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## Change and Continuity among the Batombu since 1900

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### *Abstract*

*Like elsewhere in Nigeria and Africa, the 'pacification' and imposition of colonial rule on Batombuland and the incursion of western ideas produced profound sociocultural, economic, and political changes in Batombu society. However, unlike several Nigerian and African peoples whose histories have received extensive scholarly attention, the history of the Batombu has attracted very little such attention. Thus virtually neglected, the Batombu occupies a mere footnote in the extant historiography of Nigeria. This is the gap this article seeks to fill. It examines the impact of colonialism and western civilisation on Batombu's political, social, economic, and cultural institutions and concludes that, as profound and far-reaching as these changes were, some important aspects of the indigenous institutions and traditional practices of the people survived.*

*Keywords: Batombu, Nigeria, Africa, colonialism, institutions, change, continuity*

### **Introduction**

Like other Nigerian and African peoples severed from their kith and kin by the arbitrary boundaries drawn by European imperialists in their unrestrained quest to consolidate their foothold in Africa, the Batombu are found in three West African States: Benin Republic, Nigeria, and Togo. They are one of the dominant ethnic groups in the Benin Republic (known as Dahomey up to 1975), where they constitute the fourth largest ethnic group and approximately a tenth of the population (Davies, 2008, p. 156). Those in Nigeria are found in the northcentral zone, between Kwara State and the Borgu section of Niger State. Nigeria's Batombuland consists of four districts: Gwanara, Okuta, Ilesha, and Yashikira, each under its Emir. Although a questionable and doubtful claim, Haddock (1959, p. 90), Batona (2009, p. 224), and Prunier (2003, p. 218) assert that the Batombu are also found in parts of northern Togo. The Murdocks (n.d.) put the population of the group in Togo at 23,000 and the entire Batombu population all over West Africa at well over a million. The last estimate tallies with that of Davies, although Lopiz (2005, p. 187) opined that "there are approximately 600,000 Bariba, 500,000 of whom live in the territory of Benin."

Anene (1960, p. 194) stated that the Batombu are called Borgawa by the Hausa and Bariba by the Yoruba; it however appears that the people call themselves Batombu (plural) and

Batonu (singular) and their language, Batonnum. It must be added that both the people and their language are known as Bariba or Batonu elsewhere (Adekunle, 2004, p. 156). While Greenberg (1963, p. 16, 20) and Roger and Dendo (2004, p. 1) classify Bariba as a member of the Mossi-Grunshi sub-family of the Niger-Congo family of languages, Welmers (1952, p. 82) says it belongs to “the Voltaic group of languages and bears very close similarities with some of the languages in the Voltaic group”. Lopiz (2005) claims that Bariba belongs to the Gur family “geographically centered in Burkina Faso.” This last assertion implies that the Bariba are found in four countries in West Africa. It however appears that this is an isolated claim – the most popular and generally accepted view is that the Bariba are found in three West African states.

Prior to the famous 1898 ‘race to Nikki,’ following which the Borgu Kingdom<sup>1</sup> was partitioned between the British and French, the whole of Batombulay within Borgu in Nigeria where they were part and parcel of the old Borgu Kingdom (the Bariba being the principal inhabitants). However, Britain and France clashed over Borgu and only narrowly avoided war<sup>2</sup> by signing the Anglo-French Treaty of 14 June 1898, Article II of which provided thus:

The line of demarcation shall start from the Extremity of the present frontier on the 9<sup>th</sup> degree of North latitude and shall be drawn northward So as to include in the British sphere, the Frontier of *Bere and Okuta* together with the towns of *Ashigere* and *Bete*. It would follow Generally the direction of Meridian 3° east of Greenwich, then leaving *Nikki* and Sorounding districts with the French sphere, but will be deflected so as to touch the Niger at a point ten miles to the north of the town of *Illo*, leaving within the British sphere are territory belonging to the province of Bussa and the district of *Gomba* (Tibeaderama, 1977, p. 21).

Thus partitioned, the Batombu of Ilesha Baruba, Gwanaru, Okuta, and Yashikuru fell under British control, while Kpanetem, Wassatem, Banikparatem, and Makaratem fell under the French. Consequently, the area on the British side became known as Nigerian Borgu, while

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<sup>1</sup> The Borgu Kingdom stretched from the northwestern part of present-day Nigeria to the northeastern part of present-day Benin Republic. The kingdom became so powerful towards the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that it was able to resist the invasion of the Fulani Jihads of Sokoto and Gwandu until the establishment of British colonial rule.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed examination of Anglo-French conflict in West Africa, see Claire Hirshfield (1979), *The Diplomacy of Partition. Britain, France and the creation of Nigeria, 1890-1898*, London: Martinus Nijhoff.

the French side became French Borgu. Although both sides have a lot in common<sup>3</sup>, this article concerns itself with the Batombu of northcentral Nigeria only – i.e. those found between Kwara State and the Borgu section of Niger State.

The British (Nigeria) Borgu underwent several administrative changes since 1900: it became Borgu province in 1907, while Illo, Kaoje, Lafagu and Gandemi were separated from it and merged with the Sokoto province as compensation for land lost as a result of northern boundary adjustments. In 1915, Kunji, Rofia, and Agwara in Northern Borgu were carved from Borgu and merged with Yauri emirate, and later Sokoto province. However, Agwara and Rofia Districts were later returned to Bussa, in 1918 and 1927 respectively. Nigeria Borgu was, in 1967 and 1991, partitioned among Kwara, Kebbi, and Niger States. Presently, the Bariba are found in Baruten and Kaiama Local Government Areas of Kwara State, Baruten Local Government Area of Niger State, and Illo in Kebbi State. Thus, as a result of several administrative changes, the size and shape of the area occupied by the Bariba has differed over time.

Nigeria Borgu, situated in the Guinea Savannah region with climatic features like tall grasses and scattered trees, stretches from 9<sup>0</sup> and 12<sup>0</sup> parallel latitude and longitude 1<sup>0</sup> and 4<sup>0</sup> east of the meridian. The Batombu has two main traditions of origins, the Kisra and the Suni-Baru. The former relates that Kisra, the progenitor of the Batombu, migrated westwards from Saudi Arabia having refused to accept the reforms of Prophet Mohammed (Stewart, 1980, p. 34; Mathew, 1950, p. 25). After a stint in Borno, he was said to have moved westwards with his followers to the Niger area from where they subsequently moved to Borgu (Mahmud, 1976, p. 16; U. S. Sabikpasi, personal communication, September 7, 2017). He was said to have fathered three children (all males): Woru, Sabi, and Bio. The first, being the eldest, succeeded Kisra and founded Illo, where he left his youngest brother Bio. Sabi moved down southwards to Nikki (generally believed to be the headquarters of the Batombu). Woru was said to have also later moved southeast, where he founded Bussa. A variant of this tradition relates that Kisra actually settled in Bussa and allowed his brothers to found and exercise authority in Nikki and Illo. It must be stated that the first variant is the

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<sup>3</sup> Some of the factors that account for the strong unity that exists among all Bariba groups across the West African subcontinent are: the traditional political influence of Nikki; the long-term coexistence of these communities; language; the existence of several symbolic objects of veneration, particularly the personality of mystical Kisra; and, the Goani, an important annual festival of aristocratic origins.

most popular among the Batombu. Indeed, the tradition of naming children as Kisra did his offspring continues among the Batombu to date: Woru, Sabi, and Bio for the first, second, and third sons, respectively.

The most cursory glance at the tradition related above leaves a scientific historian with some unanswered questions. The first concerns the personality of Kisra, the supposed progenitor of the Batombu. While the limitations of space do not permit a detailed analysis of Kisra's personality and journey, suffice it to state that leading Arabic sources are unanimous that Kisrawas killed in c. 651 AD (Mohammed, 1994, p. 12). Yar-Shater (1999), citing several primary and other Arabic sources, contended that Kisra Abarwiz had 18 sons and was killed by the Persians as a result of his highhandedness:

Kisra treated people [his subjects] with contempt and regarded them with scorn in a manner no righteous and discerning monarch should adopt...[his] insolent pride and lack of respect for God reached the point that he gave orders to the man in charge of his personal guard of court called Zādhān Farrū that he should kill every person held captive in any of his prisons; these persons were counted up and their number reached thirty-six thousand...Kisra incurred for himself the hatred of the subjects of his kingdom for various reasons...The Persians rose up against Kisra and killed him, aided by his [oldest] son, Shiruyah (p. 378-381)

Other scholars corroborate the above. Hazrat and Yusuf (n.d., p. 158) assert that Kisra, the Emperor of Persia, was killed as a result of his highhandedness and his refusal to embrace Islam. In the same vein, Katheer (n.d., p. 45) describes how Kisra was "cut up...as a piece of meat is dismembered" and that "his *murder* occurred on the night of Tuesday, the tenth of Jumad AlOola, in the *Year 9 AH*." If the above unanimous accounts about the murder of Kisra in Persia are anything to go by, one wonders to which Kisra the Batombu tradition refers. Moreover, the claim that Batombu was founded by Kisra, apparently an Arab, is very doubtful as there are no similarities in the culture, language, skin, colour, etc., of the Bariba and Arabs.

The second tradition of Batombu origins is the Suni-Baru tradition given by Lafia Hussaini (2003, p. 14): the Batombu are believed to have lived within the West African sub-region (possibly in Gao) and Suni-Baru and his supporters left Songhai and moved towards Bussa, the eastern end of the Borgu Kingdom. At Bussa, Suni-Baru was recognized as ruler (Hussaini, 2003, p. 14). Suni-Baru was said to have been followed by the Hombori and Barga peoples. According to this tradition, the Hombori went westwards while the Barga followed the River Niger to Nikkiberi and later to Batombuland. The Suni-Baro group was

subsequently conquered by the Hombori who thereafter established themselves as rulers. According to this tradition, this was how the Wassangari (the ruling class) originated amongst the Bariba. Viewed from the Afro-centric autochthonous-latter migrants' perspective, the two traditions related above only appear contradictory; rather, they corroborate each other. The Kisra myth is nothing more than an extension of the Hamitic hypothesis.

Although the African continent, like others, has been an active stage upon which the drama of human development and cultural differentiation has been acted since the beginning of history, until recently the history of the continent, its culture, as well as the potential of its peoples, have been a subject of monumental distortion, ridicule, and outright denial. The Europeans opined that Blacks were racially, biologically, and intellectually inferior to the Whites. Among the leading Eurocentric writers who dismissed the possibility of African history was the German philosopher, W.F. Hegel, who contended that, "Africa is no historical part of the world...it has no movement or development to exhibit". According to Hegel, any attempt at studying the history of Africa before the colonial enterprise would amount to "prying into the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe" (Okon, 2004, p. 3). In 1930, the British ethnologist, C.G. Seligman, postulated that "the civilizations of Africa are the civilizations of the Hermites" (Fage, 1969, p. 7). This postulation has since then been known as the Hamitic hypothesis. The implication of the above, as Markovitz (1970, p. 15) has pointed out is that "Africans had no history, meaning that they did not change or progress or have science, art or inventions among themselves". Thus perceived as innately incapable of initiating or inventing anything useful, Africa was relegated to the bottom rung of human history and viewed as what Okon terms "pathological adjuncts of White societies" (2004, p.3). Trevor Roper, Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford, re-echoed the above line of thought in 1963 when, in response to African students' demand for African history courses, he said, "Undergraduates, seduced, as always, by the changing breath of journalistic fashion, demand that they should be taught the history of black Africa. Perhaps, in the future, there will be some African history to teach, but at present there is none. There is only the history of the Europeans in Africa the rest is darkness and darkness is not a subject of history" (Poulsen, 1981, p. 76). Roper contended further that he did not deny that men existed in Africa and that they had political life and culture, interesting to sociologists and anthropologists, but that history was not "a mere phantasmagoria of changing shapes and

costumes, of battles and conquests, dynasties and usurpations, social forms and social disintegration” which was the best Africa had (Appiah, 1998, p. 12).

The above accounts for the Eurocentric view that virtually all Nigerian/African peoples originated/migrated from the amorphous ‘east,’ variously supposed to be Egypt, Yemen, Nubia, Meroe or Persia. It is in this context that the ‘eastern traditions of origins’ of such Nigerian peoples as the Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, etc. should be understood. However, the Hamitic hypothesis has been thoroughly discredited and demolished, so that today, as Okon has pointed out, “only the hopelessly uniformed can claim now that Africa has no history” (2004, p.6). Isichei (1983, p. 5) has pointed out that “only two of Nigeria’s peoples speak languages which suggest an origin far beyond the borders of Nigeria: the Shauwa Arabs who live in south of Lake Chad, and the Fulani.” Corroborating the above, Obayemi (1985, p. 255) contended that virtually all Nigerian peoples, save the two groups mentioned above, originated from the Niger-Benue Confluence area in Nigeria and migrated in several waves to their present abodes. Deploying linguistic evidence in support of the above, Williamson (1989, p. 20) asserted that nearly all Nigerian languages belong to the Benue-Congo family of languages, which spread across a vast area of West Africa, including many languages in Nigeria, the Fon languages in Benin Republic, Ewe, Fante, and Asante in Ghana, Baule and Bate in Ivory Coast (Côte d'Ivoire), and Bassa and Kru in Liberia. Indeed, Atanda (1980a, p.4) was emphatic that “none of the Nigerian peoples speak a Hamitic language.” It has thus been asserted that the speakers of the Benue-Congo languages originated from the Niger-Benue Confluence and migrated in waves to all the places they are now found. Pieced together, the available evidence supports this postulation. For example, Frobenius’s account asserts that the Borgu people (including the Batombu) under Kisra migrated from Badar, near Mecca and that they “broke off into many sections” (1913, p. 35). Also Temple (1919, p. 45), who supported the Badar migration thesis, argued that the immigrants decided to settle down when they reached River Niger. It seems safe, therefore, to assert that the ancestors of the Batombu migrated from the Niger-Benue Confluence in waves. Just as the Obatala/Oduduwa tradition has now been generally accepted to represent the end of an era and the beginning of another in the history of the Yoruba, the Kisra tradition represents the autochthonous settlers in Batombuland who left the Niger-Benue Confluence area in earlier waves of migration, while the Wansangari group represents the better-armed latter immigrants who imposed themselves on the autochthonous settlers. This assertion agrees with that of Lopiz who opines that “the Bariba are descendants of different population

movement...the Wansangari warriors imposed themselves on the Bariba area progressively from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries” (2005). In the same vein, Mangut asserts that,

All informants interviewed in and around New Bussa (primary sources), relating to the origin of the Borgu people, only provided information relating to the origin of the ruling aristocracy popularly known as Wasangari. It therefore appears as if there were certain indigenous groups in which oral traditions relating to them have been deliberately ignored or have since been lost to time(2013, p. 4).

Available pieces of evidence seem to agree that the founder or founders of the Batombu might have been a group of horse-riding, politically- and militarily-superior invaders who imposed their authority over the indigenous peoples, but being inferior in numbers, they adopted the language of the indigenous population (Levtzion, 1968, p. 17). The same phenomenon occurred in the culture history of the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria. After the conquest of the Obatala group at Ile Ife, Oduduwa and his group adopted the language of the pre-Oduduwa settlers, while his sons and grandsons did same in other autochthonous communities in Yorubaland which they invaded or supposedly founded.

### **British Colonial Enterprise: Change and Continuity in Batombuland**

The old treaties are dead; you have killed them. Now these are the words which I the High Commissioner have to say for the future. The Fulani in old times, under Dan Fodio, conquered this country. They took the right to rule over it, to levy taxes, to depose kings and create kings. They in turn have lost their rule which has come into the hand of the hands of the British. All these things, which I have said the Fulani took the right to do, now pass to the British (Oluniyi, 2017; Williams, 2011, p. 289&p. 146-7; Lockhart, 2008, p. 269; Herbst, 2004, p. 83).

With the above pronouncement by Fredrick Lugard, at the installation of Mohammadu Attahiru II as the ‘colonial emir’ of Sokoto on 21 March 1903, the imposition of foreign rule, or what Herbst (2004, p. 83) calls “the dawn of colonial rule” in Northern Nigeria, effectively began even though pockets of resistance to the British administration continued. Thus, Batombuland, like other ethnic groups in Northern Nigeria, came under British colonial rule. This imposition had far-reaching implications for the indigenous political, social, economic and cultural institutions of the people. However, as overwhelming and profound as the impacts of colonialism and westernisation were, some aspects of the traditional institutions of the Bariba survived and continue to the present. Herein lies what this article considers as change and continuity in Batombu history. Of course, history itself



is a complex mix of the study of continuity and change in human institutions and societies. Our analysis begins with changes and continuity in the sociocultural sphere.

Arowolo (2010, p. 14) defines culture as the totality of a set of bequeathed ideas, belief systems, values, and norms which constitute the common bases of generally agreed social action. One of the most catastrophic consequences of colonialism in Batombuland was the distortion (westernisation) of the culture of the people (Aboyeji, 2005, p. 121). Before the advent of colonialism and western civilisation, the Batombu worshipped the *Wooru*, *Buu*, and *Shinagura* deities. *Wooru* was worshipped mostly by hunters while sacrifices were offered to *Buu* in the event of drought. Not surprisingly, the imposition of colonialism and introduction of western civilisation waned the influence of these gods, considerably reduced the number of their adherents and worshippers, and contributed to instability of traditional Batombu society (Alade, 1988, p. 209). The introduction of schools by the Christian missionaries and the acquisition of Western education by some members of the Batombu society led to the emergence of elites who no longer regarded their culture and now saw themselves as superior to their 'non-westernised' peers. Their 'sophistication' made them despise and abhor traditional cultural practices, particularly the worship of *Buu*, *Shinagura*, and *Biokitiri*. Thus, colonialism brought with it Christianity and a new concept of a god who was prepared to forgive anyone who showed penitence and sought forgiveness after committing a crime. This removed or eroded the fear of instant retribution from the gods. The result of the disregard and outright contempt for traditional norms and values, gods, and deities became a sort of license to engage in vices that instant retribution from the gods once prevented. Moreover, the influence and authority of the priests and diviners whose authority rested on traditional religious beliefs waned. In other words, the introduction of western education/civilisation reduced the acceptance, reverence, and importance of traditional religious observances which had for a long time commanded the obedience and awe of the people. Furthermore, in traditional Batombu society, young people stooped to greet elders as a mark of respect; however, western-educated elites changed the trend by resorting to shaking hands or refusing to stoop while greeting elders. Similarly, European cultural traits and values of dress, greeting, eating habits, and other behavioural attitudes were emulated (for example *taako and bante* were discarded for European-style dress). This scenario was repulsive to those members of the Batombu society who still remained 'traditional,' thus leading to social stratification which sometimes led to conflict and ill feelings (O. A. Kilishi, personal communication, October 2, 2017).

Before the imposition of colonial rule and the introduction and spread of western civilisation in Batombuland, the acknowledgement of the curative and preventive potency of charms and traditional medicine for various ailments was ubiquitous. Indeed, the Bariba were known all over the entity now known as Nigeria as ‘charm makers,’ such that famous Bariba ‘traditional doctors’ and charm/amulets makers were patronised near and far. The effectiveness of their charms was probably responsible for the Bariba’s reputation as archers and guards. Until very recently, all over Nigeria, the Bariba were preferred above other groups as night guards as their charms and amulets supposedly made them invincible and brought protection to the lives, properties, and neighbourhoods they watched over. The introduction of orthodox medicine diminished the patronage of Bariba ‘traditional doctors’. Also, the emergence of neighborhood policing, as well as sundry misdemeanors by some of the Bariba hired as night guards, have considerably waned the demand for Bariba as night guards (U. S. Sabikpasi, personal communication, September 7, 2017). However, in spite of the prevalence of orthodox medicine, traditional medicine has continued to play a prominent role in health care delivery of the Batombu people. Up to date, a significant percentage of the Bariba still prefer traditional to orthodox medicine. Indeed, some of them opine that the former, rather than the latter, could effectively cure psychiatric conditions and seizures and ward off ‘dark power attacks’ or stop the afflictions inflicted by them (A. G. Oyuru, personal communication, September 5, 2017). Moreover, in a country where the doctor-population ratio stands at 1:4,000, it is almost inevitable that citizens would seek alternative sources of medicare. The Medical and Dental Consultants Association of Nigeria recently described the country’s doctor-population ratio as appalling and unacceptable (Chukindi, 2018). Another factor that has aided the survival and continuity of traditional medicine among the Batombu is inadequate health facilities and the lopsided nature of their distribution: health facilities, most of which lack drugs, personnel, and equipment are located in the urban areas, thus promoting the patronage of traditional medicine in rural areas (A. Idris, personal communication, October 20, 2017).

In religion, it is important to note that the adherents of the ‘White man’s faith’ continue to consult their ancestral gods, oracles, and deities in case of severe sickness or misfortune. Indeed, the Batombu remain conscious of the potency and powers of the gods and are sometimes unconvinced that the gods are imaginary and powerless. Ironically, in some cases, Christians and Muslims contribute money to perform certain traditional cleansing,

rituals, and rites to appease the gods or to seek favours like rain, good harvest, healing, children, etc. from them (U. S. Sabikpasi, personal communication, September 7, 2017).

Another important aspect of the culture of the Batombu that was overwhelmed by colonialism and westernisation was facial marks and tattoo. *Kuroru* (cutting of the top of the nose) and *kpelle* (three parallel cuts on both cheeks) were very popular among the Batombu before the advent of colonialism and westernisation. The colonial administration discouraged these practices, citing the risk of infection and the excruciating pain suffered by those who engaged in them. The above, coupled with ‘civilisation,’ rendered these acts ‘anti-social’ and were consequently abandoned by many Bariba (Negri, 1964, p. 5). Today, it is a rarity to find Batombu young men and women bearing facial marks and tattoos.

Moreover, colonialism and other foreign influences led to name-confusion in the Batombu society. Given the waning of facial marks and tattoos, Batombu names, which would have served as a prominent mark of identification of the Bariba, became either Islamised or Anglicised. In traditional Batombu society, names were given by any relative of the newborn. There were three categories of names: in appreciation of idols and festivals (Tabe, Siano, Taku, Weragi etc. for males and Dangana, Deeru, etc. for females); in order of birth (Woru, Sabi, Bio, Bonni, Sanni, Woru-Mere, and Sabi-Mere for the first to the seventh males, respectively, and Yon, Bona, Bake, Buyon, Yon-Mere, Bona-Mere for the first to the sixth female children); and, in remembrance of family members (Bakenduro, Tourenduro, Gunungobi for males and Baankuro, Gununkuro, Takun-Kuro for females), place of birth or prevailing circumstances during birth –Worusua, Bona sua (born on the road); Worudwaru, Bona dwaru (born at river); Worugura, Yongura (born when raining); Bansu (born after the death of father); Worugouraa (male child born after many girls); Yongouraa (girl child born after many boys). In addition to the three categories mentioned above, there were also clan and sub-clan names. Some of the aboriginal Batombu clans bore names like Tamba, Doko, Toku, Gawe, Mansa, Buara, Birso, Baatia, Worudeke, Gbeeru, Daki, and Baku (males), while females bore such names as Deeru, Kaano, Itoo, Natoo, Tanson, Kpaare, Yenu, and Sebegi among others. In the sub-clan of Kenubu, names like Oyoru, Ayara, Komilafia, Sokobasi, Sinaworu, Yirugi, Sinabio, Meyemi, Mafara, and Kenken (male) and Nangi, Woore, Samanse, Bara, and Mangu (female) were famous. Famous manes among the Wassangari included Lafia (heron), Saka (acacia tree), Yaru (buffalo), Sime (crocodile), Gunu (lion), Koto (hyenna), Kora (river Niger) for males and Yaaki, Kpayero, Gandigi, etc. for females. The Moraru clan bore names like Asaburu, Daba, and

Weene (male) and Yeeka, Bona Sani, and Yonbio (female). Today, however, owing to westernisation, the above names are rarities: indigenous names have almost completely given way to names like Yusuf Mohammed, Ibrahim Issa, Mohammed Lawal Yusuf, Victor Joshua, Helen John, Lawrence Thomas, Matthew Jacobs, Joshua Emmanuel, etc. among many others. However, some still preserve and promote their native names mostly by making them middle names; hence, names like Ezekiel Woru Thomas, Eunice Bona Abraham, Ibrahim Woru Abdullahi, Said Bio Ibrahim, etc. The overall effect of this is the loss or obfuscation of identity (O. A. Kilishi, personal communication, October 2, 2017).

Western influence also produced remarkable changes in the area of traditional music and literature with varying degrees of survival and continuity. Music was employed for entertainment on occasions like marriage, naming, funerals, and installation/coronation ceremonies. Today, many Bariba have replaced *moroku* – their traditional music which served entertainment and encouragement purposes – with jazz and pop songs. In any case, the traditional music industry is still active, particularly during the coronation and installation ceremonies, the annual *Goani* festival, and sometimes at state functions. Also, the griots, (*Barobu*) reputed for their penetrating knowledge of court history and oral traditions are irreplaceable and function very prominently as the custodians and ‘house of knowledge’ of the Bariba traditions and culture.

Closely related to the above is the choice of dress. In traditional Batombu society, men wore *taako*; women wore *barubekuru*; princes wore *taako gona* and *taako kpakpene* (Hussaini, 2003, p. 45). *Taako*, which has waned in significance and use, is woven locally from local material. In traditional Batombu society, children between ages five and ten wore pants called *petu* and graduated to the use of knickers called *komisa* at adolescence. Caps had special significance in Batombu culture – they were used to identify the class/status of an individual. A cap made from white *taako* (bent backwards) was worn exclusively by chiefs and other titleholders. The *furogona* (a cap made of black and white dotted *taako* cloth) had spiritual and political importance and was worn by individuals who were renowned for their knowledge of traditional herbal medicine (Hussaini, 2003, p. 45). The rulers also had their peculiar cap, red and long, with many yards of fabric wound round it. Monarchs wore a big, loose gown of rich embroidery called *guru musur*, while their footwear was usually flat slippers (Hussaini, 2003, p. 45). Generally, traditional dressing has given way to the modern, although all the categories of traditional attire mentioned above are still worn during special occasions and other traditional festivals and ceremonies. On the other hand, it is worthy of

note that Batombu monarchs still maintain their traditional mode of dressing described above (U. S. Sabikpasi, personal communication, September 7, 2017).

Colonialism also engendered profound changes in the economy of the Bariba. The traditional, pre-colonial economy of Batombuland, as elsewhere, was predominantly food crop farming supplemented with hunting, animal husbandry, and local crafts based on indigenous technology (Mason, 1969, p. 554). Land was fertile, available, and communally owned, hence every member of society had unrestricted access to it, while blacksmithing provided the basic local tools and implements needed for farming. The imposition of colonialism and the spread of western culture had far-reaching implications for farming and other indigenous economic activities. In the first place, many people went in search of white-collar jobs and gave up farming which now became an ‘old folks’ job.’ One of the consequences of this was a sharp decline in the scale of farming and food production. Also, indigenous technology suffered as attention shifted from traditional farming implements, like the hoe, cutlass, knife, etc., to European-type tools (Mason, 1969). The local weaving industry was not spared as attention shifted away from indigenous to western dress and from local yarn to imported ones. In the same vein, indigenous utilities and utensils, like clay pots, bowls, black soap, baskets, traps, etc., suffered sharp decline (B. S. Damakowo, personal communication, October 22, 2017). The quest to dominate and control the economy of Africa was one of the immediate causes of imperialism; consequently, as was the case elsewhere, following the ‘pacification’ of Batombuland, British colonial officials made conscious and sustained efforts at steering away from the cultivation of food to cash crops. However, as profound and far-reaching as the above changes were, the Bariba continue to cultivate indigenous crops, engage in the manufacture and production of indigenous farming tools and implements, promote hand-woven fabrics, and deploy traditional tools, like the *tebo* (hoe), *ghan* (axe), *gbansikuru* (a long stick with iron at the edge used for digging yams), and *adaru* (cutlass) in their farming activities.

The autochthonous Bariba monarchical political system was headed by the descendants of the earliest migrants from the Niger-Benue Confluence area. Their court ensured social peace, stability, cohesion, and harmony. With the arrival of the Wassangari group, Batombu society was transformed from a homogenous society to a composite one or what Lopiz calls ‘a complex whole’ (2005). In addition to the Bariba and the Wassangari, there were also the Boko and Mokole speakers, as well as the Fulani and Gando ethnic groups. Following their

conquest of the autochthonous settlers, political authority passed to the Wassangari group with Sinaboko (higher king) becoming the political head while the indigenous chiefs were “concerned with religious and symbolic systems developing a linking function between the newcomers and local divinities” (Lopiz, 2005). The autochthonous Bariba were differentiated from the Wassangari in the order of their sociopolitical practices and roles. In effect, the indigenous Bariba occupied lower sociopolitical status in the arrangement that ensued. The Wassangari in turn lost their sociopolitical status following the ‘pacification’ and imposition of colonial rule on Batombuland. Thus, vital political appointments, hitherto the exclusive reserve of the king-makers and the king’s court, were now subject to the approval of higher authorities, particularly District Officers. The regional government inherited this right at independence in 1960, and it is now the prerogative of the Governor to confirm the appointment of the Emirs whose courts create chieftaincy titles and appoint lesser chiefs for administrative, loyalty, and pecuniary purposes (A. Idris, personal communication, October 20, 2017). Closely related to the above is the dispensation of justice. In traditional Batombu society, disputes and petty quarrels and other social misdemeanors were settled and handled at the family level, while issues that could not be settled by the family head or verdicts which the parties involved appealed against were referred to the village head. The king’s court was the highest court of appeal. Vices, such as laziness and lying, were punished by exclusion or suspension from age-grade functions. In theft cases, the Shinagura deity was invoked for sanction, especially when the culprit denied involvement. However, with the emergence of Area and Customary Courts during colonial rule, government-appointed judges became the dispensers of justice. Today, family and village heads, as well as the king, continue to play prominent roles in the dispensation of justice, while the age grades still perform different sociocultural functions.

### **Conclusion**

This paper highlights some of the changes and continuity in the twentieth-century history of the Batombu during colonial rule in Northern Nigeria. The paper pointed out that the traditional sociocultural, political, and economic systems and institutions of the Batombu were assailed by foreign influences and practices. Land, readily available and fertile, became under utilised as young folks went in search of white-collar jobs. The consequence was a sharp decline in the quantity of food production. Also, the imperialists’ agricultural policies, which favoured the cultivation and production of cash crops for the use of the metro

pole, coupled with the prospects of increased earnings by local farmers, swayed people away from the cultivation of food crops.

The traditional cultural setting of the Bariba also witnessed profound changes as western music rivaled and overshadowed indigenous music, while many gave up their indigenous names in favour of high-sounding Anglicized names. Also, Christianity and western education became the vogue, thus depleting the ranks of the adherents of traditional religion. Monogamy gained a foothold but many practise polygamy. Indigenous technology was stifled due to the availability, popularity, and effectiveness of western goods, tools, and implements. Also, the occupiers of traditional political space suffered degradation as they became subservient to British colonial administrators.

However, as profound, widespread and far-reaching as these changes were, they did not wholly obliterate the traditional practices of the people. Thus, farming remained (and continues to remain) the dominant economic activity of the Batombu with a fairly widespread use of traditional farming implements. In addition, traditional music continued to be treasured by some Bariba, while many still preserve and promote indigenous names and other modes of identification. The annual *Goani* festive is still popular. Indeed, the banning of the festival for the Bariba in French Borgu by the administration of Mathieu Kérékou<sup>4</sup> in 1974 led to a mass migration of Bariba from the French to British Borgu until 1981, when it was unbanned (Lopiz, 2005, p. 188). Many Bariba folks still treasure traditional utensils like earthen pots for storage of drinking water. The lopsidedness of modern health facilities and other limitations, as well as the Bariba's 'faith' in the preventive and curative potency of local herbs, continue to ensure patronage of traditional medicine. Many Bariba are of the opinion that ailments like leprosy, seizures and other forms of 'traditional afflictions' are only curable 'traditionally' (A. G. Oyoru, personal communication, September 5, 2017).

The system of indirect rule employed by the British ensured the continued relevance of the Batombu traditional political system and institutions. Thus, although overwhelmed by colonialism and other foreign influences, the traditional sociocultural, economic, and political institutions of the Batombu were able to respond to these changes, adapted to them, and survived their onslaught. Herein lies the changes and continuity among the Batombu.

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<sup>4</sup> Mathieu Kérékou served as the President of Benin from 1972 to 1991 and 1996 to 2006.

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