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The Politics of History in Northern Nigeria

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Niels Kastfelt has been Head of the Centre of African Studies at the University of Copenhagen since January 2006. Before that he was assoc. professor at the Department of Church History at the University of Copenhagen, where he, among other things, has done research on Cristianity, historical thought and ethnic identity in northern Nigeria since the Second World War.

This paper is part of the outcome of this research.

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The Politics of History in Contemporary Africa

In recent years there has been a growing interest in the political use of history in Africa. It is difficult to tell whether there is today a greater or more explicit political use of history than before, but it is clear that the past as a political resource does attract a strong interest from politicians and others, and that this interest takes new and highly visible forms.

In this paper I shall discuss the politics of history in northern Nigeria. The discussion is based on a local case from the Nigerian Middle Belt which will be interpreted in the light of two wider contexts, that of the African continent in general and that of the specific Nigerian context. The aim of the paper is therefore double, aiming both at throwing light on the continental debate on history and on contemporary Nigerian politics and history.

The political use of history in contemporary Africa takes many forms and so does the scholarly study of it. Without pretending to cover the entire field some main forms can be identified:

“Patriotic history”: In a series of fascinating studies Terence Ranger and others have called attention to the emergence of “patriotic history” in contemporary Zimbabwe¹. Zimbabwean “patriotic history” is part of the so-called “Mugabeism” launched in recent years by the regime of Robert Mugabe. The core of Mugabeism is the special version of the past called patriotic history which is promoted systematically through television, radio, newspapers and in the schools. Ranger argues that patriotic history is different from the older “nationalist historiography” in several important ways:

¹ See especially Ranger (2004) and (2005); cf. White (2003).

“Nationalist historiography” proclaimed the nationalist movement as inclusive and even non-racial. It depicted nationalism as emancipatory...By contrast, “patriotic history” emphasises the division of the nation not only into races but also into “patriots” and “sell-outs” among its African population. It proclaims the need for authoritarian government in order to repress and punish the “traitors”, who are often depicted as very numerous – most of the urban population, for example, and large sections within the rural. Nationalist historiography espoused projects of modernisation and reform, extending in its radical versions to Socialist and egalitarian visions. By contrast, “patriotic history” has replaced the idea of Socialism with that of “authenticity”².

Key elements in patriotic history, then, are exclusion, authoritarianism and authenticity, and subscription to the official version of the past becomes an act of patriotism and political loyalty towards the government.

The Mugabean idea of linking political status to the acceptance of government-defined notions of patriotism and cultural authenticity is, of course, not an exclusively Zimbabwean phenomenon, although it is clearly more important in Zimbabwe than in other southern African countries. Substantially, is it also found in the notion of “Ivoirité” in the Ivory Coast which was initiated by the government of Henri Konan Bédié in 1994 and reinforced as a state doctrine after the military coup d’état in December 1999³. Like Zimbabwean patriotic history “Ivoirité” implies a direct link between cultural “authenticity,” “autochthony,” historical origins and political status.

Custom: links between origins, identity and rights have also been apparent in the widespread debates on the uses of “custom”, not the least in court cases which have often developed into stages for historical discussions about the legitimacy of claims to land or political office, turning court rooms into a fasci-

² Ranger (2005), pp. 7-8.

³ Akindès (2004), esp. pp. 20-21, 26-33; cf. Ceuppens and Geschiere (2005).

nating field for studying contemporary historical and historiographical debates in Africa⁴.

Local historiography: As is the case with “custom” the growing field of local historiography in many African countries functions as a challenge to the nation-state and is widely interpreted as a reflection of the fragmentation, or the crisis, of the nation-state in Africa. Authors of local historical accounts often aim at giving their community recognition and “a place in the world”, and historiography is widely seen as an important source of power of local communities in relation to the state⁵.

Memory and ritual history: historians and anthropologists interested in history as culture and practice (many of them working in the field of post-colonial memory research⁶) have stressed that historical thought and memory is often contained and transmitted in other forms than the written, and that such phenomena as African Pentecostalism involve intense reorientations towards the past at the level of the individual Christian⁷. Rituals are seen as alternatives to bureaucratic memory, as people gain access to historical knowledge through ritual practice⁸.

These trends in contemporary historiography and historical thought in African countries share some common features. Patriotic history, customary history and local history all belong to the same type of historiography. They are all presentist views of history and they all see history as a contemporary cultural and political resource, first of all by linking history with political loyalty and social rights. Subscribing to particular types of history becomes a declaration of

⁴ See Oomen (2005) on South Africa, Berry (2001) on Ghana, and Kuba and Lentz (2006) on land, custom and belonging in West Africa.

⁵ See Harneit-Sievers (2002) for many exciting case-studies. The expression “a place in the world” is taken from the title of Harneit-Sievers’ book.

⁶ See Werbner (1998).

⁷ See Meyer (1998), van Dijk (1998).

⁸ Ellis and ter Haar (2004), pp. 184-185, cf. Ellis 2002; Shaw (2002).

loyalty and a basis for claiming rights. These trends in other parts of the African continent can also be found in contemporary Nigeria which I discuss in the following.

The Nigerian Case

The Nigerian case that I shall present here has certain similarities to the debates on patriotic history and the politics of custom, first of all to the idea that acceptance of a particular view of history becomes an act of political loyalty and, consequently, that a rejection of this view becomes an act of failure or betrayal of communal solidarity. The discussion focuses on the Bachama community in the Nigerian Middle Belt, a predominantly Christian community in Adamawa State, its main town Numan being situated on the confluence of the rivers Benue and Gongola. The paper combines an interest in historiography and in religious and political history. When discussing the politics of the past in the Bachama community, in its past as well as present forms, I wish to demonstrate how particular religious ideas from the early 20th century shaped a new view of history and of historical writing which was then translated into political practice. This is demonstrated through the analysis of two cases from two different periods of time, one from the era of decolonization in the 1950s, the second from a recent clash between Christian Bachamas and their Muslim neighbours in 2003-2004.

The paper is first of all intended as a study in Nigerian intellectual history. The analysis is mainly structured through the employment of the historical narrative of the paper, where the “unity of plot” is shaped by tracing and linking particular religious and historical ideas and their implementation into political action from

the early 20th to the early 21st century⁹. The analysis is based on two premises. The first one is that the style of analysis is reformed modernist in the sense that it insists upon the existence of certain long-term intellectual trends which can be traced over long periods of time and which manifest themselves in new ways at different point in time. My focus is on dominant ideas and motifs, not on the plurality of ideas of history and the many different stories which do of course exist in Bachama society, but which are put at the background in favour of the Great Ideas of Bachama Christian historical thought. The second premise is that I concentrate on those aspects of Bachama Christianity which have been used by Bachama Christians as a source of cultural power.

These years the Nigerian Middle Belt, as other parts of Nigeria, is marked by frequent and violent community conflicts. These conflicts are usually, and with good reason, interpreted as clashes between different ethnic and religious communities competing for natural and political resources¹⁰, but I want to demonstrate that community conflicts and local politics in general are also conflicts between competing views of history, not only as it is increasingly discussed in Nigeria (as elsewhere) in relation to the indigene/settler debate¹¹, but also involving fundamental views of the past and its usability. My interest, though, is not only in how historical knowledge and historical imagination are used politically, but also how they have themselves been created historically.

Colonialism, Christianity and the Remaking of the Past

The Bachama community was colonised by the British from about 1900 and in 1913 the first Christian missionary, Niels H. Brønnum, arrived in Numan. He

⁹ The "unity of plot" phrase is from Aristotle's poetics, Aristotle (1965), pp.42-43.

¹⁰ A convenient survey of events up to 2002 is Hope Betrayed? (2002).

¹¹ For Nigeria see, for instance, Danfulani 2006.

was a medical doctor representing the Danish branch of the Sudan United Mission which set up its headquarters in Numan and immediately began its work of evangelising, medical and educational work. Thus began a long and still ongoing discussion on the relationship between Christian ideas and non-Christian Bachama ideas about religion, culture and history¹².

Both colonisation and the Christian mission enterprise shared an underlying endeavour – that of contributing to the remaking of the Bachama past. In principle, the colonisation project was secular as opposed to the missionary enterprise, but they both introduced new teleological views of history – in a secular and a religious version, respectively - which made Bachamas begin to think of them selves and their history in a new time perspective. In both versions history was seen as carrying meaning and as moving towards an end purpose, in the secular version towards state-building and in the religious version towards eternal life.

Initially, the British colonial assault on Bachama historical cosmology was implicit, not explicit. It was seen, for instance, when the old town of Numan was moved about a kilometre to the west in 1912, thereby also moving the Bachama away from their ancestors who were buried in the compounds of the old town¹³. Or it was shown by the appointment in 1921 of the new chief Mbi who was chosen not only because of qualifications embedded in historical traditions, but also because of his ability to create colonial and missionary allies¹⁴. At a more fundamental level, though not explicitly formulated till later, the British colonial administration attempted to persuade the Bachama that they had their special place in a larger historical scheme, in a long-term teleological movement towards state-building.

¹² For a survey of early Bachama colonial and missionary history see Kastfelt (1994), pp. 11-29.

¹³ Brønnum (1923), p. 27.

¹⁴ Nissen (1968), pp. 102-103.

The missionaries and the Bachama Christians were more explicit and more fundamental in their work on remaking the past, and this work of historical interpretation is the most important premise for that mode of historical thought which was manifested in the political events that I discuss later in this paper. Once Christianity was introduced to the Bachama it immediately led to debates about the new religious encounter. This intellectual process took place through the triple procedure of comparison, inscription and translation. Through comparison Bachamas and missionaries tried to get at a better understanding of Christianity and Bachama culture. Through inscription Christians attempted to incorporate Christianity into Bachama religion and history¹⁵. The modes of inscription which were most important in our context were inscription by anticipation and by prophecy¹⁶. Anticipation implied that Bachama Christians and missionaries sought to identify elements in traditional Bachama religion which pointed forward towards Christianity which was then seen as a fulfilment of developments which were already present in the traditional religion. Inscription by prophecy meant a search for indigenous prophets and prophecies which foretold and thereby legitimated the coming of Christianity and the Europeans. This process was facilitated by Christian translation where the wish for a vernacular Christianity led to an intensive work with Bible translation and to the composition of new hymns in the vernacular. The Bachama translation work produced its first results in 1914 when the first Bachama hymn was composed, and in 1915 when a translation of the Gospel of St. Mark was published¹⁷. Translation and the creation of a vernacular Christian language led to systematic comparisons of Biblical and Bachama religious ideas and by choosing, for instance, the name of one of the major Bachama spirits, Pwa, as the name for

¹⁵ I have taken the notion of Christian inscription from Peel (2000), pp. 295-304 where he discusses different “modes of Christian inscription”.

¹⁶ Peel (2000), p. 300.

¹⁷ Brønnum (1914); *Lemefeme da Yesu Kristo. Markus* (1915).

God, Christianity became embedded in traditional Bachama religious language¹⁸.

The work of religious comparison, inscription and translation through the lens of the Bible led to a synthesis of the local and the universal, because traditional religion and history were Christianised and made part of a universal development. This happened, for instance, when Niels H. Brønnum or government anthropologist C.K. Meek claimed a historical contact between the Bachama and ancient Egypt due to alleged similarities between ancient Egyptian and Bachama religion¹⁹. This whole enterprise of religious and historical interpretation and reconstruction demonstrated, in John Lonsdale's words, the peculiar ability of Christianity to "sacralize the local while introducing the global"²⁰. It created a new historical understanding in which Bachama Christians saw themselves and their past in a new way. Their remaking of the past implied both the collective past of the community and the individual past of Bachamas, often narrated through conversion stories. And the sacralization of the local past through the introduction of the global brought the Bachama and the Danish missionaries into "the longest durée of all, that of the world religions themselves, those great vehicles of trans-historical memory, carelessly re-activated in the consciousness of their adherents"²¹. Missionaries and Bachama came to see the religious encounter in Bachamaland as part of a world-historical development which enabled them to draw numerous parallels between the universal past and the local present.

Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries Bachama Christians have continued to work out the consequences of those religious and historical ideas which began to be formulated in the Bachama area from 1914-1915. As will be apparent in

¹⁸ Cf. Sanneh (1989) and Hastings (1997) on translation.

¹⁹ Brønnum (1926); Meek (1931).

²⁰ Lonsdale (2002), p. 173.

²¹ Peel (2000), p. 9.

the following sections this work continues today, and one can establish a direct line from the composition of the first Bachama hymn in 1914 and the translation of St. Mark in 1915 to the contemporary politics of history in the Nigerian nation-state.

The Politics of History in the Age of Decolonization

In the period immediately after the Second World War Nigerian politics took a new direction²². In 1946 the British colonial administration introduced the Richards Constitution which divided Nigeria into three regions – the North, the West and the East. Nigerian political representation was introduced at the federal and the regional level, and Nigerian political parties were allowed. The main political party in northern Nigeria was the Northern People's Congress (the NPC), dominated by the Islamic political elite in the North and widely perceived as a Muslim party. To Christian communities like the Bachama and others throughout the Middle Belt the NPC was perceived as the chief political enemy, and Christian dominated parties were founded in the Middle Belt, especially the Middle Zone League and the United Middle Belt Congress which were supported by most Bachamas²³. To the Christians of northern Nigeria the main political aim of the period was to avoid Muslim domination and to resist what they saw as a long-standing British alliance with Fulani Muslims in northern Nigeria.

Some situations and some eras are more history-making than others, and the 1940s and 1950s in northern Nigeria were an outstanding history-making epoch, first of all conditioned by the political development of the immediate pre-independence period. This makes the era interesting in a discussion of the

²² For the following survey see Dudley (1968).

²³ Kastfelt (1994), pp. 65-124.

politics of history, not the least because it introduced a theme of great historical and contemporary significance in Nigeria, namely the link between the political structure of the state and types of historical imagination. Debates about the structure of the Nigerian state were deeply informed by historical thought, and history was constantly mobilised as a political resource by all parties. One can identify two competing politico-historical visions, a state history and a universalised local history. In state history the historical development of Nigeria, and not the least the North, was seen as a movement towards still higher levels of state-building where the different ethnic groups coexisted in unity within the state. In this historical model emphasis was upon state-building, political centralization and ethnic assimilation which were the ideals of the federal Nigerian state developed by the British colonial administration. The universalised local history saw historical development as diverse and fragmented and emphasised ethnic autonomy and separatism as opposed to centralizing state-building. Its main concern was local history, but in a universalised form in which Christianity was the defining universalising element which linked local history to universal history. State history was promoted by the colonial administration and by the Northern People's Party, while universalised local history was championed by Christian intellectuals in communities like the Bachama.

The political battle between competing historical ideas was seen clearly in the debates over the so-called ethnic minorities in the second half of the 1950s. Chief Obafemi Awolowo and the Action Group had put the question of ethnic minorities and their fear of being dominated by ethnic majorities on the agenda of the 1957 constitutional conference in London²⁴. One of the demands of the ethnic minorities was the creation of a separate Middle Belt State. The Minority Commission or the Willink Commission, chaired by Sir Henry Willink, was established and toured Nigeria to collect information. The Commission eventually rejected the claims of the minorities and the underlying arguments of the

²⁴ The following is summarised from Kastfelt (1994), pp. 154-162.

Commission were embedded in the state history outlined above. This was first of all reflected in a memorandum to the Commission from the colonial administration of northern Nigeria²⁵. The memorandum argued against the creation of a new Middle Belt State and generally rejected the views of the minority groups. The arguments of the memorandum were full of historical reference, all of them stressing the unity of northern Nigeria. The memorandum stressed that the northern region of Nigeria covered the old Fulani and Kanuri empires and the old Igala and Jukun kingdoms, although it did acknowledge that some ethnic groups were outside these pre-colonial states. Nevertheless, it was argued, the long-term historical development was one towards unification. This was most clearly formulated in the concluding paragraphs of the memorandum where it is stated – in an interesting teleological historical interpretation – that “history, long before the advent of the British, has been busy with the process of unification”²⁶. The same historical view was inherent in the slogan of the NPC, “One North, One People”²⁷. This was a secular colonial parallel to the principle of religious inscription through anticipation practised by the Danish missionaries and Bachama Christians: as pre-colonial religious developments were seen to be anticipating and to be fulfilled in Christianity, so pre-colonial political developments were seen to be anticipating and to be fulfilled in the colonial state.

The state history of the colonial government was opposed by a counter-history from the Christian Bachama community. Bachama spokesmen appearing before the Commission in Numan in 1958 rejected the view that the Fulani were the “natural” rulers of the region and thus rejected any idea of a pre-colonial movement towards unification in which the Fulani played a prominent part. The

²⁵ *Memorandum to the Minorities Commission...* (1957).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, §207.

²⁷ Dudley (1968), pp. 116ff.; cf. Reynolds (1997) on the Northern People’s Congress’ political use of the legacy of the Sokoto Caliphate.

inherent historical view was one of different ethnic communities developing in a mutually linked but separate development²⁸.

The universalised local history was also promoted by Bachama Christians outside the framework of the Minorities Commission. The late 1940s and the 1950s saw the emergence of an unprecedented cultural movement in which Bachama culture and history were mobilised and reinterpreted as part of the Bachama attempts to maintain cultural autonomy and to resist Muslim influence. This movement was led by Bachama Christian intellectuals and it came in many forms. It did contain different counter histories, but they were united by a common concern of cultural resistance²⁹. One major example of this was a reinterpretation of Bachama traditions of origin³⁰. The Bachama and the neighbouring Bata people shared traditions of origin which emphasised that originally the two peoples were one but then split because of a conflict between two twins, the later chiefs of the Bachama and the Bata. They lived close to each other, but in separate kingdoms. Up to the 1950s the emphasis in this history had been on the different developments of the two peoples after their split, but now a new interpretation emerged which stressed the common origin of the two communities before the split. The two peoples were now seen as one and this was a clear example of the political mobilisation of the past.

The Bachama resistance to official state history was also seen in a growth of written accounts of personal and collective history. The authors of these accounts did not necessarily themselves see their writings as an act of opposition to a government view of history, but they all pointed in that direction, and they all shared the view that Bachama local history had to be written and that it had to be understood as part of universal Christian history. The growth of a new local historiography was mainly due to the growth of literacy in English

²⁸ *Minorities Commission. Minutes of the Proceedings...*(1958).

²⁹ Kastfelt (2003).

³⁰ For a fuller analysis of this see Kastfelt (1994), pp. 142-143.

and Hausa and to the expanding training of a literate and historically minded Bachama clergy, and both were facilitated by the politics of the time. The new local historiography grew in the 1960s and 1970s and beyond, and it came in many forms: autobiographical writing, works on Bachama language, folklore and literature, and this was later supplemented by writings by Bachama academics on Bachama history and eventually by the publication of the Bachama cultural journal *Linto* in the 1980s and 1990s³¹.

Styles of Thought in the Contemporary Politics of History: The Bachama-Muslim Conflict in Numan 2003-2004

During 2003 and 2004 the Bachama community experienced a series of dramatic and unprecedented events which had serious implications for the community and which displayed important dimensions of the contemporary political use of history³². The event which sparked it all off took place on Sunday the 8th of June 2003 in Numan, the main Bachama town with a population of 30-40,000 inhabitants. On the afternoon of the 8th of June a young Muslim man, a water hawker called Muhammudu Alisu, stabbed to death a female Pentecostal preacher, Zinkai Ethan, a Bachama from Numan. Apparently their clash resulted from a disagreement over the price of water, but the event had far-reaching consequences. Bachama Christians, and especially young Christian men, immediately interpreted the murder as the act of a Muslim against a Christian and therefore as part of a wider pattern: it was yet another example of Muslim aggression against the Christian Bachama. The young Christians mobilised and started attacking Muslims and their property throughout Numan and within hours the town was in flames. Christians

³¹ See e.g. Pwanahomo (1947); Aleyideino (1948); Jangare (1948); Pweddou (1955); Kastfelt (2004); Pweddou (1977); Asodati (n.d.).

³² The following is a brief summary of a detailed account of the events to be found in Kastfelt (2005). In the present context I concentrate on the types of historical thought involved in the crisis.

attacked and burned down the central mosque of Numan and destroyed numerous shops and houses belonging to Muslims, and Muslims burned down several churches and property belonging to Christians. Before midnight 15 people had been killed, and eventually the Nigerian Mobile Police moved in and stopped the fighting.

The following year, in June 2004, the Bachama-Muslim clash resumed, partly resulting from tensions in the town as the first anniversary of the killing of Zinkai Ethan was approaching, partly due to disagreement between Christians and Muslims over the rebuilding of the central mosque which was burned down in June 2003. Violence escalated, many people were killed (estimates ranged from about 50 to more than 100), a great deal of property was destroyed and hundreds of people were made homeless. Eventually, the state government of Adamawa State intervened and deposed the Bachama chief, H.R.H. Freddie Bongo, and subsequently appointed and installed his successor, Mr. Asaph Zadok.

The Numan crisis was in many respects a typical Middle Belt conflict. Since the mid-19th century the Middle Belt has experienced permanent tensions and conflicts between Muslim Hausa and Fulani people and smaller ethnic groups, many of which became increasingly Christian during the 20th century. Many local communities fought Islamic expansion and the Christian churches often came to function as the basis for resistance to Muslims. Many ethnic groups gradually came to see themselves as Christian, and parallel to this a new Middle Belt identity developed, shared primarily by Christians throughout the Middle Belt. Today, the numerous community conflicts in the region are fought between groups which define themselves in ethnic and religious terms and which compete over scarce natural and political resources.

The Bachama-Muslim conflict of 2003-2004 was part of this pattern, but that is not my main concern here. In a discussion of history and politics the crisis is interesting because it reflects some of the fundamental aspects of Bachama historical thought today. They can all be traced back to at the least the early 20th century and the historical and cultural work of early Bachama Christians. I identify three styles of Bachama historical thought: heroic history, Biblical history and paranoid history. These styles of history are not shared by all Bachama, but most would subscribe to them as styles of thought, as a particular way of approaching the past through some dominant motifs. Counter histories in other styles do indeed exist among the Bachama, but in the present context my main interest is in dominant styles.

Heroic history. Heroic history is closely linked to one of the great codes of Bachama historical and political thought – the idea that the central motif in Bachama history since the mid-19th century is the confrontation between the Muslim Hausa and Fulani and the Bachama. Bachama history is seen as series events linked together by this underlying theme which keeps emerging at various points in time. In the eyes of many Bachama this goes back to the legendary Bachama warrior Makwada who fought the Fulani jihad in the mid-19th century, and the theme resurfaces in the colonial period where the British colonial administration was seen as the ally of the Fulani and promoted their regional influence. In modern Bachama history the same motif returns again and again and provides the most important key to making sense of the politics which takes place around the Bachama, and the historical memory of these conflicts resonates in contemporary conflicts like the Numan crisis in 2003-2004. These classic conflicts define the stage for heroic history. They are seen as “moments of truth” where Bachamas have to stand up and fight for their land and their way of life. Bachama heroism stresses masculine virtues of martial courage, and the heroic moments of history are seen as those moments where superior civic virtues are materialised in concrete events,

much in the style of Carlyle's Victorian discussion of The Hero³³. Many Bachama whom I interviewed about the Numan crisis would see it as one of these heroic moments of truth where the Bachama way of life had to be defended.

Biblical history. The Numan crisis was also reflecting that major historiographical manoeuvre which Bachama Christian began when Christianity was introduced into Bachamaland in 1913 and which I have outlined above. The Bible was the hermeneutical key to this style of history, and the Bible was read typologically which enabled Bachamas to identify Biblical history and their own. It was, to repeat John Lonsdale's words quoted above, this interpretation which sacralized the local past while introducing the global and it created the kind of universalised local history which appeared so strongly among the Bachama in the 1950s. It made it possible, for instance, to claim a historical link between the Bachama and the Middle East, a generally accepted idea in contemporary Bachamaland. The alleged similarities between the Biblical world and traditional Bachama culture made it possible to use the Bible as a hermeneutical gateway to world history, thereby incorporating Bachama history into world history and giving the community "a place in the world".

Biblical history was clearly at work in the Numan crisis of 2003-2004. It is reflected in the following statement by a young Bachama man who took part in the fighting and whom I interviewed on 23 June 2003 in Numan. He saw the crisis as an attempt by the Muslims – "the strangers" of Numan – to take over the land of the Bachama:

---they are strangers, the land is ours. We own the land. We will not let it happen in Numan as it happened in Jos where the Muslims attacked the Christians there. Here in Numan it is like in Israel. We own the land as the Jews own the land of Palestine, it is Biblical land. The Muslims, the Palestinians, come in as strangers and want

³³ Carlyle (1896), pp. 3-4; cf. the discussion of heroic history in Sahlins (1985), pp. 35-54.

to take over the land from the owners. It is the same here. The Hausa and the Fulani come in and settle here and want to take over the land from us who are the owners of the land.

The statement reflects a heroic understanding of history and sees the Numan crisis as one of those defining moments of truth where Bachama heroism must be awakened. The link between Bachama history and world history through the Biblical narrative is seen in the parallels between the situation of the Bachama and that of the Jews in Israel, a very popular identification in Bachamaland. The young Bachama fighter also points to a crucial aspect of the Numan conflict when he links history, land and community conflict by calling upon history, both the regional history of the Middle Belt and the history of the Middle East, to justify Bachama claims to the land.

A variant of Biblical history could be called “covenant history”, reflected in the identification between the Jews and the Bachama. When many Bachama Christians accept or are attracted to this idea, the appeal is clearly the notion of a covenant between God and his chosen people, not just giving the Bachama “a place in the world” but also the status of a chosen people, to whom Christianity was first preached in the Adamawa region³⁴.

Paranoid history. In 1965, American historian Richard Hofstadter published his famous essay on “The paranoid style in American politics”. Hofstadter traced a particular conspiratorial view of the world from the eighteenth century through to the twentieth century which he called a paranoid style of thought:

When I speak of the paranoid style, I use the term as a historian of art might speak of the baroque or the mannerist style. It is, above all, a way of seeing the world and of expressing oneself.---In the paranoid style, as I conceive it, the feeling of persecution is central, and it is indeed systematized in grandiose theories of conspiracy.---

³⁴ A contemporary example of this view is Goro (2004), written by a Bachama pastor in the Lutheran church.

the clinical paranoid sees the hostile and conspiratorial world in which he feels himself to be living as directed specifically against him; whereas the spokesman of the paranoid style finds it directed against a nation, a culture, a way of life whose fate affects not himself but millions of others³⁵.

Hofstadter added that “the paranoid mentality is far more coherent than the real world, since it leaves no room for mistakes, failures, or ambiguities”³⁶. The paranoid style provides a master story which unites visible and invisible forces into a unified, coherent and all-embracing pattern whose special attraction is that leaves no room for “mistakes, failures, or ambiguities”.

The paranoid style of thought comes in various forms: as a paranoid style of politics, a paranoid style of religion (seen, for example in paranoid styles of Christianity or Islam), or a paranoid style of history. This was clearly visible in the Numan crisis, and this form of political, religious and historical thought has not only become part of local political cultures in the Middle Belt, but has also been paralleled in recent years by the growth of social enclaves, or zones, in northern Nigeria.

In the Numan crisis the paranoid style was seen in countless rumours and speculations on the true nature of the conflict, both on the part of Muslims and Christians. Briefly stated, among the Christians all these rumours and speculations pointed in the same direction, namely that the killing of the female preacher in June 2003 was part of an all-encompassing Muslim conspiracy to take control of the Bachama and their land. The evidence for this was found in all sorts of coincidences, curious and strange episodes which could not be otherwise explained, etc. The same was the case among the Muslims who saw the events as part of Christian master plan to eliminate Muslims from Christian areas.

³⁵ Hofstadter (1965), p. 4.

³⁶ Hofstadter (1965), p. 36.

Among the Bachama Christians the paranoid style was yet another manifestation of their basic view of the driving forces in northern Nigerian and Bachama history: the ever recurring clash between Hausa/Fulani and Bachama. In that sense there was no difference between the great Bachama warrior Makwada's battles with the Fulani in the 19th century and the Numan crisis. In this view of history the basic pattern of history repeats itself constantly, almost creating a historical space beyond time.

The paranoid style is of course not new to the Numan scene, but there is no doubt that it is stronger today than, say, in the 1970s when I first started working among the Bachama³⁷. Today, the paranoid style is also accompanied by a parallel social development in the shape of a growing enclavisation of northern Nigerian communities. The sharp Bachama distinction between "the owners of the land" and "the strangers", which kept recurring during the Numan crisis, is reflected throughout the region – as it is in many other parts of the African continent - in similar distinctions between "indigenes" and "settlers", and social enclaves or zones are reshaping the urban communities along religious or ethnic lines³⁸. An "enclave culture" is emerging in Bachamaland as elsewhere in the region where social pluralism is being replaced by a growing concern with defining, creating and maintaining community boundaries³⁹.

The growth of paranoid historical thought and of enclave culture in northern Nigeria does, of course, reflect a crisis of the nation-state and its notion of citizenship, or a "crisis of postcolonial citizenship"⁴⁰. At the same time, however, it embodies a clash between competing historical ideas, each of them carrying different views of the state. As in the 1950s we see a connection between

³⁷ I have analysed earlier forms of political paranoia in the Bachama area in Kastfelt (1989).

³⁸ Cf. Danfulani (2006); Last (2006) discusses a similar development in the Islamic communities of the North.

³⁹ The term "enclave culture" is from Sivan (1995).

⁴⁰ Cf. Mamdani (2001), pp. 19-39.

different models of the state and different views of historical development, manifested in what I termed “state history” and “universalised local history”. The paranoid style of historical thought among the Bachama and others rejects, or is totally alien to, any idea of a nation-state in which ethnic groups coexist. To the contrary, it represents a conflict model of history in which the driving force, or the leading motif or Grand Design, is a confrontation between Fulani/Hausa and Bachama, and between Christians and Muslims. In political terms the paranoid style of thought (be it in history, politics or religion) is mirrored in the ongoing political fragmentation of the Nigerian state which began with the introduction of constitutional regionalism with the Richards Constitution of 1946 and has since continued with the fragmentation of the state into still smaller units – regions, states, local governments and now urban enclaves and zones⁴¹. One may thus draw a simple Durkheimian picture where types of state structure are mirrored in types of thought. In terms of political rights and claims a similar correspondence exists, juxtaposing the indigene/settler model and the citizenship model, the first implying a historical model of state fragmentation, the second a model of state-building.

Concluding Remarks

In this paper I have discussed aspects of the politics of history in northern Nigeria, mainly through an approach of intellectual history. I have argued that Bachama political tradition is firmly embedded in particular styles of historical thought which are activated in concrete political events. From this discussion two brief general remarks should be made.

⁴¹ Cf. Suberu (2001)

Firstly, in Bachama historical thought – as in that of many other Christian communities in Africa – the Bible has been the Great Code⁴². Through the Bible local history has been reinterpreted and sacralized and the Bible has simultaneously introduced the global and enabled local history to be incorporated into universal history, turning local and Biblical history into a powerful source of identity and political power.

Secondly, the growth of the paranoid style of history and the accompanying enclave culture brings us back to the initial reference to “patriotic history” in Zimbabwe. There are obvious differences between Zimbabwean patriotic history and Nigerian paranoid history, first of all that in Zimbabwe the new history aims at justifying authoritarianism and one-party dominance, while in Nigeria paranoid history functions at the local level. Yet, the two have important similarities: they are both exclusive views of history, including the loyals, the authentic and the indigenous and excluding the enemies, the non-authentic and the strangers/settlers. Patriotic and paranoid history demands loyalty, and history is mobilised to define and maintain strong community boundaries, be it at the national or the local level. Historians and others interested in historical thought in Africa should therefore take patriotic history, paranoid history and similar phenomena seriously as powerful new forms of historical thought.

⁴² This is the title of Frye (1982).

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