus leading to the migration of nomad Arabs from Wadai to Borno, (Denham, 1850:52).

But the next momentous migration into Borno, as far as Louis Brenner is concerned, took place in the 18th and 19th centuries when they came to play an important determining role in shaping Borno history, (Brenner, 1973:89). Although this invitation was to assist El-Kanemi in wars with the Fulata, the Shuwa Arabs accepted the invitation with the hope that they might benefit from the alliance with El-Kanemi. They had, perhaps, hoped to obtain some privileges from El-Kanemi such as grazing right over some grazing areas, acquisition of free cattle passages, security for their livestock and perhaps they saw the invitation as an opportunity to participate in politics to further their groups interest. What these amount to is the force of the push and pull factors as determinant of Shuwa migration at the time of El-Kanemi in the early 19th century.

Pattern of Settlement of the Shuwa Arabs in Borno

The Shuwa Arabs, being a nomadic group, had been naturally concerned with conditions favouring the survival of their herds of cattle both in time and space as indicated in the preceding sections of this paper. As they migrated into Borno, they settled in areas considered to be generally conducive to their livestock as this formed the mainstay of their economy and by extension their very survival. It appears that the early arrivals seem to have occupied the rich grazing lands on the western shores of Lake Chad before moving into the interior of Borno. The Ma'in, for example, settled on the shores of Lake Chad before moving on, after some troubles between the nomads and the farmers over resources such as grazing land and water resources for their livestock with the local settlers, into Uje and Kaga districts (Adam, 1977:17). The Joama and other groups were initially settled probably by Mai Ali Ghaji, in Dar Kazal north of river Yobe possibly to serve as a buffer between Borno and its

northern neighbours. They later moved, into Kaga region where, for example, the Village of Banisheikh received its name when a settlement of Bani Badr was established there (Adam, 1977:17; Modu, 1989:24). It is reported that some Shuwa groups came later into Borno, for example, the Baniset and some sections of the Salamat who came much later than the early arrivals, settled in the region South of Lake Chad known as Balge area, (Adam, 1977:18; Saleh, 1977:38; Modu, 1983:24). Finally, the latest and most momentous group which migrated into Borno at the invitation of El-kanemi, were predominantly settled in the Ngumati region, which became an important base of the Qawalme Arabs in Borno. This base is locally referred to as the *Naghamat al Arab*, meaning the base of the Arabs, which is the area known as Ngumati and its immediate environs, (Brenner, 1973:38; Saleh 1977:214; Jidda, 1977:24).

Conclusion

The Shuwa Arabs, being predominantly a nomadic group had always been on the move in search of better pasture and general pastoral conditions for their livestock. Given the importance of ecology to their economy, their migration in the course of their history had been greatly determined by the environmental push and pull factors. Favourable conditions always attracted them but adverse conditions, like high taxation, political pressure, drought, and cattle disease wars among others

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had always occasioned their migration elsewhere. This is what this study tried to document.

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