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AND RESISTANCE TO THE SOKOTO CALIPHATE, ca. 1800-1908

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Abstract 

This study is concerned with the foundation of the Ningi Chiefdom in the Jos Plateau and resistance to the Sokoto Caliphate. The literature on African resistance to European rule is abundant, but studies of African resistance to incursions by other Africans are scarce. Since Ningi illustrates the formation of an African state in response to external aggression, it serves as a classical model for reversal of an earlier scholarly tradition. This pattern of state formation contrasts sharply with the role of jihad in emirate formation. Beginning in the pre-jihad center of Tsakuwa, a Qu'ranic town near Kano city, Ningi resistance grew out of an initial revolt indirectly related to Caliphate policy, and went through a variety of definable stages. Sufi traits and millennial thought influenced this revolt. Further, a troublesome prince ('Dan Sarki) caused feelings of oppression at Tsakuwa among learned Hausa malams. Led by Malam Hamza in ca. 1846, the malams refused tax payment of Kharaj. Hence, they fled Tsakuwa, and migrated to the Ningi mountains, between Kano and Bauchi emirates, where they found the stateless non-Muslim Butawa, Warjawa, Kudawa, Pa'awa, and Sirawa, and organized them into open rebellion (fitnar) against Sokoto. The mountaineers made annual raids against surrounding emirates. Sokoto and Ningi attempted to resolve this conflict through diplomatic re-
lations, and Ningi received territorial recognition through the Islamic institution of aman (peace).

The frontier characteristics of the mountain people made them unique to Hausaland. The region was populated through a series of migrations and growth of new settlement communities. The Buta and Warji people represent the very ancient and original societies of West Africa. In contrast to the Butawa, who belong to the Benue-Congo language family cluster and its northern most extension in Jos complex, the Warjawa belong to the Chadic language group, but both represent elements of the original pre-Hausa speaking population. Acha (Digitaria Exilis) was the staple food.

Ningi was not essentially an isolated case in resistance to the established rule of Sokoto, who never conquered Ningi, and to the British, who did conquer Ningi in 1902. In the process of consolidation and expansion during the course of the nineteenth century, the Sokoto Caliphate experienced resistance from successor-states on the periphery of its frontiers, from areas without Islamic traditions, from unconquered areas at the fringes of emirates within the Caliphate, from inhabitants with special status under Sokoto rule, and finally, where normally least suspected, from individuals belonging to the rank-and-file of jihad and blood of Sokoto. Since ideology overrode group feeling (asabiyya), factors other than ethnicity must receive more attention in the present historiography of northern Nigeria than in the past in regard to revolts. The millennial character of the Hausa revolt in Ningi provides substance to this assessment.
The broader contribution of the Ningi study of African history lies not in the thematic development of resistance to aggression and to established rule, but in the non-conquest formation of Ningi by Hausa Malams through the use of glamorous magic called Sihr in Islamic ideology. The malams, therefore, were apostates in orthodox Islam. This micro-study adds to the literature on non-conquest "states" in pre-colonial Africa, and the increasing number of such states provides continuing challenge to the traditionally accepted "conquest" status of pre-colonial African states expressed in earlier scholarship on Africa.