

Lessons from a Historical Account of the Origin and Expansion of the Bantu in Southern, Eastern, Central Africa and Migration into the Middle Belt Region of Nigeria

¹Akombo Elijah Ityavkase PhD

¹Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, Taraba State University, Jalingo.

Abstract

Peoples and languages are classified on the basis of the common variables they share. While languages are classified basically on common lexical structures, peoples and groups are compared in accordance with their socio-cultural and political similarities. However, the hallmark in the classification of peoples and groups is common progenitor, that is, the factor of common origin. This was even one of the basic considerations in the classification of the Bantustan groups (Bantu) under one language family otherwise referred to as the Benue-Congo language family. Historically and demographically, the Bantustan groups dominate Southern, Central and Eastern Africa, the supposed ancestral nucleus of the groups. The groups are believed to form about half of Africa's total population. From what is believed to be their ancestral nucleus, the groups later migrated in clusters into other parts of Africa and what later became Nigeria. Prominent among the Bantoid clusters in the Middle Belt Region of Nigeria are the Tivoid, Mambilloid, Dakoid, Platoid, Nupoid. It is observed that the Bantoid groups have almost lost knowledge about the common progenitor and unity they once shared as well as knowledge about the very powerful political systems and military machines their progenitors once established in Southern, Central and Eastern Africa. Instead, they have shifted allegiance from broad-based identity to microscopic ethnic or group identities. This down trend has remained the bane for the eclipse of the Bantoid groups in the Middle Belt, and Taraba State in particular. This paper is, therefore, an attempt to unfold the historical account of the origin and expansion of the Bantustan groups in Southern, Central, Eastern Africa and their subsequent migration particularly into the Middle Belt Region of Nigeria, but with special focus on Taraba State. The paper tries to examine the fate of the Bantoid groups in Taraba State in the midst of their shift of allegiance from broad-identity to microscopic ethnic or group identities. Conclusively, the paper suggests the need for Bantoid groups in Taraba State, and other groups in Nigeria, to retreat to broad-based group identities as a panacea for the multiplicity of incessant inter-ethnic or group hostilities in the state and Nigeria at large. The paper adopts a multi-dimensional approach in data collection.

Keywords: Bantu, Bantoid, Benue-Congo, Middle Belt, Migration, Niger-Congo

Who are the Bantu and their spread in Africa

The Bantu are conglomerates of ethnic nationalities speaking what is referred to as the Bantu group of languages and dialects. Afolalu (1972) refers to the Bantu people, or the word “Bantu”, to apply “to all African peoples south of the Equator from Kenya to the Congo down to the Cape of Good Hope. This implies that this area represents the ancestral home of all the Bantoid groups, no matter wherever any of the groups is found. More ever, the dominance of the Bantu tribes in this zone, more than anywhere else in Africa, is seemingly a confirmation of this argument.

Generally, the Bantoid groups dominate Central, Eastern and Southern Africa. Demographically, the groups are believed to represent roughly 30% of Africa’s total population(UN Dept. of Economic & Social Affairs, 2015). The distribution of major Bantu groups across countries in Africa is reflected in the table below (Guthrie, M. In Wikipedia).

Tabular distribution of the groups Bantu in Africa

Country	Total population (millions, 2015 est.)	% Bantu	Bantu population (Millions, 2015 est.)	Zones	Bantu groups
Angola	26	97%	25	H,K,R	Ovimbundu, Ambundu, Bakongo, Chokwe, Lunda, Ganguela, Ovambo, Herero, Xindonga (97% Bantu)
Botswana	2.2	90%	2.0	R,S	Tswana or Setswana, Kalanga, 90% Bantu
Burundi	10-	99%	10	J	Hutu, Tutsi
Cameroon	22	30-70%	c.7-15	A	More than 130 groups, c.30% Bantu and 40% Semi-Bantu
Comoros	0.8	99%	0.8	E,G	Comorian people
Democratic Republic of the Congo	77	80%	62	B, C, D, H, J, K, M	Kongo people, Mongo, Luba, numerous others (Ambala, Ambuun, Angba, Babindi, Baboma, Baholo, Balunda,

					Bangala, Bango, Batsamba, Bazombe, Bemba, Bembe, Bira, Bowa, Dikidiki, Dzing, Fuliru, Havu, Hema, Hima, Hunde, Hutu, Iboko, Kanioka, Kaonde, Kuba, Kumu, Kwango, Lengola, Lokele, Lupu, Lwalwa, Mbala, Mbole, Mbuza (Budja), Nande, Ngoli, Bangoli, Ngombe, Nkumu, Nyanga, Pende, Popoi, Poto, Sango, Shi, Songo, Sukus, Tabwa, Tchokw9, T9k9, Tembo, Tetela, Topoke, Tutsi, Ungana, Vira, Wakuti, Yaka, Yakoma, Yanzi, Yeke, Yela, total 80% Bantu)
Equatorial Guinea	2.0	95%	1.9	A	Fang, Bubi, 95% Bantu
Gabon	1.9	95%	1.8	B	Fang, Nzebi, Myene, Kota, Puru, Kande.
Kenya	46	80%	37	E,J	Kikuyu, Luhya, Kamba, Kisii, Meru, Kuria, Aembu, Ambeere, Wadawida-Watuweta, Wapokomo and Mijikenda, numerous others (80% Bantu)
Lesotho	1.9	99%	1.9	S	Sotho
Malawi	16	99%	16	N	Chewa, Nyanja, Tumbuka, Yao, Lomwe, Sena, Tonga, Ngoni, Ngonde
Namibia	2.3	70%	1.6	K,R	Ovambo, Kavango, Herero, 70% Bantu
Rwanda	11	99%	11	J	Hutu, Tutsi
Somalia	14	7%	1	E	Somalian Bantu
South Africa	55	75%	40	S	Nguni (Zulu, Xhosa, Swazi, Ndebele), Basotho (South Sotho), Bapedi (North Sotho),

					Venda, Tswana, Tsonga, total 75% Bantu
Swaziland	1.1	99%	1.1	S	Swazi, Zulu, Tsonga
Tanzania	51	90%	c.45	E,F,G, J,M,N, P	Sukuma, Gogo, Nyamwezi, Nyakyusa-Ngonde, numerous other (majority Bantu)
Uganda	37	70%	c.25	D,J	Nkole, Tooro, others (majority Bantu)
Zambia	15	99%	15	L,M,N	Nyanja-Chewa, Bemba, Tonga, Tumbuka, Lunda, Luvale, Kaonde, Nkoya and Lozi, about 70 groups total
Zimbabwe	14	99%	14	S	Shona, Ndebele, numerous minor groups
Sub-Saharan Africa	970^[26]	c.37 %	c.360		
Middle-Belt Region of Nigeria	-	-	-	-	Tiv, Mabmbilla, Mumuye, Kaka, Kambu, Panso, Chamba, Ndula (Ndulo), Yandang, Kulung, Seyawa (Seiwa), Tarok, Beron, Nupe, Gbagyi, Ebria (Igbirra), Gwari, Angas, Jju, Tyap, Hyam, Eggon, Che, etc.

Source: Malcolm Guthrie (1967:71). Bantu speaking (Bantu varieties) areas in Africa, in “Bantu Peoples”, Wikipedia.

Generally, the Bantustan groups belong to the Benue-Congo language group out of the Proto-Niger-Congo group of languages. The Benue-Congo language family is not only the dominant proportion of what is the Niger-Congo group of languages, but also the largest language family in Africa. It comprises 900 languages spoken by 500 million people, constituting half of Africa’s population (<http://www.Languageulfer.com/eng/Benue.html>). The language family dominates in all Central and Southern African countries, including Eastern Benin, Nigeria and Cameroon (Alejandro and Beatriz, 2013). In Southern Africa, the countries are South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, parts of Botswana and Namibia, Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe and Malawi. In East Africa, the countries are Tanzania,

Zambia, Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Kenya; whereas in central Africa, the countries are Central African Republic and Cameroon. In west Africa, the countries are Nigeria, Benin, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Cote D'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Senegal. The various components of the Bantoid groups are believed to have began their migration into Southern, Eastern and Central Africa in the 1st millennium B.C (Philip and Randall, 2007).

The Bantu speaking ethnic nationalities who constitute the Benue-Congo sub-language family form the largest proportion of what is linguistically referred to as the Proto Niger-Congo Language Family. Most of the language groups in Sub-Saharan Africa belong to the Bantoid groups. The groups are spread mostly in Central Nigeria and Cross River area. They constitute the largest language family group in Central Nigeria. The Bantoid groups in Central Nigeria constitute the following clusters;

- a Mambiloid
- b. Tivoid
- c. Dakoid (Chamba groups)
- d. Platoid(Berom, Angas, Tarok,etc)
- e. Nupoid

Bantu origin and migration

Generally, the definite place which could be said to be the original place of Bantu origin is still debatable. However, it is popularly believed that the Bantoid groups existed or exist in ancestral clusters, and that their migrations were organised based on such ancestral clusters(Tishkoff, 2009). The major clusters are Central, Eastern and Southern African

ancestral conglomerates. Each of these clusters spread within and without its immediate geographical area at different periods (Falola and Usman, 2009).

The eventual cause of the Bantu migration or spread, particularly from Southern Africa northwards or to other areas of the region, was accountable to two main factors. First and foremost was the population explosion with its attendant scramble over limited land. Secondly, the check on the southward expansion of the Bantu by the Europeans instigated a spontaneous push of Bantu migration to the north of the region.

One of the major features of the Bantu migrations or expansion was their contacts with the earlier inhabitants of the areas they either passed through or settled. In South and Central Africa, for instance, they encountered the Pygmies and the Khoisans, respectively. They also encountered the Nilotic Sudanic groups who were the major components of the Nilo-Saharan groups. Other groups were Afro-Asiatic groups, mainly the Cushitic groups (Fage, 2002). It was this phenomenon which eventually led to conflicts between the Bantu groups, particularly in Southern Africa popularly known as the Mfecane, “an Nguni word meaning, ‘the time of trouble or havoc’” between 1820 and 1850 (Sagay and Wilson, 1978).

In their series of migrations, the Bantoid groups either displaced or assimilated the groups they came into contact with due to their superior military machines and highly organised political systems. In some cases, they copied some linguistico-cultural aspects of the earlier inhabitants. Like in the case of their contact with the Cushitic groups, they are believed to have copied some pastoral; or cattle terminologies and the art of milking cattle (Fage, 2002 and Tishkoff, 2009).

Development of early Bantu political systems

The Bantu peoples started developing state systems as far back as from the 12th century. Among the factors that accounted for this development were the well organised political and military structures the groups developed as earlier stated. Other factors included the very comprehensive economic or commercial networks they evolved which promoted trade

within and without. Some of their early state systems in Central Africa included the Kongo Kingdom, Lunda Empire and Luba Empire in Angola, whereas their state systems in Eastern Africa were, among others, the Buganda Kingdoms of Uganda and Tanzania. In Southern Africa, they established state systems like the Mutapa Empire, the Danamombe, Kwami, and Naletale Kingdoms of Zimbabwe and Mozambique (Oliver, 2005), including Rozwi Empire (Isichei, 1997).

Politically, the Bantu peoples displayed a history of unity and prowess, especially before and after the Mfecane, which was an episode of hostility among the Bantu groups, particularly in Southern and Central Africa. In all the regions they found themselves, they remained the conquerors and builders of kingdoms and empires. Between 12th and 19th centuries, they built powerful kingdoms and empires across the length and breadth of Southern, Eastern and Central Africa. Roland et al (2005) declared, for instance, that:

some examples of such Bantu states include: in Central Africa, the Kingdom of Kongo, Lunda Empire, Luba Empire of Angola; (in Eastern Africa) the Buganda Kingdoms of Uganda and Tanzania; and in Southern Africa, the Mutapa Empire, the Danamombe, Khami, and Naletale Kingdoms of Zimbabwe and Mozambique (Oliver, 2005).

The most common characteristic of the Bantoid political systems was the existence of sophisticated military machines (Sagay and Wilson, 1978). Each Bantoid polity possessed a very strong military machine with which the tasks of territorial conquest, expansion and defence were actualised with relative ease. In fact, they were hardly defeated by opponents. It was this quality which enabled the Bantoid groups to easily spread across the regions of Southern, Eastern and Central Africa, including the Nigeria-Cameroon frontier.

The intimidating dominance of the Bantoid stocks in the Nigeria-Cameroon frontier in the Lake Chad Region across the Mambilla region is an established historical compendium. Generally, the spread of the Bantoid stocks in Southern, Central and, in the case of East

Africa specifically in Kenya and Tanzania, including the Nigerian-Cameroon frontier has remained an intimidating historical reality dated to antiquity. Others date this phenomenon to the period between 2000 B.C and 1500 B.C(<http://www.rogerb/ench.info/Archaeology...>).

Expansion of the Bantoid groups into Nigeria

The precise date for the migration of the Bantoid groups into what became Nigeria is not yet ascertained. Due to emerging socio-political factors, the debate over issue of date has become more politicized. While some of the groups hide under the theory of long-long ago concept to domesticate themselves as the autochthonous or the aboriginal groups in the area as the Mambilla would claim that they are the Bantu that remained at home (Bami and Akombo, 2016), others feel the issue of date is immaterial given the fact that most, if not all, communities cannot precisely say when they came to where they are presently found. However, what seems to live above reasonable debate is that most of the Bantoid groups found in Taraba migrated into what became Nigeria through the Nigeria-Cameroon border frontier.

The eventual upsurge of the Bantoid stocks into what became Nigeria marked yet another major phase of Bantu expansion. Using their military prowess and political organisation, the groups were able to navigate through territories with little or no human or geographical obstacles to challenge them. Most of the Bantoid groups found in Nigeria came through the Nigeria-Cameroon border. This process saw the distribution of the Bantu groups in what became Nigeria. Among the groups include the Tivoid, Mambilloid, Dakoid, Ejagham (Ekoi in Cross River state) (Bami and Akombo, 2016). The very appreciable level of unity, political ingenuity, military prowess and determination exhibited by the Bantoid groups were the same watchwords that enabled other groups like the Yoruba, Edo, Kanuri,

Hausa, Fulani, Jukun, Nupe, etc. to establish elaborate state systems, empires and chiefdoms or kingdoms.

In the Middle Belt Region of Nigeria, the Bantoid groups comprise the following clusters; Mambiloid made up of all Mambilla subgroups, including the Kaka, Kambu and Panso on the Mambilla Plateau stretching into Cameroon Republic; Tivoid; Dakoid made up of the Tikarr, Dirim and other Chamba groups; the Kulung, Jenjo (though due to some historical antecedents have become more inclined to the Jukunoid); Platoid made up of Tarok, Eggon, Che, Berom, Angas, Jju, Tyap, Hyam and the Nupoid made up of the Nupe, Ebira (Igbirra), Gbagyi, Gwari(<http://www.languagesgulper...>). Others include the Seyewa who are found majorly in Tafawa Balewa and in parts of Bogoro Local Government Areas of Bauchi State, respectively

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Expansion of Bantoid groups in Taraba State

In Taraba State, the Bantoid groups constitute the overwhelming majority of the state's total population. It is no doubt that in the three Senatorial Districts where the Bantoid groups are found, they exercise intimidating numerical dominance. For instance, in the Southern Senatorial Zone, we have mainly the Tiv and Chamba. It is not arguable that in the first demographic population census conducted in 1946 in the Zone formerly known as Wukari Federation, the Tiv possessed the highest population of 40,400, followed by the Kuteb, a Jukunoid group, with 20,384, whereas the Chamba, a fellow Bantoid group with the Tiv, were 4,500(Gunn, 1947). Similarly, in the Central Zone, we have the Mambiloid made up of all the Mambilla sub-groups, including the Kaka, Kambu, Panso, Chamba and Ndola (Ndoro), which, equally put together, constitute an overwhelming majority in the Zone. In the Northern Zone, we have the Mumuye, Yandang, Kulung, among others. Even in the Northern Zone, there is no debate about the dominance of the Mumuye.

There are striking linguistic, political, occupational and socio-cultural evidences to substantiate the fact that the Bantustan groups in Taraba State are derived from a common

Proto source. For instance, apart from the Tiv and the various sub-Mambilla groups, including the Kaka, Kambu and Panso having similar trado-political organizations characterized by segmented clannish and hamlet set-ups, they share very impressive socio-cultural features. Politically, the groups, especially the Tiv and the Mambilla, give trado-social titles based on the order of animals, like *Begha u Tiv* (Lion of Tiv, the title for the Tiv Paramount ruler), *Anyam nyian* (Red Tiger) *Yar Asua* (Fierce Buffalo), *Gafa Or* (Eagle Man, meaning a powerful man), *Alom Or* (Hare-like man, meaning a wise man), etc., in the case of the Tiv, and *Mbon-Ngwi* (Chief in the Order of the Leopard), *Mbon-Gwuribi* (Chief in the order of the Lion), *Mbon-Nyia* (Chief in the Order of the Buffalo), etc., in the case of the Mambilla(Akombo, 2018).

Linguistically and occupationally, apart from the Tiv and the Mumuye assuming an intimidating dominance over yam production in Taraba State, the two groups, including the Mambilla, have the same name for their major occupational implement, the big hoe, called and spelt the same as “Gbaa or Gbar”(Akombo, 2018 and Militus, 2017). What, then, are the glaring linguistic evidential proofs that these Bantustan groups found in Taraba State belong to the same Proto-Group and, as such, are interwoven in their relationship with one another and among themselves? See the table below for obvious proofs (Oral interviews, 2017/2018).

Table 2: Tabular comparative analysis of linguistic relationships among the Bantustan groups in Taraba State using seventy two (72) words:

English	Tiv	Mambilla	Kaka	Kambu	Panso	Ndola	Mumuye
Meat	Nyam	Nyam	Injam (Njap)	Nyam or Nya	Nyam	Nyam (Nyama)	
Father	Ter	Ter/Ta	Ter	Tar/Ter	Tar/Ter	Ta	
Eat	Ya	Ya					
How	Nana	Nana				Hala	
Buffalo	Yar	Yar				Yar (Yara)	
Yes	Een	Een			Enn		
Work	Tom	Tom (Tum)					
Sit	Tema/Tuma	Tuma					

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How are you?	Ungunana?	Nganana?					
You(Plural)	We (Ne)	We (Ne)					
You(singular)	We	We					
Work	Tom	Tum					
Swallow	Mena	Mena or Mina				Mena	
Death	Ku	Kwu	Kuwu (Kwu or ku)	Rkwi	Kwu (Kpu)		
Excreta	Ambi	Mbirr				Mbi (bi)	
To excrete	Nyia ambi	Nyia mbirr				Nyi mbi	
Moon	Wer	Wuer or Wir					
New Year	Nyom i he	Nyon ma ha					
Face	Ishigh/shii	Shii				Shi	
Hear	Ungwa	Ngwa				Waa	
Call	Yila	Yila					
Call father	Yila ter	Yila ter					
Till tomorrow	Saa kper	Se kwer					
Big hoe	Gbar	Gbar					Gbaa
Bird	Nyon (Anyon)	Non (nyu or nyunu)				Anon (Anona)	
Three	Utar	Tar				Tara	
Slave	Kpan	Kwan/Kwer	Ngwan (Ngan)	Nkwah	Kwan		
Tooth	Inyigh (nyigh)	Nyi				Igha	
Man (person)	Or	Norr or Nor					
Ape	Ambo	Mbo/Mbu					
Tongue	Nombor	Namal or Namman or Nabal					
Ear	Tough	Taa/Tu				Coo	
Mat	Sebere	Bere/Ber					
Oil	Mkurem	Kurme or Kurume/Kurim				Kura	
Cat	Kpatuma	Patu/Tango					
Day/Sun	Iyange	Nyagha/Nyang					
Oh!	Wuh/wu!	Wuh/wu!					
Bone	Kuhe	Kuh/Kwu					
There	Keela	Keeh/ke					

King	Tor	Toh/To					
Cloud	Aben	Behr/Buk					
Fat	Ahom	Fom					
Kneel	Inyu	Ighu/Nil/Jur a					
Salt	Baar	Mbara/Tom					
Door	Hunda	Ona/hur					
Neck	Mon	Mena/Man					
Hair	Iche	Cheri/Yur					
Black	Ir/Ire	Yiri		Nya	You (yoh)	Ira	
Build	Maa	Ma/Mara				Maa	
Shoot	Ta	Ta/Tara				Ta (Rar)	
House	Iyough/iy ou	Nyum					
Child	Wan	Mwan/Wun u			Wan	Wana	
Five	Utaan	Teen/Tiin					
I	Mo	Mi				Men	
Call	Yila	Yira					
Go	Yem	Yina/Yu					
Tie	Kange	Kanda/Ke					
Neck	Mon	Mana				Amen	
Back	Ijime	Edzima/jumi /Ajima					
Come	Va		Va				
Mountain	Wo (uwo)		Wo				
Soft	Leeghem (Borbor)			Borbor			
Head	Tyough		Tuo (Twu)	Twu (Thu)			
Hunger	Ijen		Nje	Njih	Jen (Jing)		
Breath	Ioon		Boon	Ioon	Kiyoon		
Snake	Iyo (yo)						
Four	Unyiin					Nyiyi	
Drink	Ma					Nwa	
Leg	Nguhar					Ngura (Angura)	
Food	Ruam (Rwam)					Kwam (Kwama)	

Source:Oral interviews with members of the groups reflected in the table.

It is imperative to state that even though some Bantoid groups are not reflected in the table due to the fact that the comparison is broad-based, it is important to state that many groups that do not appear in the table share numerous same or similar words when compared in

pairs or in clusters with others that appear in the table. For instance, the Yandang who do not appear on the table share numerous same and similar words and phrases with the Mumuye, so also is the case between other groups reflected in the table and others reflected. Linguistically, therefore, the relationship between the Bantustan groups is like a cub web, no matter wherever any group is found. Similarly, both the groups that appear in the table and those not reflected in same share common religio-political, socio-cultural and economic practices indicative of belonging to a common progenitor, no matter the distant apart they are distributed at present.

Unfortunately, today, while other groups have continued to revive their acclaimed ancestral unity to assume political dominance in their respective areas, and even at the national level, the Bantustan groups in Nigeria, and in Taraba State in particular, have, seemingly, forgotten about their bond of unity which hitherto enabled them to stand tall in the comity of ethnic nationalities both within and outside the country. Consequently, wherever the Bantoid are found today in Nigeria, they are seemingly marginalized and treated as second class citizens. The trend is becoming more worrisome, especially bearing in mind that in some places, some Bantoid groups add energy to other groups not only to marginalise and dehumanize fellow Bantu groups but also to discriminate against and even treat them as second class citizens.²⁶ The trend is becoming more worrisome!

The story in Taraba State is seemingly not different. The clinching factors are bare. First and foremost, some groups do not even know that they belong to the Bantoid, talk more of knowing and appreciating the amiable history of unity their progenitors built and sustained over the centuries (Tyolanga, Interview, 2019). Secondly, some Bantoid groups, due to campaigns of calumny against fellow Bantoid groups by non Bantu groups, have developed morbid allergy to be identified with the group they belong to. More worrisomely, some either instigate hatred against one another or add energy to other groups to prosecute hatred and even violence against fellow Bantoid groups (Tyolanga, Interview, 2019).

No matter the factors responsible for the seeming mutual rejection among the Bantoid groups, they suffer from similar consequences. The most disturbing consequence is the continued dehumanisation and treatment of the Bantoid groups as second class groups wherever they are found. In some cases, they present themselves in the hands of other groups to be used as willing tools to prosecute hate, discrimination, marginalization and violence against fellow Bantu groups. Worse still, by denying their root or their progenitor, there is the risk of their group soon coming into extinction. This trend calls for the gospel of atavism in order not only to preserve their identity but also to regain the lost glory.

Summary and Conclusion

The paper establishes that the term Bantu refers to conglomerates of ethnic nationalities that constitute the Benue-Congo language family which belongs to the Proto Niger-Congo language family. The Benue-Congo is the dominant language family in the Niger-Congo group of languages.

The Bantu ethnic nationalities constitute the dominant groups in Southern, Eastern and Central Africa. They constitute the dominant population in Africa put together.

The early history of the Bantustan ethnic nationalities was characterized by clusters of political systems organised on clannish platforms in forms of confederacies (Sagay and Wilson, 1978). They were powerful political systems with powerful military machines with which they carried out military expeditions for territorial expansion and defence. Each of the political clusters was led by a warlord who served as a military and political leader, especially during the Mfecane between 1820 and 1850 (Sagay and Wilson, 1978). Prominent among the warlords were Shaka of the Zulu, Dingiswayo also of the Zulu, Sobhuza of the Swazi, Zwangendaba of the Nguni, Soshangane of the Shangaba, Mzilikazi of the Ndebele, Moshweshwe of the Basuto, Sebitwane of the Kololo, Ngware of the Maseko, etc (Sagay and Wilson, 1978).

The later history of the Bantustan groups which was characterised by mass migrations in search of land was what brought them into conflicts with other groups and among themselves. The movements were instigated primarily by population explosion among the Bantu groups and the blockade of their expansion southward to the Cape Coast by the Europeans (Sagay and Wilson, 1978). It was this natural phenomenon which eventually led to the migration of some Bantoid groups into Nigeria and the Middle Belt region in particular.

The paper equally observes that the Bantustan groups also arrived in Nigeria in clusters of ethnic nationalities made up of the Mambiloid, Tivoid, Dakoid, Tikar, Platoid and Nupoid (Bami and Akombo, 2016), including the Mumuye, Ndola (Ngoro), Seyewa (Seiwa), Kulung, Yandang, among others. These groups, like those in other parts of Africa, exhibited very impressive degree of military prowess. It was this very quality of militarization which enabled them to transverse territories without any competent internal or external force to frustrate their agenda.

Unfortunately, the paper observes that the reverse has become the sad story of the Bantoid groups in the Middle Belt Region, particularly in Taraba State. The Bantustan tribes in Taraba State, in particular, have seemingly lost their sense of ancestral unity and identity. They have rather coiled into microscopic ethnic identities loyalty, which has remained the bane of their socio-political and economic predicament just as it is the case with other groups that have taken to this narrow-gauged sense of identity and loyalty (Ebegbulem, nd). These developments are the major causes of the multiplicity of inter-ethnic or group hostilities the contemporary Nigerian society is experiencing.

It is imperative to conclude, therefore, that it will pay Nigeria better if groups will revive and promote their broad ancestral ties as opposed to the present phenomenon where groups have developed and stick to microscopic ethnic identities and loyalty. In any society where allegiance is shifted from broad-based ancestral ties and unity to microscopic identities,

antagonism, suspicion, marginalisation, discrimination, dehumanisation, hatred, conflict and violence are bound to be the commonest features as it has become the case with contemporary Nigeria. These worrisome features seem to be the dominant adjectives to be used to describe the phenomenon of inter-group relations in the Middle Belt states like Benue, Taraba, Plateau, Kogi, Niger, Bauchi and Adamawa. This is largely because the region has the highest percentage of microscopic ethnic nationalities in Nigeria who have knowingly or unknowingly mortgaged their broad allegiance to bastardized microscopic blocs (Akombo and Nungwa, 2018).

It is one's belief, which, of course, is supposed to be the popular opinion, that the Middle Belt microscopic groups should borrow the golden leaf from efforts being made by larger conglomerates like the Afenifere (for all Yoruboid groups); the Ohanize Ndigbo (for all Igbooid groups);³⁶ the Miyeti Allah Kaota Hore (for all Fulfude groups even across Nigerian border) and, of recent, the earnest efforts being made under the canopy of Kwararafa (for all Jukunoid stocks). It is believed that where such broad movements are promoted in order to unite diverse groups under bigger common clusters, internal and external antagonism will be drastically minimized as it became the case in the history of Modern Europe following the attainment of balance of power (Grant and Temperley, 1927).

Just like it worked out well in Europe, it is not arguable that if Proto-groups in the Middle Belt, and Nigeria at large, will revive their ancestral ties to form such broad clusters, they will develop mutual respect and fear for one another, which will, in turn, minimize inter-group violence as it is being observed in the case of members of Afenifere and Odua Peoples' Congress (Yoruba) and Ohanize (Ibo), Miyeti Allah Kaota Hore (for the Fulfude within and across Nigerian border) and , of recent, Kwararafa Movement (among the Jukunoid groups) (Ebegbulem, nd). It is obvious that the benefits and protection subgroups within individual clusters will enjoy from the broad union will consciously or unconsciously check internal hostility. This is also the golden advantage the presently

bastardized Bantoid groups in the Middle Belt, and Nigeria at large, will enjoy if they also revive their well celebrated ancestral ties to form a cluster.

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