



The Shuwa Arabs of Borno: Their Migration and Socio-Economic Roles to the Development of Kanem Borno Empire

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to trace the history of Shuwa Arabs of Borno, their movements and migrations into Kanem Borno Empire. The article used desk review to gather secondary data related to the topic under investigation. The disastrous draught, human challenges, natural and man-made environmental circumstances, which affected the Sahelian zone of Africa south of Sahara and beyond, occasioned large-scale and mass migrations of people and livestock into grassland environment ever since. Indeed, these waves of people human migrations and movement constituted a major feature of the pre-colonial history of Nigeria, brought many people from various locations, to various environments. The new comers also had to adjust and adapt themselves to their new environments. Thus, the Shuwa Arabs who were originally from the Arabian Peninsula came and settled in Kanem Borno Empire as far back as 14th Century. Today they are predominantly found in eastern and central Borno State.

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Introduction

The Arabs, ancestors of the Borno Shuwa Arabs migrated from Yemen to Egypt. The people of Banu Judham were important tribes of Yemen from the branch of the Beni Tai of Yemen Palmer (1938) at the end of 7th Century. They were among the first Arabs to settle in Egypt after muslim conquest and were given the ruler-ship of some provinces. By 12th Century, during Ayyubid dynasty, they started to lose their privilege status and consequently engaged in several revolts, later with the Mamluk sultans, the

situation became more disastrous, hence they migrated to Nubia, Sudan and later to the Kanem Borno Empire (Holl and Levey, 1993: 166).

The Lake Chad area, due to its unique location in the heart of arid zone, it had supported a large variety of animals and plants life and provided sustenance to fishermen, pastoralist, farmers, were attracted to migrate to the area via the Nile valley in 14th Century. Judham Arabs the ancestors of the Shuwa Arabs of Borno constituted the majority group (Kyari, 2007: 22). The Arabs generally came into the world prominence, which made them a formidable real force in continental, global, regional, political, economics, including agropastoral activities time memorial. Through movements and migrations, substantial number of them established settlements in various places, especially in the Central Bilad al Sudan. Their dispersal to the region was as a result of events and conditions associated with lack of pastureland along the Nile Valley, as well as a hostile policy against them from the Mamluk rulers of Egypt (Tijjani 1982; Mukhtar 2001). The ecological and political circumstances forced the Judham Arabs to move south-wards along the Nile Valley and then westwards into Lake Fitri, Bahr-Al-Ghazal and Lake Chad areas. Bankemper (1994), Zeltner (1967). Arabs migrations into Africa started after the conquest of Egypt in 639-642 under the command of Amr Bin Al-Aas, (Fadl Hassan, 1973: 88).

In view of this background, the article will provide a discourse on Shuwa Arabs of Borno, their movements and migrations into Kanem Borno Empire. The paper is divided into eight sections: section one is the introductory section; section two deals with the definition of key words, where the meaning of Shuwa Arabs is discussed; section three discussed the Kanem Borno Empire; section four deals with the movements and migrations of Shuwa Arabs; section five involves the culture of pastoralism of the Shuwa Arabs in Borno, the Shuwa culture of pasteurization; section six is the role of Shuwa Arabs in socio-politico-economic development of Borno; and, finally, article ended with conclusions in section seven.

The Definition of the Term Shuwa Arab

The term Shuwa is a Kanuri term for all the Arabs living in Borno which is also derived from the Kanuri word *shawa*, which means “fine”. However, as Mukhtar (2002) puts it, Shuwas prefer to be called **Arabs**, as they always say ...*Ana Arab*, meaning “he/she is an **Arab**”. This interpretation is due to, and in recognition of the Shuwa **Arabs**, distinctive features from the main stream Borno Community. The term Shuwa was also said to have originated from *shuwaiya*, denoting “few” in Arabic; which was said to “have stemmed from the story that responding to a question about their population from Mai of Borno, when they first settled in his territory, the **Judham Arabs**, said *Shuwaiya*, implying that they were few in member” (Mukhtar, 2002: 4, *with author’s grammatical touching*).

There are still other different interpretations by scholars, over the term Shuwa, ranging from Shuwa (**Shaah**) which means ‘sheep’ in Arabic. Another one is *sha or shoa*, derived from Abyssinia, Shuwa pastoralist called *sha or shoa*, who were also alleged to have been a branch of the Shuwa Arabs of Borno. Shuwa Arabs right from the time of their migration to Borno to date, still maintain their cultural identity, physical traits, and retained Arabic as their mother tongue; they remained and maintained their semi-nomadic pastoralist culture. However, it has been observed that, the Arabic Language they speak is colonial in nature and therefore not as ‘Pine’ as the one spoken in the rest of the Arab world. As a result of several centuries stay in the region and rate of inter marriages with some non-Arab population in the region, especially the Kanuri population.

The Kanem Borno Empire

The state of Kanem Borno as rightly pointed out by Kyari (1980: 147) is the predecessor of Borno, first appeared in the written source in the 9th Century AD, in writing of the Arab geographer, Al-Yakub. Its territorial boundary is expanded and contracted through centuries. Its influence was felt in the whole of the then Muslim world as far as North Africa, Fezzan in the North, Bauchi, Jos Plateau in the South, the Cameroon mountains in the east and the Hausa land in the West, Kyari (2007: 2). Kanem Borno is covering areas stretching from Darfur in Sudan, to Lake Chad region in the east and the great bend of River Niger and western coast of Atlantic Ocean. Kanem Borno is strategically lies across the extended trade routes between Egypt and **Bilad** Al-Sudan. The trade routes remained the most famous, stable, most travelled, peaceful, busiest, shortest, ancient and has been in existence since 6th Century, it stretches from North Africa to other continent of Africa and beyond.

The rulers of Kanem Borno were pre-occupied with how to manage the plurality of the territory with a view to asserting their control over the vast territory, which was ethnically and culturally heterogeneous. The chad basin region of Kanem Borno Empire environment shape the course of human development, throughout history. It is to this great renowned environment the Shuwa Arabs moved from Yemen, Egypt, Sudan, to Kanem Borno Empire and into present Borno.

Movements and Migrations of Shuwa Arabs

Specifically, movement according to Oxford Dictionary of current English is an out or the process of moving or a person's activities during a particular period of time. Migration is a person or group who moves from one place to another or an animal that moves from one habitat to another according to the seasons. Generally movements and migrations could be defined in various terms, to move out or leave place of origin to another place outside one's domain, people normally move and migrate from one place to another on account of natural disaster, disease, draught, political oppression, anarchy, posturalization to a green pasture, economic fortune, trade and commercial interest, these and other circumstances provoked a number of people to resort to movement and migration to various places outside their place of origin and settle for better life. The **Judham** Arabs the ancestors of the Shuwa Arabs of Borno migrated from Yemen to Egypt, Sudan, Kanem Borno Empire and later to Borno due to the above and other reasons.

The history of the origin of the migration of the Shuwa Arabs is presented based on the available historical accounts:

1. The immigration of the ancestors of the Shuwa Arabs into Kanem Borno Empire was as far back as late 14th Century, their, migration was a consequence of drought and disputes as discussed earlier. The **Judham (Juhaynah?)** (Mukhtar, 2002: 1) Arabs appeared in Kanem, North East of the Lake Chad as far back as 1391-92 as reported in a letter of Sultan Uthman Bn Idriss, the Mai of Borno to the Mamluk Sultan of Egypt Al-Zahir Abu Said Barquq (Toll and Levy 1993: 172).

2. They were also said to have originated in Yemen. The group (**Judham** Arabs) who successfully invaded Egypt in the early Islamic expansion period and majority of whom reached the Christian kingdom of Nubia by the middle of the 7th Century. Their further migration to Kanem Borno Empire was, due to various reasons, ranging from the diminishing nature of pasture-land along the valley of the Nile, unfavourable and hostile nature of policy against them from the new Mamluk rulers of Egypt etc. The above ecological and political situation forced them to migrate south wards along the Nile Valley and then west-wards into the Lake Fittri, Bahr –al Ghazal and Lake Chad region (Mukhtar, 2002: 2) around that time.

3. Their movement and migration brought them to as far as Kanem but their concentration was more in Wadai, where the Arab speaking people occupied the entire belt between White Nile and Lake Chad. The earliest reference to the Shuwa Arabs appeared in the account of Al-Qaqashandi in his *Subh Al-Asha*. It was the **Judham** Arabs, who first came to Kanem Borno Empire in 14th C. They were also said to have exploited the civil disorder in the kingdom and sided with Bulala, against the Mai of Kanem Borno Empire, Mai Usman bn Idriss, who had to write to the Mamluk sultan of Egypt Zahir Barquq, complaining about the activities and involvement of the **judham** Arabs over the internal crises of the empire; raiding and attacking communities for no cause as objected by the then ruler, Mai Usman bn Idriss, right from that time, the Shuwa Arabs established settlements in Kanem and later migrated to Borno late 14th and 15th Century.

4. However, some writers are of the view that by 14th Century, the **Judham** Arabs who invaded Kanem, were later replaced by new group of Arabs immigrants, the **Juhayna** Arabs. Mac Michael (1992: 181) in the same view, Yusuf Fadl Hassan (1973: 90) also viewed that **Juhayna** were allies of the **Judham** Arabs who traversed the desert, west of Nile to the region called the **Baggara**.

5. Therefore as observed by Zeltner (1967: 133-134) that there were four sets of Arab Migrations towards southwards from the Aswan region to Sudan after the Mamluk capture of the Christian Nubia. Further great influx's of Arab groups which includes the **Huluyar, Rabia, Bani Aminr, Bani-Yashkur, Bani Abs, Bani Salim** etc. also came. Kamfut (2004:). The above movement and migrations, especially the **Judham** group who arrive in 16th Century, have played a remarkable role in supporting Mai Idriss Aloama in his campaign against the **Bulala**. Later in History, specifically in 18th Century another set of mass migration of Shuwa Arabs into Borno took place, when they actively participated in the Sheikh El-Kanemi's encounter with the Sokoto jihadist and save Borno from a total collapse.

6. The Shuwa Arabs as mentioned above, migrated first into Kanem and later to Borno due to events, conditions in socio, ecological environment, population explosion, political instability Pastoralization etc. As a result of these rigorous environmental constraints, which they have to overcome by intensive cultural strategies which involved special methods of keeping animals. Brawkamper (1996: 53-68).

According to Richmond Palmer (1938) the **Judham** Arabs were the descendants of the Borno Shuwa Arabs who were also a branch of the **kahtan** of the southern Arabia, occupied the eastern Delta of Egypt. They were also said to be originally a branch of the **Beni Tai** of Yemen.

7. The movement and migrations of the Shuwa Arabs into Borno was at various stages and levels, through a steady and slow process. Among the groups who first migrated to Borno with the **sayfawa** rulers include **Jawama, Surajiyye, Bakamyee, and Ma'in** Groups. Patterson Also Viewed That **Banu Malik, Ajaini Wulat Mihilit, Wulattelel, Wulad Jallaba**. Also constituted the early migrants (Adam, 1977: 14).

8. Later, after the fall of **Tunjur** dynasty in Wadai during early 17th Century led to migration of number of **Tunjur** from **wadai** to Kanem and Borno (Adam (1977: 15). Later, crises, political upheavals, constant state of fear and security in Wadai and policy of expansionism towards **Shari**, the base of the Shuwa Arabs also necessitated the migration of the Shuwa groups to Borno.

The Culture of Pastoralism of the Shuwa Arabs in Borno

The Shuwa Arabs throughout history were acknowledged as nomadic groups and have been camel and cattle rearers all their lives. They had been concerned with conditions favouring the survival of their herds of cattle. That's why in their movement, migrations and settlements they considered areas

generally conducive to their livestock. They mostly identified, located and settled in areas rich in grazing-lands, as evidence by the early immigrants who decided to settle on the western shores of Lake Chad before moving into the interior of Borno.

In fact, the **Baniset** and sections of **Salamat** who came much later decided to settle in the region south of Lake Chad, called **Balge** area, while those specifically invited by the Shehu El-Kanemi to Borno also settled at **Ngumati** area, which later became the main domain of the **Qawalme** Arabs in Borno. The base is known as **Naghamati**, Al-Arab the base of Arabs which is today known or called as **Ngumati**, Brenner (1973: 38), Sale (1977: 214), Jiddah (1977: 24). The Shuwa Arabs are group into two dialects the **kwalmé** and the **Salamat**. Owners (1966). The **Ngumati** group is found in Monguno, Marte, Mafa and Jere, while Balge group is found in Ngala, Kala Balge, Dikwa, Bama etc.

The Shuwa Arabs as nomads they were divided into two groups the **Nas Al-Diran** (people of the cattle camps) the **Diran Shuwa** group were actively involved in patterns of transhumance, as they are actively involved in seasonal migrations, as temporary strategic response mainly to climatic and geo-medical factors. This is mainly and purposely both for exploitation of seasonal grazing reserves and avoidance of harmful insects causing sickness. The pastoral group always move about in large convoys under their leader's sheikh purposely for convenience and security, in search of greener pastures for their animals, such movement usually take them to as far as chad basin, uphill in to Cameroun or other parts of the North Eastern Nigeria.

The second group are the **Hallal Shuwa** Arabs, the Shuwa Village Settlers, who either participate in the pastoral migration themselves or entrust part of their cattle to the mobile herdsmen. This type of symbiosis guarantees an efficient division of labour and it reduces the risk of livelihood in terms of economic crisis. The settled Shuwa were engaged in various activities like farming, Tanning, Smithing, and Wood-Works, Islamic scholarship and learning etc.

The **Khuzzum** group in Borno which include **Qenaka, Awlad, Bu Assaf, El Bahariye, Omeirat** and **Qebesat** were all situated in the fertile **Ngomati** area of Southern Lake Chad, who later gradually taken to agriculture due to the decimation of their herds by disease (Mukhtar, 2002: 17). Combining the mobile livestock rearing, pastoralism and cultivation in an agropastoral system made the Shuwa Arabs to acquire high degree of stability in the profession and facilitated them to withstand crises of production in each of the two sectors (Brankamper, 1996: 64).

The Shuwa Arabs' Role and Participation in Socio-Político-Economic Development in Borno

As mentioned earlier, by 15th Century the **Assale** or (Lesiyeh according to British Sources) the Debaba, Assale, Dekakire clans (all branches of Salamat tribe) and the **Khuzzum** were already herding in the area of **Baghirmi**. Later in history, due to ecological reasons, some Shuwa Arab groups in the chad Basin region abandoned camel for cattle breeding. "In Borno, it was cattle that became the main wealth and livelihood of the Shuwa Arabs" (Mukhtar 2002: 14). However, some also turn and diverted themselves simultaneously to horse breeding and agricultural activities engaged in cultivating land.

The movement of the **Sayfawa** dynasty from Kanem to Borno, made the Shuwa Arab clans of (**Judham** and **Juhayna**) **Asala**, the **Salamat** groups begun penetrating into the region west of the Shari river. (Mukhtar 2002: 15) by 1870s the **Mamaduyel** and **Sawarima** sections with a substantial population were settled in Magumeri and Karagawaru districts of central Borno. While the **Sarajiyeh** and **Wulad Aina (Ma'in)** Clans with large population were found in the Uje district. (Konduga District) Mukhtar (2002: 15). The **Jaoma** group were also settled at Dar Kazal North of river Yobe. The **Bani Badr** also moved to Kaga area from where Benisheik got its name (Ibrahim, Mohammed and Haruna, 2021: 3).

During the El-Kanemi dynasty, Borno witnessed a large number of migration into the territory, according to **Nachtigal** right from that time, there was always Shuwa Arab influence at the Shehu's palace and emirate council as their descendance still occupy the positions of their forefathers through succession up to date. For example, Mallam Tirab was succeeded by his son Hajj Bashir, Mamman Tar was Succeeded Ahmed Gonimi as king makers and senior councillors in the Borno Emirate. The position they maintain and sustain to date.

Nineteenth (19th) Century remain a golden age in the history of the Shuwa Arabs in Borno, it was a milestone period of their existence in the region. It was a period of their rise to prominence in Borno political leadership hierarchy; this also encouraged and attracted a number of Shuwa Arabs groups to migrate west wards into polity, especially the rise of the three Shuwa Arab leaders to positions of recognition and prominence. Mallam Mohammad Tirab, Ahmad Gonimi and Ibrahim Wadaima, who were the three prominent Shuwa Arabs were not only most powerful and influential lieutenants and Advisers of the Shehu. They were the most senior councillors and king makers. They all belong to the **Qawalme** Shuwa group; that is why both **Wulad Sarar** and **Wulad Salem** constituted the highest and influential Shuwa clans in Borno. The clans of these influential lieutenants of the Shehu, the **Khuzzum** and **Wulat Hemet**. Specifically, Mallam Terab is from **Wulad Sarar** while Ahmed Gonimi from **Wulad Salem** respectively.

It is also worthy of note that there are other related Arab groups who migrated and settled in Kanem Borno Empire time immemorial mainly as merchant's trader. The **Jallaba** (from Nilotic Sudan) the **Wassili** (from North Africa) the Yemeni's, the Syrians, whose descendance are still found in Maiduguri metropolitan. Specifically, Fezzan area of Maiduguri. In the contemporary Nigeria and the present day Borno, the Shuwa Arabs have greatly contributed to the development of the country in all facets of endeavour. Ranging from civil service, as seasoned Civil Servants, Administrators, Technocrats, Military Generals, Nigeria Police, Captain of Industries, Politicians, Diplomats, Bankers, Teachers, Academicians, Merchants, Business, Mangolds, Traders, Islamic Scholars etc. Among them mentioned must be made of Waziri Abba Habib, Late Waziri of Bama true son of Borno, a renowned politician, who represented Borno in Various capacities during the first republic and after.

Among the civil servant/Administrators include Alhaji Musa Dagash, who was also one-time Federal Super Permanent Secretary in charge of defence. Alhaji Musa Dagash, a fearless, courageous, determined, frank and thorough elder states man. He once took charge of the affairs of Nigerian Nation for a period of time during crises. Mentioned should also be made of one-time Civilian Governor of Borno State, Alhaji Ashek Jarma, Alhaji Muhammad Hayatudden , a Banker, Technocrat, Senator Muhammad Abba Aji, a politician, the Aji Sudan of Bama Emirate and a former presidential liaison officer, Senate affairs, Ambassador Baba Ahmed Jidda, One-time Borno State SSG and the Current Nigerian Ambassador to China, Alhaji Usman Jidda Shuwa the current SSG of Borno Senator Mohammed Sanusi Dagash and one time Minister of National Planning and works, Engineer Mohammed Mustapha Dagash one time Managing Director of Ashaka Cement company.

In the military, General Mohammed Shuwa (Rtd), one of the Generals who fought for the unity and corporate existence of indivisible Nigeria, Air Marshal Al-amin Dagash one time Chief of Defence Staff, Defence Headquarter Nigeria, in the Nigerian Police we must equally mention of Alhaji Mohammed Kamselum Former Inspector General of Police. Few Among the educationist includes, Alhaji Ibrahim Wulet, Mallam Jidda Harun, Mallam Umar Maina Isa, Mallam Umar Shamsi Lawan, Alhaji Lawan Badawai, Alhaji Muhammed Adam, Ya-malam Falmata Marte, Dr. Hajja Gona Abdullahi Gulumba to mention but a few.

Other prominent Shuwa ladies of outstanding calibre include Dr. Maryam Sani Abatcha, one-time first lady of Nigeria, Hajja Amra Imam, Hajja Yakaka Lawan etc. In the Business circle, Late Alhaji Grema Muhammad, Late Alhaji Muhammad Hassan, Late Alhaji Kurso Bashir, Alhaji Muhammed Atom, Alhaji Ebet Tom etc. Among the University Academician are Prof. Ibrahim Muhammad, the current Director Nigerian Arabic Village, Prof. Isah Hussaini Marte, the Chief of Staff to Borno State Governor, Prof. A. Jidda, Prof. Ibrahim Muhammad History Department, Dr. Bukar Jamri Deputy Vice Chancellor, Central Administration and Associate Professor, of (Political Sociology), Yobe State University, Damaturu, Dr. Hayatu Deen Mohammed, Department of Political Science, and Centre of Peace and Conflict Studies University of Maiduguri. Late Prof. Adam Sheik Abdallah to mention but a few.

Among the Islamic scholars of international repute are Sheik Sheriff Ibrahim Saleh Alhussain, Alhaji Goni Durma Abubakar, Goni Abdullahi Abubakar, Goni Alamin Goni Durma, Goni Ahmed Goni Durma etc. The Shuwa Arabs of Borno are serious, brave, courageous, frank, point blank, with passion for their unique culture and language. They speak Kanuri as their second language, to some, as their first language.

Conclusion

The article discussed the history of Shuwa Arabs of Borno, their movements and migrations into Kanem Borno Empire. In conclusion, Shuwa Arabs' role in socio, politico economic administrative and military spheres is well acknowledged by writers, their immense contributions to military might of Kanem Borno Empire and later Borno has been supportive and well acknowledged. Being excellent horse breeders, their gallant military conviction, superiority, strength and professionalism in the Borno military expeditions has been outstanding and credible. Economically the Shuwa Arabs prominent role in economic development especially in terms of livestock production, they supplied markets with grains, milk, butter, wild rice etc. Their well-known leather work, calabash, decoration, farm utensils, wood works, especially wooden dish (**Buwur**) Mortar (**Kur**), Wooden Stool (**Guduma**), pestle (**Karmo**), Grain Milling etc. And as a result of their knowledge of the belt from Lake Chad to the Nile Valley, Shuwa Arabs played a remarkable role in the long-distance trade between Chad and Nigeria, especially the Jallaba group and the Wassili merchants.

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