

MIGRATION AND IDENTITY REGENERATION: *BASSA NGE* IN PERSPECTIVE, 1850-1991

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Abstract

This paper explores the original identity of the *Bassa Nge* ethnic group, the adoption of the name *Bassa Nge*, the issue of identity regeneration, and its attendant problems and challenges to development from 1850 to 1991. The paper brings to the fore, who the *Bassa Nge* people were, why and how they migrated, as well as identity foray. It further sheds light on the bottlenecks on the part of progress in an attempt to further change the name – *Bassa Nge* to their original Nupe identity. This work, therefore, addresses the problems associated with identity change and regeneration among the *Bassa Nge* people who migrated from Niger and settled in their present place of abode in 1850. The identity problem that the *Bassa Nge* has not been able to address since colonial times, coupled with the fact that another ethnic group bears a similar name – *bassa*, gives a nodding impulse to this paper coupled with the fact of historiographical problem in writing and reconstructing the history of the Nupe people now *Bassa Nge* in extant literature. The historical method of data collection and analysis to either advance, corroborate, or contend ideas has been adopted. Findings show that the *Bassa Nge* is now a Nupe minority group in the western fringes of Igalaland that occupies the Kogi Eastern Senatorial District. Like many other minority groups in Nigeria and other parts of the world, they are not free from marginalization. There is also the problem of nationality questions relating to micro-nationalism. Also, the migration and the subsequent merger of the Nupe ethnic group now called *Bassa Nge* with another *Bassa* migrant group that originated from Fulani Bororo in 1917, mean that they are gradually losing their cultural identity. This made some *Bassa Nge* elites from the time past see the need for an identity reversal which has further disunited *Bassa Nge* aborigines along diverse opinions. This research will serve as a foreknowledge on identity regeneration among *Bassa Nge* on the general history of Nupe.

Keywords: *Bassa Nge*, Development, Identity, Migration, Regeneration

Introduction

Identity refers to traits and attributes that define an individual or group, which shapes their sense of self and place in the world. This work deals with the shared ancestry and heritage of *Bassa Nge* (Nupe Tako) in Kogi areas with the Nupe Central in today's Niger State. They have similar ethnic relations and affiliations. Identity regeneration is about the self-discovery of *Bassa Nge* people of their ancestral identity to be well integrated with their ancestral brethren based on cultural norms and historical context. Their culture and personal choices have largely influenced this. This work therefore, sheds light on Nupe schism,

the original identity of the now *Bassa Nge* people, and further addresses the problem of identity construct or contrive, identity sortie, identity regeneration, and identity reclamation or reassertion among the *Bassa Nge* people in colonial and contemporary Nigeria. World over, people are named after their culture. All people and diverse ethnic groups have one form of name or the other. They may also migrate or remain where they are. Sometimes, circumstances may warrant them to want to *change* their name or identity based on certain conditions or as they may desire to address a problem or prove a point. Such was the case of the Shona people of South Africa formerly Bantu living in Zimbabwe because there was no native term for the Bantu-speaking people and the language was native to about twenty-four countries. Romani for instance was an Indo-European language related to Hindi dispersed across Europe formerly Dacia, Germans formerly Germania, so was the Bariba formerly Baatonu or Baatombu, and so on. Sometimes, a *change* of name could bring about good or bad fortune just the way migration has its problems and challenges¹.

It may bring about good when such a change fosters unity and progress among the group desiring such a change and it may be bad when the reverse is the case especially when some do not want such a *change*. Concerning the *Bassa Nge* people, their change from Nupe's original identity to *Bassa Nge* was triggered by migration from Gbara in Niger State to their present place of abode in today's *Bassa* Local Government Area of Kogi State. The migration was necessitated by dynastic feuds. And since their primary migration, they have not been able to reassert themselves as one indivisible entity for development to take place. For instance, some are still not comfortable with *Bassa Nge* as their ethnic name and some prefer to remain so. This is a big dilemma. The migration of *Bassa Nge* which started in 1821 and ended in 1850, has led to the loss of population and identity of the Nupe people necessary for the development.² Also, in their new place of abode, there is a lack of government presence as they do not have a single local government of their own. The *Bassa Nge* by their neighboring *Bassa Komo*, also, have been accused of identity theft. They are also mixed up among other ethnic groups, especially the Okun, Oworo, Ibirra, and their neighbouring *Bassa* and the Igala people. This among other reasons facilitates struggles for a name reversal to restore their original Nupe identity. While there is nothing wrong with mixing up with other ethnic

¹ V. Chirevo Kwenda, Religious Myth and the Construction of Shona Identity in C. Prentiss, Ed. *Religion and the Creation of Race and Ethnicity* (U.S.A. : New York University Press, 2020), 197-98, M. Clement Doke, Report on the Unification of Shona Dialects in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, University of London, 6(4), 1097-1099, J.P. Mallory, *The Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-European and Proto-Indo-European World* (Oxford University Press), 442

² C.A.M. Lakpini *History of Bassa (Nge) Ethnic Group of Nupe Origin and the Autobiography of Pa Chief Christopher Amos Mawo Lakpini*, CHM (Lagos: CSS Bookshops Limited, 2004) 1-15

groups, some see the sharing of identity with another *Bassa* migrant group to be an awkward decision and therefore, obscured. These are the issues this paper tries to examine.

The Origin and Identity of *Bassa Nge* People

From oral testimonies, written accounts, linguistic accounts, and traces of dialectical and cultural evidence, one could see traces of similarities between the *Bassa Nge* and Nupe people which are a pointer to their Nupe origin. Three historical pieces of evidence are used to determine how the *Bassa Nge* are a Nupe people. The first evidence is their language. In terms of language, they easily understood each other when they spoke. The second aspect is their culture. In terms of cultural similarities, they are still akin to each other in the way and manner they dress, eat, dance, marry, and conduct burials. The third is evidence from linguistics, written, oral, and anthropological sources. For instance, according to Forde, the *Bassa Nge* are naturally bilingual like any other Nupe cluster such as Ebe, Zitako, or Dibo more closely related to Gbari, Kupa, and Cekpa.¹ This means that they speak Nupe as their language. This could be the reason why, Forde identified them as a split-off of Nupe.²

In corroborating Forde, Habi further clarifies that *Bassa Nge* who is a splitter-off of Nupe still has a language similar to Nupe both in its very [form], structure, and organization³. Historically, however, there is no way one would separate without changes coming into play over time. This is why recently, they can be regarded as separate Nupe because a lot of influences have crept in which leads to adulteration of the original Nupe language. Be that as it may, they still have similar language expressions, religious beliefs, dietary habits, singing and drumming, masquerades, birth ceremonies, marriage ceremonies, and interment. Even their political structure, occupation, economic structure as well as the structure of the communities and settlement patterns are all pointers to the similarity claims. For instance, Hopkins observed that the language of *Bassa Nge* is similar to Nupe to the extent that a *Bassa Nge* and a Nupe man can make

¹ D. Forde The Nupe in Daryl, F. "Ed" *Western Africa, Ethnographic Survey of Africa: Peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence*. International African Institute. London. Routledge, 1955. 23

² D. Forde The Nupe in Daryl, F. "Ed" *Western Africa*, 23, Interview with Barrister Alim Haruna, President Niniji Nupe Development Association, Lokoja, interviewed by Nasiru Joseph Gimba, 02-08-2024, 2pm

³ Interview with Mr. Nda Yakubu, Patron, Niniji Nupe Development Association, Lokoja, Interviewed by Nasiru Joseph Gimba, 02-08-2024, 2pm Y.H. Habi, 1987, *the People Called Bassa Nge*, Zaria. Tamaza Publication. 11

themselves understood to one another, each speaking his language⁴. Interrogating this statement shows that, this is an aftermath of their primary migration because, from the beginning, there were no dialectical differences, also, the Nupe and *Bassa Nge* have the same Nupe Bible and literature. The minute variations only crept in much more lately which could be a result of their age-long contact with Bunu, Oworo, Igala, and even Ibira to an extent en route to their present place of abode⁷. Perhaps, this could be why Habi alludes that, all along their migration and sojournment in Bunuland and Lokoja to their present place of abode, they were still bearing Nupe until their secondary migration from Lokoja to *Bassa* Province where another ethnic group called *Bassa* were already settled. This made the Whiteman refer to them as *Bassa* adding a suffix – *Nge*⁸. Of all the ethnic groups mentioned, Bunuland, had more influence on the language of the *Bassa Nge* of about ten percent (10%) as alluded by Lakpini⁹.

It is on record that, their cultural affinity is such that they have similar historical experiences such as the system of succession to chieftaincy or political office, system of inheritance and rights of land and property, and so on, which are all patrilineal. The traditional head is called Etsu chosen by males. They also operate similar deities called – *Gunnu* or *Egbunu* which is the belief in a supreme Sky-god (Soko), and also, a similar general structure of political ranks, age sets, kingship system, and marriage rites.¹⁰. Apart from this, their music pattern, drama, dance, mime, and pantomime are similar. A good number of Nupe traditional music and songs are retained such as the *Badankolo*, *Enyaduku*, and *Kerengu* all for entertainment during birth, marriage, interment and the celebration of *Egbunu* deity which is an institution that welded the society together. Nadel and Woodhouse all bear testimony to the Nupeness of *Bassa Nge*¹¹. Even in linguistic classification, they are classified as Nupoid which belongs to the Kwa branch of the Niger-Congo group of languages.¹². In addition, Daryl Forde has identified them as a Nupe split-off section of Nupe.¹³ This means their culture could not have been different from Nupe. Although having migrated for

⁷ C.A.M. Lakpini *History of Bassa (Nge) Ethnic Group of Nupe Origin and the Autobiography of Pa Chief Christopher Amos Mawo Lakpini*, CHM (Lagos: CSS Bookshops Limited, 2004) 8

⁸ Y.H. Habi, *The People Called Bassa Nge*, (Zaria: Tamaza Publication, 1987), 12

⁹ C.A.M. Lakpini *History of Bassa (Nge) Ethnic Group of Nupe Origin*, 8

¹⁰ D. Forde The Nupe in Daryl, F. "Ed" *Western Africa, Ethnographic Survey of Africa: Peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence*.

⁴ T.F.G. Hopkins, 1933. 1919-1934, Introduction. Bassa Nge District, Igala Division, Kabba Province Assessment Report. NAK. EAP, 535/2/6/57. www.quadrantindia.com/ see: eap.bl.uk/database/overview-item.a4d?....Source: British Library

International African Institute. London. Routledge, 1955. 23

- ¹¹ S.F. Nadel, 1942. *A Black Byzantium: The Kingdom of Nupe, Nigeria*. London, Oxford University Press. 77-78, 12, C.A. Woodhouse, 1911. The Bassa Rising and Account of the Bassa People Zaria Sir Kashim Ibrahim Library MS.Afri. S.266. *Correspondence Regarding the Bassa Komo and Account of the Bassa people*, 1991. Oxford. Boddlerain Library. MS.Afri. S.266. ABU KIL Microfilm

- ¹² M. Crowder *The Story of Nigeria* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), 13, J.H. Greenberg *The Languages of Africa*, Supplement to the *International Journal of American Linguistics*, xxix, 1, pt. 2 (Bloomington, 1963)

- ¹³ D. Forde, 1955.17

a very long time, there is a sense of little variations that could not be denied even as could be seen in the deity, in the case of *Gunnu* and *Egbunu* which probably came as a result of diffusion and adulteration.

Migration of *Bassa Nge* from Gbara to the Niger-Benue Confluence Areas

The Nupe as an ethnic group in northern Nigeria witnessed political squabbles and tussles in the 19th century which made them split into two rival camps. The chronology of this problem could be placed in circa 1805 as dated by Dupigny. As observed by Dupigny, the death of *Etsu* Mohammed, within this period, brought the Nupe group under a very turbulent time, leading to their subsequent division. As substantiated, two cousins by name: Jimada and Majia, both put forward their claims to become the next *Etsu*, but, being unable to agree, they resorted to fighting⁵. Further evidence by Elphinstone, K.V., also agreed to this assertion. Elphinstone alludes that, towards the end of the 18th century, two brothers, Jimada and Majiya, sons of Mohammadu, the *Etsu* of Nupe fought to ascend their father's throne on his demise and were unable to reconcile. After Mohammadu's death, these two brothers who happened to be cousins, both claimed to become the next *Etsu* of Nupe; the trouble began because Mohammadu died before he approved and coronated a new king. But late *Etsu* Mohammadu, on his part, before his death, sent an emissary to Gando for a flag, but before the return of the messengers he had died; the flag was then handed to Majiya. As Jimada and his supporters felt aggrieved, Civil War then broke out between Majia and Jimada, culminating in the defeat of the latter (Jimada) at Ragada, close to the present site of Pategi; Majiya was then recognized as *Etsu* of the Nupe⁶. The account of Temple, C. is also suggestive of this claim having stated that, after the death of *Etsu* Maazu in 1795, internal strife broke out. He was probably succeeded by 'Kolo' who reigned for a few months and succeeded by Mohammadu, who is said to have reigned and died circa 1805 as the last *Etsu* that welded Nupe society together. It was at this point of Mohammadu's death that the Nupe kingdom became factionalised⁷. The revolt was said to have led to the defeat and the subsequent death of Jimada at Ragada. As

⁵ E.G.M. Dupigny, 1922, *Gazetteer of Nupe Province*, 7-9. File 1/42/606, AREWA House, Kaduna, 7

⁶ K.V. Elphinstone 1921, *Nupe History, Gazetteer of Ilorin Province 1921*, File 1/42/606, AREWA House. Kaduna. 7-8

⁷ C. Temple 1919, *Notes on the Tribes of Northern Nigeria*, 524-525. File 1/42/606. 4-8. Goldsmith, H.S. 1902. Information Collected from Native Sources. (N.D)

Jimada was killed, his followers under *Etsu* Isa and Idrisu, fled to Ilorin where certain Filani had begun to migrate from Sokoto. Isa was recounted to have collected an army of these Fulani and Hausa to fight Majiya to retreat to Gbara or Bida⁸. This claim is substantiated in the account of Nadel. As Nadel points out, Idrisu, Jimada's son, fled with the rest of his followers to Labozi and later across the river, to Egga where he stayed, in exile and fugitive, powerless against Majiya's army⁹.

Jimada's sons and followers could best be said to be the scion that finally journeyed through Ilorin to Kabba, and from Kabba to Lokoja and across the Niger and Benue River areas and the people who now begin to bear the name *Bassa Nge* due to certain historical influences¹⁰. At the beginning of their outward migration, they settled along the banks of the River Niger and mostly in today's Kabbabunu not far away from Central Nupeland¹¹. As Ade Obayemi further points out, *Etsu* Muazu like Jiya [Majiya] appeared to have had effective control of his domains, but he was perhaps, the last *Etsu* of the Tsoede line to hold all of Nupe together in an effective way. Kolo, Muazu's son, and successor, was deposed and fled to Zugurma in westernmost Nupeland which then seceded from the rest of Nupeland¹².

Some accounts stipulate that Jimada reigned at Ragada, (situated close to the present town of Pategi) and *Etsu* Majia at Rabba (situated on the left bank of the Niger). Certain accounts also indicate that the father of Jimada and the mother of Majia were brother and sister which shows them to be cousins and it is possible for Majia not to be directly linked to the throne. However, whatever the reality, they were found rivaling over the throne. It is also on record that before the rivalry between the two cousins which culminated in them building these two rival towns on the opposite side of the Niger, the *Etsus* of Nupe had reigned at various towns, the most important of which were Nupeko, Mokwa, Jiman, and Gbara, and had a vast territory which included the Niger Basin from below Lokoja to North-West of Jabba, and they also raided the country to the South as far as Old Oyo and Kabba.¹³ It was gathered that Idrisu son of late king Jimada the first cousin of Majia, fled with his father's followers, moved southwards and later settled at Mount Pati, a hill in the suburb of present-day Lokoja the Kogi State capital.¹⁴ The people's path of movement was through Koro, Yagba,

⁸ K.V. Elphinstone 1922. 7-9

⁹ S.F. Nadel 1942, *a Black Byzantium: The Kingdom of Nupe of Nigeria*, London, Oxford University Press, 78

¹⁰ E.G.M. Dupigny 1922, *Gazetteer of Nupe Province*, 7-9. See File 1/42/606. AREWA House. Kaduna. 7

¹¹ A. N. Abdullahi, Questions and Answers on Nupe, *Nupe Cultural and Resource Centre*, Minna

¹² A. Obayemi States and Peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence Area, in Obaro, I. "Ed" 159

¹³ K.V. Elphinstone, 1922. 7-9

¹⁴ S. Haruna, 2015, Masquerades in Bassa Nge Culture. *Anlele Channel News*, Tuesday December 8th, 2015

and Bunu down to Lokoja. The immigrant first settled among the Bunu in the former Kabba Division of Nigeria before reaching Mount Patti at Lokoja.¹⁵

The Nupe migrants further left Kabba to Mount Patti (Lokoja) probably in search of political and economic freedom because they were predominantly farmers, hunters, fishermen, and traders. The migrants moved until they finally settled at *Eti Patti Lukongi* – Mount Patti Lokoja stretching down to the River in settlements at Adankolo, Emi Agbati, Geregu, and Adikoro”¹⁶ [Emi-woro, stretching down to Ajaokuta and Itobe, and later cross to Shintaku, Kpata, Ecewu and so on]. Alex Eronu Ashem and Fayam, F.N.¹⁷, all made their contributions towards this claim. Aseniye, V.K. states that they migrated from Bunu in about 1844 and settled in places like Osara in the present Okehi Local Government area of Kogi State. Other places they moved to include Apata, Obajana, and Shokoshoko all in the then Agbaja Division which falls within the present-day Lokoja Local Government area of Kogi State before resorting to Pati-Lukongi as other sources hold. This was later christened Mount Pati by the Europeans who had a stopover at Lokoja in the course of their expedition of the Niger in 1841¹⁸. But since Mount Pati was not arable for farming occupation and lack of good sources of water for domestic use and due to continuous Massaba raids to collect taxes, they moved further to the banks of rivers Niger and Benue. They, therefore, crossed from Lokoja to Shintaku and Kpata and Ecewu through the influence of Eshida. Aseniye V.K., while citing Baikie, did not offer a contrary opinion²⁸. Haruna Sanusi states that, in Lokoja, they continued to disperse into smaller family units and groups in different parts of the state¹⁹.

As they moved across the River Niger, they sought asylum under the Attah of Igala who gave them stretches of land in the then *Bassa* Province. This was how the Nupe people from Central Nupeland first came across the *Bassa* people and the *Bassaland* of today’s Kogi State. But to differentiate the new arrivals (Nupe migrants) to the area from the *Bassa* (now *Bassa Komo*) people who were the first settlers in *Bassa* country,

¹⁵ C.A.M. Lakpini *History of Bassa (Nge) Ethnic Group of Nupe Origin*, 16-17

¹⁶ C.A.M. Lakpini *History of Bassa (Nge) Ethnic Group of Nupe Origin*, 16-17

¹⁷ F.N. Fayam, 2005, Migration and Settlement of the Bassa Nge People of Bassa District in Niger- Benue Confluence during the Pre-Colonial Era. *Indian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, No.

2 Vol. 4. 362. Hopkins, T.F.G. 1933. Assessment Report on Bassa Nge District. NAK. Agency No. 580/1917

¹⁸ V.K. Aseniye, 2012. Traditional Marriage Institution among Bassa Nge in the 19th Century. B.A.

Project, Department of History, Kogi State University, Anyigba. 18-19 ²⁸ V.K. Aseniye, 19-20

¹⁹ S. Haruna, 2015, Masquerades in Bassa Nge Culture. *Anlele Channel News*, Tuesday December 8th, 2015 ³⁰

Ama Ndagi Abdullahi. Questions and Answers on Nupe. Nupe Cultural Resource Centre. Minna

the Nupe people began to be referred to as the *Bassa Nge* as the suffix “*Nge*” was added by the colonists through William Wallace.³⁰ The question is why the suffix? This means the colonists were conscious of their peculiarities. The word *Nge* based on the researcher’s knowledge of the Nupe language literally means two things. Firstly, it means nice or good. Secondly, it is a corrupt word for *miga* which is an exclamatory word to draw attention when emphasizing something important.²⁰

Further movement of *Bassa Nge* was brought about as a result of the persistent Massaba raids popularly referred to as *Ekunupe* or Nupe Wars of the early 1840s occasioned by the inability of the fleeing immigrants to pay tributes to Bida, Carolyn also confirmed the settlement of the now *Bassa Nge* in Lokoja within this periods, especially within Lokongoma and Adankolo areas where some still exist to date²¹. Woodhouse also testifies that “Massaba, Emir of Bida, marched down with an invading army and encamped on the site of the present Lokoja” from where the Nupe migrants abandoned the territory for another settlement on the eastern bank of the Niger.²² Captain Byng-Hall, F. cited by Temple also states that, when the *Bassa Nge* inhabited Kabba Province in the neighbourhood of Ero, Kogbe, and Patti, they paid an annual levy to the Emir of Bida during the powerful reign of Massaba but:

About the years 1840 to 1850 A.D., when they had no more slaves, wherewith to pay it, the Emir sent an armed force against them to exert his influence and tribute. The *Bassa Nge* fled to the hilltops, where they were sieged till after the planting season when the Nupe camp was dispersed. Half the tribe crossed the Niger and obtained permission from the Igara [Igala] to settle at Kpata, Echo [Ecewu], Shite, and Koji, in” the neighbourhood of Gbebe [Gbobe]. The next year they were joined by their compatriots from Kabba and the Ata of Ida [Atta of Idah] gave them additional lands in the vicinity of Dekina. The migration continued year by year, the *Nge* clearing forest as they required the land, till the Igara became afraid and opposed their advance. The *Nge* defeated them in battle, declared their independence, and occupied the river-banks²³.

Habi further states that the current abode of the now-named *Bassa Nge* District was said to have been discovered by a famous hunter called Eshida. According to him, while still at Mount Patti, Lokoja, the hunter used to cross

²⁰ Y.H. Habi, 1-20

²¹ C.A.M. Lakpini *History of Bassa (Nge) Ethnic Group of Nupe Origin*, 17-18, C.N. Panaki, The Peoples of Lokoja: Studies in Twentieth Century Inter-Group Relations in A.A. Idrees and Y.A. Ochefu, Ed. *Studies in the History of Central Nigeria Area*, Vol. 1 (Lagos: CSS Press, 2002), 493-498, 507

²² Woodhouse, cited in Y.H. Habi, 23

²³ Captain Byng-Hall, F. *Nge of Bassa Nge*, in Temple, Olive S. 1965. *Notes on the Tribes, Provinces, Emirates and States of the Northern Province of Nigeria*. London. Frank Cass. 306.

the Niger to hunt for games in the forests on the river banks. The hunters made their crossing probably from a tree called *Adere* in the *Bassa Nge* dialect.²⁴ Through this, he discovered the land and decided to settle there.

Woodhouse further records that:

Probably in 1853, a year remarkable for a great famine throughout that part of the country, a man named Eshida and a brother Ayim, sought a new country in which to continue their occupation as hunters crossed over from Akpanda behind Lokoja with their families and settled by the rocks called Takun-Kporo on the way to Ecewu, a spot still marked by Eshida's grave and decorated with his hunting trophies.²⁵

Eshida settled around Eriwota Rock, a weathered sculptured phenomenon that left three rocks balanced on top of each other²⁶. Thereafter, Jagwa his cousin Titai and his brother Ategbe crossed over to meet Eshida in Kpata. Ategbe was a brother to Etan, the father of Mayaki. In the same year, Etan, along with his nephews, Achemtan and Degba as well as other *Bassa Nge*: “who had maintained a brave resistance for some time against Massaba on the top of Lokoja hill found their cause hopeless and crossed the river with their relatives, Etan bringing with him his son, Maiyaki then a boy of six years old³⁸. From thence, Eshida persuaded all the people (kpata zazi) to cross over and join him in his newfound land which he named Kpata (all people should come) to the new town. They heeded and crossed to Kpata. This was in a real sense the aim of Eshida; to implore “all the people” (Kpatazazi) to come and settle at where he considered to be “a nice place” (baboge/baage/baasa) which all meant good and nice in Nupe as sometimes one word can be used in diverse ways to mean one expression²⁷.

By 1884, Nyakpa was said to have crossed to Kpata with about three hundred dependents to join his cousin, Etan. This is why by the time Dr. William Baikie came for the second expedition in 1884, he could not meet the migrants at Mount Pati as they had already moved and established settlements at Kpata and Tsewu [Ecewu]. Eshida, Etan, and Nyakpa therefore, became the first leaders or Ward Heads, called *Emitsozi* of the first ward groups at Kpata and Eshida became their overall head. This is how they settled in their newfound place and began a system of administration.²⁸

²⁴ N.I., Usman, 2010, History of Kimta Festival of the Bassa Nge 1968-2009. B.A. Project. Anyigba, History Department. Kogi State University, 32

²⁵ Woodhouse, cited in Y.H. Habi, 23-24

²⁶ C.A.M. Lakpini *History of Bassa (Nge) Ethnic Group of Nupe Origin*, 22-27 ³⁸
Woodhouse 1911: MS. Afr.S. 266.

²⁷ C.A.M. Lakpini *History of Bassa (Nge) Ethnic Group of Nupe Origin*, 8,
Y.H. Habi, 24

²⁸ O. Temple 1922, *Notes on the Tribes of Northern Nigeria*, Lagos. C.M.S. 306, C.A.M. Lakpini
History of Bassa (Nge) Ethnic Group of Nupe Origin, 23-24

Identity Contrive among the *Bassa Nge* People

The identity contrive of Nupe to *Bassa Nge* could be attributed to both internal and external factors based on traditions and written records. These internal and external factors were a result of the impulse of their migration which has significant positive and negative impacts on their history and development. As aware, migration comes with a lot of problems and challenges some of which may be displacement, depopulation, and the struggle to assert oneself in the new or host community for either economic or political reasons. These are evident in the anal history of the *Bassa Nge* all along their movements and final settlement in their present place of abode.

There are two factors to explain the identity contrive of *Bassa Nge*. The first factor is endogenously inclined while the second factor could be attributed to colonial influence and the new environment they found themselves which created the enabling condition for them to be so-named *Bassa*.

Internally, the creation of the name *Bassa Nge* could be attributed to the influence of a man called Eshida who happened to be a hunter. According to sources, while they were still at Mount Patti, in Lokoja, Eshida used to cross over to the other bank of the Niger to places like Kpata and Ecewu to hunt. In the process, he and his brother Ayimi discovered the land and settled there around 1853. This is alluded to by Woodhouse as seen in the previous page²⁹.

The area is behind Lokoja, after Shintaku. He and his brother were said to have moved with their families from Akpasha and settled by the rocks called Takun-Kporo on the way to Ecewu. Eshida Having settled there with his brothers, nephew, and cousins, persuaded – *kata Zazi* meaning all should come and join him that the place is good and nice – *baboge or baage or babossa or [baasaa]* ³⁰ As aforementioned which means the same thing. This is how the name *Bassa* naturally sprang up. Thereafter, Jagwa his cousin Titai and his brother Ategbah crossed over to Eshida in Kpata. Ategbah was a brother to Etan, the father of Mayaki. In the same year, Etan, along with his nephews, Achemtan and Degba as well as other *Bassa Nge*: “who had maintained a brave resistance for some time against Massaba on the top of Lokoja hill found their cause

²⁹ Woodhouse 1911: MS. Afr.S. 266. Y.H. Habi, 23-24

³⁰ O.S. Temple, 1922. *Notes on the Tribes, Provinces, Emirates and States of the Northern Province of Nigeria*. London, Frank Cass 306, C.A.M. Lakpini, 4, 14-15, Woodhouse, 1911:MS.Afr.S. 266, C.A.M., Y.H. Habi, 23-24

hopeless and crossed the river with their relatives, Etan bringing with him his son, Maiyaki then a boy of six years old.³¹

After he succeeded in persuading all the people (Kpata Zazi) to cross over and join him in his new settlement which he named Kpata, many crossed the river to enjoy the new nice and comfortable home together with him.⁴⁴ Also, environmental factors contributed to the adoption of the name *Bassa*. For instance, by 1840, a Fulani ethnic group originally known and called *Bassa* had migrated earlier towards the stretches of Odugbo inward, before the arrival of the new Nupe migrants in the 1850s. As they bore *bassa* and occupied *Bassa* Province according to British colonial delineation, it became a phenomenon of a natural historical coincidence for the two different ethnic groups to be christened as *bassa*. The original *Bassa* people descended from Fulani Bororo in Southern Zaria. However, it was the *Bassa* of Tawari who moved from Bugu in Nasarawa Province to *Bassa* Province as a result of continued Fulani raids. The Nupe descendants, however, moved to the area due to Etsu Massaba's raid.³² So, because of the name of the province they now occupied, irrespective of cultural dissimilarity, the name *Bassa* became erroneously applied to both ethnic groups.³³

The *Bassa* Komo have different interpretations of the meaning of *bassa*. Wodi Victor Ndazhaga holds that the word *bassa* in the *Bassa* Komo dialect emanated from the market. When selling goods and services, the *Bassa* Komo normally used persuasive words, one of which is *bassa* to mean won't you buy? Or come and buy. Literary, therefore, *bassa* means a word used to attract or woo any potential buyer. Another version of the name states that a Hausa man gave out cows to a *Bassa* man for grazing in which he was expecting a return but the *Bassa* Komo man abandoned the grazing business for land cultivation. At the return of the Hausa man, he became dismayed. In this instance, he called the outcome of the business *ba-sa'a* meaning bad luck. This version holds that the name *Bassa* emanates from a Hausa word meaning bad luck. This shows that, the early Niger migrants who originated from southern Zaria, the descendants of Fulani Bororo now called *Bassa* Komo, were already christened with the name *Bassa* before the arrival of the Nupe group from Gbara now called *Bassa* Nge.

This shows that the word *bassa* as applicable to the two distinct ethnic groups, is derived from

³¹ Woodhouse 1911: MS. Afr.S. 266. Y.H. Habi, 24 ⁴⁴
Y.H. Habi, 24

³² O.S. Temple, 1922. 306, C.A.M. Lakpini, 17-18

³³ Y.H. Habi, 19-20

their spoken words although meaning different things and it is also a Hausa word. As such, it is not surprising that both coincidentally began to bear the name *bassa* having found and settled in the same location due to migration almost the same period. Whichever way, the two different ethnic groups now found themselves bearing the same name coincidentally. The schismized Nupe group, therefore, is now faced with cultural perversion and identity foray and sortie, which they think could be corrected at all costs.

The force of migration based on historical coincidence has therefore, made both the Niger migrants (i.e. *Bassa Komo*) and the Nupe migrants (i.e. *Bassa Nge*) who had simultaneously migrated and settled in the same geographical location called *Bassa* Province about the same period – 1840 and 1850 respectively to be so christened by the colonists and have for ages lived together with their differences without resorting to any physical harm or plunder.³⁴ But to differentiate the two, the colonists have designated each of them with a linguistic suffix. For example, the Nupe ethnic group usually begins a speech with an exclamation *miga* or *mge* (meaning I say – to draw attention) and *Bassa Komo*'s greeting *ukommu* were simply added as linguistic suffixes as in the case of 'Nge' and 'Komo' to the generic term, "*Bassa*" to denote "*Bassa Nge*" and "*Bassa Komo*" respectively.³⁵ Having been amalgamated together by 1917 just like what happened to the entire Africa and Nigeria beginning from 1898. It could be recalled that by the years 1870-1900, the whole of Africa became colonies of the Whiteman. This was the case with Nigeria with many incidences of amalgamation.³⁶

The history of amalgamation continued until they finally gained independence. Lokoja now Kogi from where the study area is derived, for instance, was made part of Ilorin Province in 1913³⁷. Subsequent upon this, the *Bassa Nge* District; the *Bassa Komo* District, and the Igala District in 1918 were amalgamated to form the Igala Native Authority. With the occupation of Africa especially the area now called Nigeria, the *Bassa Nge* who were once granted major autonomy by the Royal Niger Company by 1900-1905, came under British influence. Accordingly, Captain William Wallace was appointed Provisional Resident for the then *Bassa* Province with headquarters at Lokoja. At this point, the *Bassa Nge* started having contact with the Europeans. *Bassa Nge* communities were amalgamated in 1917 with *Bassa* Province and in 1918 merged with Igala Native Authority. Amalgamation is a policy of local political organizations adopted by the British

³⁴ C.A.M. Lakpini, 23-24

³⁵ S.S. Abu, *The Niger Migrants*, 96-98

³⁶ T.N. Tamuno, *British Colonial Administration in Nigeria in the Twentieth Century*, in Obaro, I. "Ed" *Groundwork of the Nigerian History*. Ibadan. Heineman Ltd. 393 394

³⁷ A. Sa'ad, *The Northern Provinces under colonial Rule: 1900-1959*, in Obaro, I. "Ed" 462

Government for unifying diverse ethnic groups for administrative convenience in Nigeria.³⁸ This is partly attributed to the creation of the name *bassa* for the Nupe migrants as an external factor since they were not considered viable to govern themselves at the time in history.

Identity Regeneration and Reclamation among the *Bassa Nge* People

The replacement of Nupe identity with *Bassa Nge* since colonial times has been viewed by many *Bassa Nge* elites, politicians, and many indigenes as a distortion of their original name, culture, and identity especially recently. As a result, the *Bassa Nge* have begun another process of replacing *Bassa Nge* with Nupe to restore their original identity because the name *Bassa Nge* has been viewed as derogatory, hence, the need to replace and revert to the name of their ancestral origin. Personalities like Dr. Julius Elukpo, Chief Aileku, Late Dr. Yaak Habi, and a host of others have been at the forefront of championing this cause until recently, when it was gazetted by the Federal Republic of Nigeria.⁵²

Many also see the schism of Nupe in the 19th century as not sufficient enough for the now *Bassa Nge* to distance themselves from their ancestral brethren. On this singular belief, the *Bassa Nge* have taken to reclaim and reassert themselves as Nupe. This process began in 1956 through the efforts of the *Bassa Nge* National Union (BNNU)⁵³ but saw the light of the day in 2021. According to Nda Aaron, the Okun, Ijebu, Ijesha, Ibarapa, Owu, and Egba all have Yoruba identities same goes for Aniocha after Nnamdi Azikiwe told them they are Igbo who reverted their ethnic identity from Aniocha to Igbo and are today referred to as Delta Igbo⁵⁴.

The change from *Bassa Nge* to Nupe was effected on 4th December 2021 at Gboloko the central political and economic seat and hub of *Bassa Nge* communities. The declaration was made by Alhaji Muhammed Bako, the Chief of Signing who happened to be the National President of *Bassa Nge* Development Union. The National Steering Committee was inaugurated in July 2021. A voice vote confirmed the reversal. This was captured in the night news broadcast of the National Television Authority (NTA) Lokoja Confluence News⁵⁵. Many reasons have been given for the name reclamation and reassertion ranging from historical, sociocultural, political, economic, and geographical points of view. Some argue that the restoration emanates from historical background or origin and that progress starts with self-discovery and assertion, hence, the need

³⁸ Y. H. Habi, 66-69, L. Lugard, 1914, Lord Lugard and the 1914 amalgamation of Nigeria, *The Nation*, 23 February 2013 thenationonline.net/lord-lugard-and-th... Also see www.nigerreporters.com/lord-lugards-... accessed 02/17/2016. 10:37 am

for the *Bassa Nge* to reassert themselves. Also, from a Socio-cultural point of view, the problem of mistaken identity would become solved permanently if *Bassa Nge's* name is reverted as claimed. Economically, also, there is also the belief that change from *Bassa Nge* to Nupe will bring about economic transformation to the *Bassa Nge* communities if reunited with their ancestral brethren to pull resources together for development. Politically, it is believed that they will begin to have a voice in the larger Nigerian politics if through their name, the creation of a local government for them could be influenced, and if that is done, in every successive government at the state level, they will be able to produce Local Government Chairmen, House of Assembly, Commissioners, and special adviser respectively³⁹ to have an inclusive politics and educational legacy to foster progress at federal level, as such bonding with their ancestral brethren in Niger State will help to influence their assistance for federal attention⁴⁰. Economically, according to Nda, when the name is changed, it will speed up development. Because, both the Quran and the Bible agree that names have both negative and positive effects on the bearer⁴¹. Despite these claims, this paper differs in position, in that identity regeneration cannot lead to development as it is not a stairway to heaven. For instance, what about people who have never changed their name or identity and are not developed? This is a food for thought for the advocates. And so, the underdevelopment of *Bassa Nge* could not be sufficiently blamed on identity issues although, it is one of the many problems they have as a people. Irrespective of the above arguments, this research does not believe reversal will lead to automatic development because there are many critical issues to underdevelopment ranging from resource-based problems and the utilization of such resources, but one cannot deny the fact that identity problems are also fundamental.

Others also see cohesion as the main reason for such development. For instance, Isa Maliki opined that when a child grows and decides to leave his father's compound to establish himself does not mean he should not bear his father's name again.⁴² In line with this argument, Amdi Noel stated that the name reversal should not even be a thing of controversy or argument because, as a father, if your child is not bearing your name, what it means is that you have to start explaining to people around you, why it is so when you can easily name the child after you to ease the stress of explanation.⁴³ Even though this research does

³⁹ Nda Aaron, Reverting of Bassa Nge Name to Nupe.

⁴⁰ Interview with Umoru Ali. Security Officer. Kogi State University, 40. Anyigba. December 11, 2021. 9pm

⁴¹ Nda Aaron, Reverting of Bassa Nge Name to Nupe

⁴² Interview with Isa Maliki, Anyigba. Businessman. 38. December 11, 2011. 2.24 pm

⁴³ Interview with Amdi Noel. 35, Civil Servant. December 11, 2021. 1.45pm

not agree with the above positions, there are some correlations between identity and development which may include but are not limited to:

- i. Autonomy and self-discovery. Identity formation can enable an individual or a group to develop autonomy through self-expression which is essential for personal growth and development
- ii. Also, it is possible for identity to provide a sense of belonging and support crucial for psychological balance and well-being to be able to make informed choices to foster self-determination which is part of developmental processes
- iii. In addition, identity formation may connect individuals or groups to address the problem of inequalities to promote inclusivity. It also connects to cultural heritage and traditions which may shape values, beliefs, and practices that may influence development. Also, scholars in developmental psychology argue that identity shapes past experiences, current experiences, and wishes for the future which is critical for well-being and quality of life for improved decision-making⁴⁴. If this should be taken as a historical fact or gospel truth, it means, the continuity of any group is dependent on their identity formation.

Problems and Challenges of Identity Contrive and Reclamation on Development

Although there is nothing wrong with the change of name, the development has been greeted with mixed reactions from some aborigines and their long-standing neighbours who see this development as an unnecessary distraction for development to take place. Some believed that name reversal should not be an option as the name *Bassa Nge* has not denied the people in question any form of development. And so, attitudinal change could be of help⁴⁵. Also, name reversal does not mean that the Nupe in Niger or Kwara will now be voting in Kogi State. In addition, some see development as having nothing to do with geographical relocation neither would the change of name lead to an increase of *Bassa Nge* Districts in the *Bassa* Local Government Area⁴⁶. It is also possible for the reversal to extend the Nupe rule from Niger to Kogi⁴⁷. Also, although the stakeholders in the reversal have done wider consultations and have consulted with the Etsu of Bida before carrying out the reversal, one cannot sufficiently argue that other Nupoid stocks

⁴⁴ D.S. Dunn and S. Burcaw Disability Identity: Exploring Narrative Accounts of Disability. *Journal of Rehabilitation Psychology* 58 (2) (2013) 148-157

⁴⁵ Interview with Doctor Asaka Danjuma. Lecturer II. Kogi State University, Anyigba. 42. December 11, 2021. 9.20 am.

⁴⁶ Interview with Doctor Asaka Danjuma. Lecturer II. Kogi State University, Anyigba. 42. December 11, 2021. 9.20 am.

⁴⁷ Interview with Madaki Wodi, interviewed by Nasiru Joseph Gimba, title holder, Rivine, 65, January 11, 2024. 12 pm.

like Kakanda, Kuppa, and so on welcomed such development. For instance in the deed poll for the reversal of name from *Bassa Nge* to Nupe, there is no evidence to show that the Nupe of the Upper Niger favored such initiative⁴⁸.

Also, the fear of domination by the Igala people which this paper thinks has been the problem is no longer tenable as they are now well integrated due to age-long interaction and mutual political and economic benefits within the same geographical space even though there may be some seeming differences which can easily be dealt with. In addition, rather than the claim of unity with their ancestral brethren in Niger, the name reversal has also created a serious problem among the *Bassa Nge* themselves in that, they are disunited and do not have one singular voice. Some want the reversal based on historical reasons while some think that such change is unwarranted after over a hundred years of separation. Even the paramount ruler in Gboloko did not append his signature for the reversal even though it was done with the consent of some traditional rulers, the Etsus of Adankolo, Jimgebe, Emiwooro, and Gegu. This, therefore, created a problem of elitist struggle beyond solving the problem of unity.

For instance, and though the Etsu did not doubt that, the *Bassa Nges*, have both historical and dialectical relationships with the Nupes, like the Etulos and the Tivs in Benue, or the Okuns and the Yorubas in Kogi or the Igedes and the Idomas in Benue, but tribal reversal have never been an option. In his statements, he said, “We are *Bassa-Nges*. *Bassa Nge* is the language of my forefathers and it will be our language till the end of time”. This was in his press release from his palace on the 9th of December 2021, where he rejected the name reversal and considered it as null and void and that, it can never stand the test of time⁴⁹. This statement casts a doubt spell on the continuity of the name reversal which in the opinion of this paper, should have been avoided, although, his wish as the custodian of their culture may not justify the general wish of all especially that of the stakeholders in *Bassa Nge* communities because many viewed his interest as politically motivated.

⁴⁸ Federal Republic of Nigeria Official Gazette, No. 31 Vol. 110. (Lagos: Federal Government Press, Nigeria), FGP7/2023/650, 16th February, 2023. 47-49

⁴⁹ Brig. Gen. Alh. (Dr.) Abu Ali Etsu Bassa Nge. In a Press release to his Council of Chiefs at his palace in Gboloko on the 9th of December, 2021

Conclusion

According to the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND), historical consciousness is a *sine qua non* for the achievement of enduring peace, unity, and progress at all levels because it tends to foster a spirit of patriotism, national identity, sense of belonging, and national integration and that sustainable development is better guaranteed within the framework of the nation's historical and cultural experiences as well as peculiarities⁵⁰. This means that it is not a bad idea for any people or group to reassert themselves based on their past or even present experiences. There is, therefore, a nexus between identity and development. From the foregoing, it has been observed that the original cultural identity of *Bassa Nge* is Nupe. However, following their migration from Gbara to confluence areas, they lost their identity and began to bear *bassa* as a new identity due to the separation from Nupeland. This age-long separation has been viewed by many as the reason for the underdevelopment of the area due to disconnection and lack of intense cohesion between them and their ancestral brethren to pull resources together for development since there is a lack of government presence in their new place of habitation. The belief that lack of development is due to separation from the main Nupe body, has made the *Bassa Nge* people especially the elitists think identity regeneration could solve the problem. Hence, they need to reassert themselves as Nupe by reverting from *Bassa Nge* to Nupe to solidify their bond with their ancestral brethren because, in today's Nigerian politics, they cannot stand alone to be heard because of their little demographic strength. This is why starting in 1956, several attempts were made to change their new cultural identity (*Bassa Nge*) to their old cultural identity (Nupe) because *Bassa Nge* to them, has no cultural and historical bearing. Also, because the Fulani Bororo migrants originally bear the name *bassa* and have since jettisoned the komo suffix, to them, there is no point continuing with the name *Bassa Nge* as an ethnic name of a Nupe group. Many of the *bassas* have at so many fora, accused *Bassa Nge* of identity theft which is very incorrect. The first attempt at reverting their cultural identity to Nupe was in 1956 and the most recent one was in 1921. Findings show that the name *Bassa Nge* does not alienate them from the other Nupe group. But they felt reversing could solidify their bond. It has also been revealed that, despite some bottlenecks, the name has been successfully reversed and gazetted by the Federal Republic of Nigeria⁵¹. Also, in the

⁵⁰ Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) 2020 National Research Fund (NRF) Grant Cycle, Theme:

Detailed Presentation of the Research Thematic Areas and the Guidelines for Accessing the NRF

Grant, Involving the Pre-award, the Award and the Post-award Activities, by *The National*

⁵¹ Federal Republic of Nigeria Official Gazette, No. 31 Vol. 110. (Lagos: Federal Government Press, Nigeria),

FGP7/2023/650, 16th February, 2023. 47-49

opinion of this paper, though every group within the Nigerian context has the right to self-actualization which is the highest level of human needs if the *Bassa Nge* people do not act to collectively take their destiny into their hands, the development will continue to be a will of the wisp and elude them because development is action driven rather than mere reversal. They could as well remain well integrated with their Igala neighbours who never saw them as different despite cultural differences. The allusion: *IgalaBassa* speaks volumes.