

Changing Relations of Production in the Tiv Region of Central Nigeria since the Colonial Period

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Abstract

The study examines the changing relations of production viewed from the perspective of the total transformation that occurred in the Benue Valley area, starting from the era of colonialism through the remaining years of the 20th century, up to the era of globalization. Attention is paid to the relationships through the period, between those who controlled the means of production, and the producers or the rest of the members of the households or family groups and kindred which were the basic social units. There is focus on the distribution or use of land, deployment/ use of labour, the organization of production and the distribution of proceeds thereof. The specific changes in these relationships, particularly in terms of access to the means of production, organization, nature and distribution of the proceeds of production, the factors that drove these changes and their implications for economic production and rural livelihoods are examined. Extant literature on the Tiv economy and society, and information collected in the area were useful for interpretations and conclusions in the study. The findings of the study add to the body of knowledge on the changes and their implications on socio-economic development in post-colonial Africa. The knowledge is useful in interrogating the depth of the challenges of contemporary Nigeria towards determining and shaping the content, quality and implementation of socio-economic policy.

Keywords: Tiv, Production, labour, economy

Introduction

There is quite a plethora of researches on the colonial experience and transformation of the Tiv society in the 20th century, but some developments in the remaining years of the 20th century, no doubt, demands more research attention.¹ The focus here is on the changing relations of production among the Tiv and this is interrogated from the perspective of the social change process

¹ For instance, TesemchiMakar, *A History of Political Change in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1994), KwaghkondoAgber, "European Commercial Enterprise and Underdevelopment in Tiv land, 1900-1960", *PhD, Thesis*, Department of History: University of Jos; 1994, Saawua G. Nyityo, *Political Centralization in Nigeria: Nature and Transformation of Tiv Society, 1900-1965*, (Ibadan: Book Builders, 2011), BayerDzeremo, *Colonialism and the Transformation of Authority in Central Tivland, 1912-1960*, (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2002), and KwaghkondoAgber, "The Tiv Economy in the Colonial Era" in AliyuA Idrees and YakubuAbokiOchefu(eds.), *Studies in the History of Central Nigerian Area vol. 1*. (Lagos: C.S.S Ltd, 2002).



that occurred in the Benue Valley area over the years, starting from the era of colonialism through the remaining years of the 20th century, up to the era of globalization. Social change is 'a significant alteration in the basic structures of the society or the social and material life of a social group'.² The social change process of the 20th century and the early decades of the 21st generally led to the increasingly changing Tiv economy and further created developments which in significant ways altered the relations of production in the area.³ The increasingly changing Tiv economy led to the following: changes in land tenure practices and changes in land relations of the people, increasing fragmentation of hitherto large compounds, weakening of the age-grade system which contributed to social justice, law and order, welfare and stable peace, and the declining levels of polygamy which was also central for the enhancement of social and economic status of individuals up to the mid -20th century. The focus here is not on the colonial 'political labour' force/conscriptions for military and public work force or the urban based post-colonial organized labour and related waged labour, rather the focus is on the rural populace and production in the Tiv area.

Production and Relations of Production in the Tiv area up to the 20th Century

According to Ake, social relations of production or relations of production are the relations that people enter into with each other in the course of production.⁴ Marx and Engels used different terms to refer to the same concept of production relations. For example, in the work "The Holy Family", Marx used the term "social relations" to describe the concept of production relations.⁵ Also in another work "German Ideology", Marx used the term "social relations" to refer to the concept of production relations. In the same work, Marx used the term "communicative form" to describe the concept of production relations. The term "Production relation" was officially used by Marx and Engels in the work "Poverty of Philosophy", to name the concept of production relations. In the perspective of Marx and Engels, relations of production are 'the sum total of social relationships that people must enter into in order to survive, to produce, and to reproduce their means of life.' The relations of production, from the perspective of Marxism -Leninism, are the relations between people in the process of production which include ownership relations with the means of production, relations in organization, and relations in the distribution of factors of the production process.⁶ From the ideas of Marx and Engels, relation of production is a concept that refers to the relationship between people in material production and product exchange in a mode of production of a given

²Alamveabee E. Idyorough, *Sociological Analysis of Social Change in Contemporary Africa*, (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2015), 1.

³The 20th century social change process in Nigeria was made possible by the social, economic and political structures of colonialism. The globalization process of the 21st century is believed to have implications for social change especially with regards to the spread of ideas, cultures and information.

⁴Claude Ake, *A Political Economy of Africa*, (England: Longman Group Limited, 1981), 12.

⁵Nguyen ThiThuy, "Theory on Production Relation and Change of Production in the Current Society", Vol. 17 Issue 3-2021, *IJARIE-ISSN(0)-2395-4396*, 908.

⁶Thuy, "Theory on Production Relation and Change of Production", 909.

society.⁷These social relations are determined by the level and nature of the development of productive forces. These include, on the one hand, the relations between the direct producers or workers and their employers or those who control their labour, and the relations between the direct producers themselves on the other hand.⁸The relations of production connect the productive forces and human beings in the production process. Relations of production are simply not just about the ownership of means of production, but these (relations of production) are relations between persons while means of production are relations between persons and possessions or things. Relations of production have capacity to determine the direction of productive forces. While the relation that occurs between the employer and worker is that of domination, the workers themselves relate on the basis of cooperation. In this paper, the principal concern is the relationships between and among the Tiv in the process of production which include relations with the means of production, relations in organization, and relations in the distribution of the factors of the production process.

Tiv land was considered by the beginning of the twentieth century to be part of the plains of the Benue Valley stretching from 6° 30' N to 8°N, and from 8°E to 10° E.⁹ The Tiv area located within the Guinea Savannah of Nigeria was characterised by various grasses and trees and disparities in the composition of the soils in the area. Through bush fallowing/shifting cultivation and cropping cycle, the Tiv produced root and tubers such as yam, cassava, and sweet potatoes and grains including sorghum, millet, groundnuts, bambarra nuts, beniseed, cowpeas, soya beans, maize, rice and varieties of vegetable. Other crops cultivated by the people include cotton, tobacco, and varieties of fruits. Farm production was carried out through different sources of labour, clearly defined labour roles and simple farm implements. Apart from food and crop production engaged through time, the Tiv people engaged in auxiliary economic activities. The major economic activities in this regard include: hunting, fishing, keeping livestock, trade in various items, handicraft industries and manufacturing –some of which offered complementary means of livelihoods. Makar has explained the significance of these economic activities to the Tiv people in the pre-colonial period¹⁰.

The social change process of the 20th century and after, generally led to the increasingly changing Tiv economy that further produced developments which had implications for changing production relations. First, there were the changes in the land tenure practices and changes in land relations of the people (caused by population growth, state land control and management policies urbanization, land degradation and cash crop production) rendered impracticable the principles of self-sufficiency, equity fairness in access, distribution and use of land. This led to the emergence of new forms of land holdings- land rent, purchase, and borrowing which were abhorred in the Tiv

⁷ Ibid.

⁸T. Bottomore, (ed), *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 178.

⁹Paul and Laura Bohannan, *Tiv Economy*, (London: Longmans, 1968), 3. See also Paul Bohannan, *Tiv Farm and Settlement*, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1954), 1.

¹⁰Makar, *A History of Political Change*, 16-17.

society up to the early years of the 20th century. These new forms of land holdings weakened the traditional authority's control over land and labour both at the household and kindred levels. As a result of poor access to land and the difficulty in securing access through the new forms of land acquisition, this development deepened permanent and seasonal migration for alternative sources of livelihood with varied implications depending on migration types and experiences. For example, this resulted in shortage of labour force for some households and communities, a situation over which household and community leaderships had no control. Second, there was the increasing fragmentation of hitherto large compounds that comprised several families including extended family members into smaller household units comprising few immediate and in some cases, few extended family members. It should be noted that extremely large compounds which comprised of several family households as it were in the past provided the platform for effective administration at the family level necessary for cohesion and the pursuit of collective progress. Over the years, most parts of the Tiv area especially the Southern and Central areas have been characterized by smaller households basically comprising immediate family members due to increasing fragmentation of compounds and this led to the decentralization of authority which threatened collective progress and cohesion.¹¹ Apart from the issue of population growth, the fragmentation of compounds was necessitated by the desire of persons to either protect family land against encroachment by building homesteads on such land portions or to breakaway away from tyrannical compound heads.

Third, there was the gradual decline of the age-set system and grouping, guided and directed by elders in society which was mobilized for the general welfare, wellbeing, progress and stability of members in the society. It should be noted that the Tiv society suffered the weakening of social, cultural, economic and political institutions that determined and sustained social justice, law and order, development and stable peace up to the mid-20th century. One critical area in which the age-set contributed to the welfare and progress of society was the provision of cooperative labour which was one of the different forms of labour the peasant farmers in Tiv society used in addition to household labour, share-cropping, slave and indentured labour. Labour supply in pre-colonial Tiv society did not enter the factor market. Labour was owned communally and was freely offered. It was neither sold nor bought or exchanged for anything. Members of the household or the kindred as it were, formed labour groups and worked collectively in turns on each other's farms. Labour was by no means traded for any reasons, even though trade by barter existed through which the proceeds of economic production which was basically subsistence were exchanged.¹² There is evidence of the minimal use of hired youth labour force by a class of successful men in some few places in the Tiv area early in the 20th century.¹³ Payment for such labour was made to compound heads on whose directives the youth were mobilized for the activities. The rapid spread of agro-chemicals made possible by increasing awareness towards the end of the 20th century to some extent reduced the quantum of human labour expended on

¹¹Information based on observations and data collected from many parts of Tiv area by the present author.

¹²Idyorough, *Sociological Analysis of Social Change*, 108.

¹³Bohannan, *Tiv Economy*, 69.

farm tasks such as clearing and weeding of grasses since.¹⁴ These agro-chemicals were applied on farms before and after planting of crops to get rid of grasses and pests and during the process of storage and preservation of produce. Many farmers had to hire the services of persons who possessed the knowledge and acquired the equipment for the application of these agro-chemicals.

Another development was the declining levels of polygamy which was also central to the enhancement of social and economic status of individuals for many years up to the mid-20th century. Polygamy was one of the ways through which households increased their productive capacity especially in terms of the utilization of household labour comprising several productive women and men within a household. Exchange marriage which the Tiv practiced and considered as a stabilising factor and means of social control was abolished by the British administration and replaced with bride price in 1927 because it was a contradiction of capitalism and did not fit into the attempts to 'modernise' the Tiv society.¹⁵ Moreover, cooperative labour arrangements were mobilized and utilised along marriage ties during moments of critical labour needs.

The Tiv society was organized according to clans within which were kindred depending on the sizes of the clans. The kindred consisted of compounds under the control of a compound head-*orya*. The family group comprised related households under an elder and at the kindred level were a group of households supported by a council of elders in the land. The household was the primary social unit. The compound heads and other leaders of the society controlled production which gave them access to its proceeds. The family heads controlled access to the means of production, distributed production proceeds and rewarded deserving members.¹⁶ The Tiv society was basically egalitarian. This meant that "...social relations within the society were influenced by egalitarian and welfarist principles and practices that kept to the barest minimum cases of extreme misery within the society."¹⁷ Evidence shows that the land tenure system gave all members of the society adequate access to sufficient production to cater for themselves and their households.¹⁸ Those who for misfortune or any reasons, could not take care of themselves could always have their kin willing to sustain them. But this does not mean the lack of initiative in Tiv pre-colonial society.¹⁹ The communalism entailed that the relations of production were devoid of exploitation and antagonism. Varvar has argued that the egalitarian and welfarist practices in the pre-colonial Tiv society were

¹⁴Information based on data collected from some parts of Tiv area by the present author.

¹⁵Nyityo, *Political Centralization in Nigeria*, 61.

¹⁶YakubuAbokiOchefu, "Men Work Harder, but Women Work Longer; An Analysis of Gender Relations, Labour and Production in Idoma and Tiv Societies", in OkpehOchayiOkpeh, and Dung Pam Sha (eds), *Gender, Power and Politics in Nigeria*, (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2007), 64.

¹⁷ToryinaAyatiVarvar, "Pre-Colonial Social and Political Structure in Tivland", in YakubuAbokiOchefu, Joe Iyo and ToryinaAyatiVarvar(eds.) *A History of the Peoples of Benue State*, (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2007), 152.

¹⁸Bohannan, *Tiv Economy*, 81, Bohannan, *Tiv Farm and Settlement*, 31-32.

¹⁹The image of pre-colonial Tiv society as 'inert mass of men lacking initiative' is contained in P.C Lloyd, *Africa in Social Change: Changing traditional Societies in the Modern World*, (London: Penguin, 1972), 42.

important in social relations but did not rid the society of social differentiation defined along economic lines.²⁰ For one, elders had high status in Tiv society and the high status was sustained by various forms of achievements. Outside of few non-economic achievements such as (outstanding knowledge of customary law, history, and the possession of *tsavand akombo*), economic considerations were the main determinants for social status. The elders were not people of poor economic standing because, as heads of their respective immediate and sometimes extended families, they had control over the labour and economic resources of their families. Thus, “elders could be regarded as constituting a social class that had control over the labour and resources of their respective families”²¹. Those who successfully distinguished themselves economically in the society earned the title of *shagbaor* (men of prestige)²².

The sexual division of labour in many societies is a function of culture, ecosystem and social change.²³ Sexual division of farm labour among the Tiv in the past was invariably framed in the natural or biological differentiation between male and female which reflected the notion of capacities inherent in both sexes. The tasks considered to be heavy tasks were done by men while those considered less strenuous were performed by women. Men carried out such tasks as clearing of farm fields in terms of pulling of grasses and cutting of trees before cultivation, and making of ridges and mounds. These involved the use of sticks, machetes and big hoes. Planting of seeds, weeding of grasses, harvesting of crops with the use of smaller hoes and sticks, preservation and storage were the basic tasks performed by women. It is important to mention that the planting of some crops like yam which the people rated very highly, was done by both men and women. Marketing of household produce was also done by women. Apart from the food production, this division of labour on the basis of sex was carried out in other forms of work. Hunting of game, looking after the farms and livestock were tasks for men. The gathering of building materials, and building was done by men, gathering of materials and basket and cloth was done weaving were done by men. Also, wood, works, leather and iron works were done by men. Pottery, home decoration works and the production of alcoholic beverages were carried out by the women.

Besides sexual basis, there was division of labour by age. It was however, difficult to separate age from division of labour by status because status was connected to age. A compound head-usually the oldest man in the compound carried out light tasks such as overseeing his farms and those of persons under his authority.²⁴ Division of labour by age is interpreted from the nature and amount of work shared between working-age men and women, and children or young adults. For instance, young boys performed the tasks of making mounds and ridges, and looking after farms and livestock. Young women and girls performed the same tasks as the older women under childbearing age. There was division of labour based on social and political standing. Men who

²⁰Varvar, “Pre-colonial Social and Political Structure in Tivland”, 153.

²¹Varvar, “Pre-colonial Social and Political Structure in Tivland”, 152-155

²²Ibid. 153.

²³H. A. Alahira, “The Origin and Nature of Traditional Gender Division of Labour among the Berom of the Jos Plateau in Northern Nigeria”, in *International Journal of Gender and Women's Studies*, September, 2014, Vol.2, No. 3, 53.

²⁴Bohannan, *Tiv Economy*, 68-69.

distinguished themselves in society performed neither farm work nor any other forms of labour beyond overseeing work on their farms and other works.

Relations of Production in the Tiv area since the end of the 20th Century

Agriculture remained the major economic activity of the Tiv people who, by post-colonial political arrangements, predominantly fall under Benue, Nasarawa, Taraba and Plateau states, which they engaged using basically rudimentary technology and different labour sources. The basic features of agriculture in the Tiv area particularly towards the closing years of the 20th century onward include; changes in land tenure system, the reduction of fallow periods, reduction of farm sizes, introduction of new crops such as a wide variety of tree crops, and other crops and changes in crops, among other changes. Tiv people are found in fourteen out of the twenty-three local council areas in Benue state and the vast majority of the population resided in the rural areas. The Tiv speaking local council areas in Benue state are Buruku, Gboko, Guma, Gwer-East and Gwer-West. Others are Katsina-Ala, Konshisha, Kwande, Logo, Makurdi. Tarkaa, Ukum, Ushongo and Vandeikya.

The egalitarian and welfarist principles and practices that defined social relations in the pre-colonial Tiv society began to decline fundamentally and thus was the widening of social differentiation which even existed in pre-colonial period (in spite of egalitarian and welfarist principles and practices) at an early stage and became even more pronounced in the course of time and some historical developments.²⁵ Over the years up to the early years of the new century, while differentiation in the society became widened and sustained along social, economic and political lines, social inequality also deepened.

The new forms of land holdings: land rent, purchase, and borrowing resulting from the changes in land tenure practices and land relations fundamentally altered the relations among men in the society and created challenges of livelihood security. Consequently, land relations were in most situations no longer determined or governed by some egalitarian principles (of fairness, equity and justice) but by material considerations. It increasingly became difficult for many people to have access to land through the customary considerations especially in the Southern and Central areas, but it became possible to get access to land for production through rent, borrowing or outright purchase from some family heads and other authorities who had family lands in their possession. In many places, big rural farmers who effectively maximized the increasing poverty levels in the Tiv area acquired more land spaces from the poor and also utilized the labour of their youth for the expansion of tree plantations and food crops at the expense of the poor in most parts of Tiv land.²⁶ This jeopardized the livelihood security of land users of the time and posed potential threats for the livelihoods of future generations. Consequently, there were increasing levels of migration in search of alternative sources of livelihood with varied implications at home and at the destination.

²⁵Social differentiation and structure became more pronounced in the era of the Tor-Agbande (chieftaincy) institution and the era of the institution of slavery and slave trade. See Varvar, "Pre-colonial Social and Political Structure in Tivland", 155-156.

²⁶Information collected in the Tiv area by the present author.

The fragmentation of compounds, declining age-grade system and the declining levels of polygamy had significant impact on labour relations. Apart from utilizing the household labour, it became common place for people to explore other sources of labour that emerged in the last years of the 20th century. The use of hired labour for payment which was minimal as previously discussed, became widespread practice in most parts of the Tiv area by the end of the 20th century but the youth in this period, negotiated and collected payments for their labour directly from clients especially following the fragmentation of compounds which also became common. Cooperative labour groups from local church associations, local community based associations, market groups, among others provided labour which could be paid for and utilized for different farming activities such as weeding, clearing, tilling and harvesting of crops. Cooperative labour groups formed by either young men or women also offered their services to perform various farm activities for payment. Also, young men and women individually rendered labour services for payments.²⁷ This is not however to suggest the total disappearance of communal work in labour relations in the post-colonial the Tiv society. Available evidence suggest that, in some places, it was possible for some members of society (the weak, old, and the physically challenged) to seek and obtain help from cooperative labour groups, young men and women for production.²⁸ The emphasis is rather on the extent of commercialization of labour relations. Idyorough has argued that "...the change in value system has brought support to the capitalist values of selling labour in order to earn a living...today, labour in Tivland has been commoditized and commercialized. Labour has entered the factor market and has become an article for sale and purchase."²⁹ The maximization of marriage ties for cooperative labour arrangement, mobilization and utilization existed in the Tiv society up to the early decades of the 21st century.

There were little significant changes in the nature or basis of division of labour among the Tiv. By the end of the 20th century, there was increasing role of men in the performance of farm labour. For instance, there was increasing role of men in the gathering and planting of cassava which had over the years become as highly rated as yam or indeed replaced yam in some parts of the Tiv area in terms of production scale, consumption commercial and value. The clearing of farm fields for cultivation using agro-chemicals, chemical process of weed removal, and the application of chemical fertilizers were performed by men. The increasing production, consumption and distribution rates of cassava in the late 20th century were linked to the problems of poor access to land and loss of soil fertility³⁰.

During this period, many compound heads could no longer have access to the proceeds of production at the households or family groups because of their loss of control over much of the production process. Most people lived in smaller,

²⁷Part of the reasons for the formation of cooperative labour groups of most local community based associations in this period was for raising cash to fund the activities of these associations. For many individuals, providing labour was for the purpose of raising cash.

²⁸Information based on data collected from many parts of Tiv area by the present author.

²⁹Idyorough, *Sociological Analysis of Social Change*, 114-115.

³⁰Cassava is believed to do relatively better than yam under poor soils without the application of chemical fertilizers.

isolated homesteads comprised of the men, their wives and children and few other dependents free from the control of compound and household heads. Individualism which replaced collective responsibility in Tiv society in the mid-20th century became heightened in this period. As it were in the past under larger compound units, family heads kept substantial quantities of food stuff for the benefit of all members of the homestead within the new production circumstances. Also by the directives of house heads, proceeds of other aspects of production and some quantities of food stuff found way to the markets, after the amounts for consumption and seeds for the next planting season were kept aside. However, for many families, due to increasing poverty levels, the sale of large quantities of produce (food stuff) during and after harvest at cheap prices was a sure way of raising money for other household needs. It is instructive that this period witnessed increased appetites, tastes and demands for new commodities, goods and services in almost all facets of life similar to the colonial period following the integration of Nigeria area to the international capitalist economy in the 20th century. Since then, global and local developments continuously paved way for new commodities, goods and services in the Tiv area as elsewhere in Nigeria, hence the growing appetites and demand for them. The implication of the sale of large quantities of food stuff was indeed an endless circle of livelihood insecurity for many households with few coping alternatives.

Conclusion

The social change process that occurred right from the era of colonial economy, through the remaining years of the 20th century, up to the succeeding century brought changes in the Tiv economy that further created developments which had implications for production relations. These include changes in land tenure practices, increasing fragmentation of compounds, weakening of the age-grade system which contributed to social justice, law and order, welfare and stable peace, and the declining levels of polygamy. By the last decades of the 20th century, material considerations rather egalitarian principles began to govern land relations. The new forms of land holdings caused by land tenure changes weakened the traditional authority's control over land and labour. Majority of the populace were confronted with livelihood challenges due to the difficulty of securing access through the new forms of land acquisition. These livelihood problems increased the rates of migrations which created shortage of labour force for some households and communities. The fragmentation of compounds, declining age-grade system and the declining levels of polygamy had significant impact on labour relations. These developments contributed to emergence of new forms and sources of labour, terms and conditions predicated on capital-money with negative implications for livelihood security particularly for the poor and the widening of social differentiation.