

The Precolonial Social Formation Among the Bakenhe Fishing Community
of Lake Kyoga Region of Uganda, 1800-1894*

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Introduction

It is eminently evident from the literature available on the pre-colonial history of Uganda and East Africa in general, that one area which has either been neglected, or peripherally treated is that of the fishing industry and the fishing communities. A careful and close examination of these literature show a definite bias towards the agricultural and pastoral communities and their economic activities. And as if that is not enough, few that have tried to grapple with the fishing industry have largely tended to be descriptive/narrative, and mainly, talking about methods of fishing and the types of fishes caught. In fact the bulk of literature on the fishing industry are basically, works of the physical scientists who are mainly trained in biological sciences. These studies, therefore, mainly focus on the fish species found in the waters of East African lakes, rivers, ponds and swamps, their food requirements and distribution. They also concern themselves with the question of density of fish population, the growth rate of individual species, the age at which they mature, the specific factors which cause one tropical lake to support many fish and another relatively few, the depletion of certain fish species, the stocking of new species, and how to check the depletion of some species, like, *alestes* (soga), *Labeo* (ningu), *bagrus* (semutundu).
What this means in a nutshell is that these studies do not address themselves/

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During the preparation of this paper, I benefitted greatly from discussions with colleagues and comrades at Makerere University. Special thanks must go to Nyangabyaki-Bazaara, Associate Professor Hilda K. Tadria, and Kambarage-Kakonge. Errors in such an exercise are inevitable. It is, however, our hope that candid and constructive criticism from readers will enable us to overcome them in the long run.

the question of socio-economic dynamics of the fishing communities in the past and at present.

This paper, therefore, sets out to bridge this gap by specifically looking at the precolonial social formations of the Bakenhe fishing community of Lake Kyoga Region, between 1800 and 1900. In essence this is a preliminary attempt to explore about the past of the Bakenhe, a people whose past have curiously been neglected by those who have studied or written about the past of Ugandan societies. The paper seeks to explain how the interaction between the Bakenhe and their natural and social environment contributed to the development of their precolonial social formations.

Our ultimate contention in this paper is that human history is nothing but the connexion established between man and nature, and between man and fellow men through the dynamic process of production and reproduction. That is to say that human history of necessity concerns how man is able to produce and reproduce his concrete material life. It is, therefore, follows that for us to delienate the social formation that permeated the Bakenhe society in the period mentioned above, ^{we must know} who controlled the means of production, what were the objects of production, who controlled the distribution and use of products, and above all what was the nature of socio-economic relations in the society.

The central thesis of this discourse is that before the advent of colonialism in Uganda at the end of last century, the Bakenhe who were the leading fishing community in the Lake Kyoga Region had an economy characterized by a communal mode of production. The prime object of fishing was to acquire use-value products, consumption. Furthermore, the instruments of production were collectively owned and used by the fishermen on family basis, and the fishermen concerned had direct control over the instruments, the process of production, and the products of their labour.

The socio-economic relations permeating the society was communal, and hence collective and cooperative in nature. The social unit was the clan, and the unit of production was the household. There also existed

a complimentary sexual division of labour in which both men and women participated equally in the production of basic necessities and for the joint benefit of all household members.¹ Each male member of the clan was eligible to participate actively and freely in the affairs of the clan i.e. the election of the clan head, or deciding on where to fish. However, given the existing gender structure of the Bakenhe community, "women were to a large extent under the authority of men".²

The Bakenhe economy, we contend was a "natural" one, that is an economy based on the production of use-value products, food, and whereby exchange (usually barter) is conducted to realize use-value products from a different geographical location. It was essentially characterized by non-existent of middlemen (fish mongers) up to ~~mid-nineteenth century~~ when ~~the Arab traders reached the interlacustrine region, and the last decade~~ of the ^{Nineteenth} century when Uganda was declared a British Protectorate; that was in 1894.³ The establishment of British colonial rule in Uganda ushered in new socio-economic forces which considerably transformed the social formations of the people of Uganda, the Bakenhe included. But a discussion of such developments are beyond the scope of this paper.

Historical Background

The Bakenhe who were the major fishing community in Lake Kyoga lived in the islands of Lake Victoria before they migrated into the interior of Busoga and they practised fishing and cultivation. Their traditions suggest that a number of the Bakenhe families left these islands and travelled across the north-east corner of the Lake and overland to the river system of eastern Uganda. This move was either in response to the rise of the Lungfish (mamba) clan ^{or} hegemony over the larger part of Lake Victoria /the ascendancy of the Bavuma on the northern shores of the lake, who had "acquired considerable prowess in the minor aspects of naval warfare using canoes manned by large numbers of warriors."⁴ These must have posed a threat to the Bakenhe and other residents of the Lake.⁵ There is even evidence that some of the Bakenhe settled in the eastern shores of the Lake, especially in Yimbo, Uyoma, and Asembo locations of Siaya District of Nyanza Province of Kenya.⁶ Here they are known

as Wakhenye. The Bakenhe then settled in the Mpologoma-Malaba River system zone. The River Mpologoma where the Bakenhe settled is a tribut^ary of the Nile and joins it at Lake Kyoga, and it is more like a stretch of swamp, for it is a mile wide and is full of papyrus, which grows fully twelve feet high, and the Bakenhe settlements were rather "impermanent" as they built their huts on floating and meandering masses of papyrus ^{islands} huts, and river's banks and were generally dependent on the canoe and canoe borne mobility.⁷ Here they probably "practised a mixed economy of fishing and cultivation, and were involved in the emerging pattern of interdependence among the different economies of the regions".⁸

When the advance team of Lwo migrants began to enter northern Busoga from the east flanking the arms of Lake Kyoga, they found the Bakenhe settled in the area. As Langlands observes: "Lwo migration encountered an already close settlement of Kenyi along the Mpologoma-Malaba Rivers, and pushed them into the shores and waters of Lake Kyoga".⁹

That the arrival of the Lwo pastoralists caused the ~~the~~ departure of the Bakenhe and related groups from the Mpologoma-Malaba River system area is not disputable. Perhaps what is at stake is the time of their departure. The two communities, the Lwo and the Bakenhe had essentially different economies. The Lwo economy was livestock-based, while that of the Bakenhe was riverain-based fishing economy. Given the nature of these two economies there is no likelihood that the two communities had immediate conflict. The Lwo relations with the territory was in terms of pasturage and water resources for the livestock, not in terms of territorial control. The Bakenhe, on the other hand, concentrated on fishing and rudimentary cultivation of the river banks. It is therefore, probable that these two groups coexisted, and bastered their produce. However, with time things changed, and the new conditions necessitated the departure of the Bakenhe from the area of Mpologoma-Malaba Rivers.

The traditions of the Bakenhe and related groups suggest that the coming of Lwo pastoralists, and the establishment of a pastoral economy ^{far} in the region south of Lake Kyoga, had/reaching effects on the hitherto existing communities. First, it made possible a significant increase

in the productive capacity of a region which was sparsely populated, and mainly roamed by wild game. Secondly its low and undulating plains which abound with ample and favourable pasturage and water resources stimulated the increase in livestock population. The increase in livestock population coupled with that of people generated more ^{pressure} on land for grazing, cultivation and settlement.

These developments had profound impact on the Bakenhe, whose territory was now subject to constant pressure from the Lwo pastoralists. In response to these ever increasing pressure, they migrated to the mass of papyrus islands north of the Mpologoma-Malaba Rivers, and set up their settlements along the shores of Lake Kyoga, near the effluence of the Nile into Lake Kyoga and the sudd islands within the Lake.

Here fishing became the primary economic pursuit of the Bakenhe, and as a community they lived chiefly by fishing, and were essentially watermen. ^{The Namukenhe fish (engraulypris) was the foremost object of their fishing toils} The Bakenhe led a more or less nomadic life, moving from one fishing ground to the other, and also in response to threats and attacks from their neighbours.

~~The Bakenhe thereafter established their settlement along the shores of Lake Kyoga, and near the effluence of Nile into Lake Kyoga. They led a nomadic life, moving from one fishing ground to the other depending on the availability of fish, and possibly threats or attacks from their neighbours. Fishing became the primary economic pursuit, and the namukenhe fish (engraulypris) was the foremost object of their fishing toils.~~

The Bakenhe were, therefore, refugees who sought asylum from very competitive and dangerous political world on the firmer ground. Later on they were joined by migrants from Mount Elgon area who arrived on the Mpologoma-Malaba Rivers zone at different times. However, due to similar experience, they gradually developed a relatively homogenous group with a common culture.

The neighbours of the Bakenhe on the firm land practised agricultural production of food crops, cattle rearing and hunting. They were not involved in fishing. In fact, these people despised fishing, and generally had low opinion about fishing groups. At best they regarded

fishing as an inferior occupation meant for "low and lazy" people who could not dig using the hoe like the Bakenhe".¹⁰

Perhaps what we ought to note is that: "Once a community settle in a given geographical location, its process of change will depend on various external, climatic, geographical, physical, etc. conditions as well as their special natural make-up their tribal character."¹¹ The same applied to the Bakenhe. Having been pushed from the firm land to the shoreline and waters of Lake Kyoga, their historical and social development(s) were largely subject to and conditioned by the ecology and resources of the Lake¹², and the instruments of labour they devised to cope with the demands of their environment, both natural and social and the relationship they forged amongst themselves, and with their neighbours in the process of production and exchange of their products.

The ecology of the Lake and its swampy environment significantly conditioned the nature and structure of production among the Bakenhe, For the Bakenhe to realize the "concrete material life the fauna of the Lake like fish, hippopotami, water lilies (nymphaea), papyrus (ekitogo), reeds, ambatch trees, and many others became the object of their labour. All along the coasts and islands of Lake Kyoga, there were dense papyrus and grass swamps which often merge into the open water through an intermediate zone with floating leaves of water lilies (Nymphaea) and water chesnut (trapa) with submerged weeds. This narrow band of calm, well-aerated and nutrient rich water is of great ecological importance as it supports a large invertebrate fauna and is the feeding ground of many fish, especially the young and growing stages which also find protection from predators among the submerged vegetation".¹³ Obviously such ecological factors favoured mainly fish production, and the Bakenhe devised fishing gears and crafts to exploit the fisheries.

The other factor which crucially influenced the Bakenhe settlement and economic activities in the shoreline and waters of Lake Kyoga was the periodic or seasonal changes in the water level of the Lake and its swampy environment. The records of missionaries and other early

visitors to Uganda, which is corroborated by the traditions of the Bakenhe indicate that between 1875 and 1880 the Lake rose to a height above the high level of 1964, "and that by 1898 it had fallen to the general level maintained during the first half of the century"¹⁴

However, we need to add that the magnitude of the ecological effects caused by the fluctuations of water level depend upon the area of the land that is periodically flooded and dessicated. Low lying shores are clearly the most affected and even the normal season mid year rise in the level may temporarily inundate considerable areas of land.¹⁵

The logical consequence of these developments was the increase in fish population and fish production as the organic matter on the newly waterlogged land decomposes rapidly and the released nutrients stimulate a high rate of production in the shallow water which then becomes a rich feeding ground for many invertebrates and small fish.¹⁶ Fishermen are ~~were~~ then able to land more fish. But on the other hand, the rise in water level of the Lake forced those living along the flooded coastal shoreline, to move either to the unflooded areas or to settle on the mass of floating papyrus islands in the Lake. In such an environment the Bakenhe were compelled to rely on dug-out canoes, and rafts for their movement. These crafts were either paddled or punted by the Bakenhe using paddles and long poles respectively.

Fish, hippo meat, water-lilies and sweet potatoes were the staple food of the Bakenhe.¹⁷

From a material culture perspective, the Bakenhe had a low technology. The Lake Kyoga Region was not endowed with iron deposits with which the people make ores for hoes, axes, hooks, knives, as well as prongs for fish spears or harpoons. For these items the Bakenhe and other related groups therefore relied on the outside world. In the nineteenth century, they were supplied by iron implements from Bunyoro-Kitara and Samia in the East. The Bakenhe made journeys in their dug-out canoes to Kasat Beach, from where they bartered fish, hippo meat, mats and baskets for hooks, knives, spears, potatoes grains, etc. They moved in large groups to brave the Lake and also have greater

confidence to bargaining and leeway with the people of the firmland.¹⁸

All the above factors had considerable impact on the socio-economic development of the Bakenhe, whose social formation was inevitably a product of the correlation between the physical environment, the mode of production arising from the exploiting, and the forms of social relations forged in the process.

Hence our starting point in delienating the pre-colonial social formations of the Bakenhe is production and the socio-economic relations that developed in the process of production and distribution.

Communal Mode of Production

The two main economic activities of the Bakenhe were fishing and hippo hunting. The latter was essentially supplementary. It was a male occupation. The exercise was hazardous, and therefore required brave, daring and skilful hunters. The two instruments used by the Bakenhe hippo hunters were dug-out canoes and spears. For the purpose of killing a hippo three to four dug-out canoes were lashed together and the hunters spear their prey from the middle canoes which gives them a modicum of safety in operation. The canoes had a rack along one side on which the crew's spears and punting pole could be ~~kept~~^{kept}. The spear was attached to a line with a float at the end, so that if the spear is hurled at a hippo in deep water, its movement could be checked and traced. Once the hippo was dead, it would be skinned using knives, and the meat distributed to the hunters and members of the clan. The hunter, who speared the animal got the hind legs, and the rest of the body were apportioned in respect of the hunter's participation in the killing of the animal.¹⁹

The meat was for domestic use, though part of it was preserved through salting or smoking for future use, or exchange for grains. On the whole, the satisfaction of immediate needs, consumption was the main object of hippo hunting among these people.

Hippo hunting among the Bakenhe compared well with that of the

Basuba people (Muiche) from Muhuru Bay at the border of Kenya and Tanzania. These people used basically similar instruments, dug-out canoes, and spears or harpoons. The latter were made by iron workers belonging to Wakienga clan.²⁰

The primary economic pursuit of the Bakenhe in Lake Kyoga and its swampy environs was fishing. The Bakenhe fishermen used different methods of production to catch or trap fish in the waters of the Lake. But these methods of fishing were subject to the water depth; the type of fish to be caught or trapped; and the season of the year. The methods included spearing fish using harpoons, baskets (enjeru), hook and line (malobo), fixed reed fences and seines.

Of all the instrument of fish production used by these people the non-return baskets (enjeru) was the most impressive and ingenious one. They were made of the stiff rind of the raphia palm fronds; papyrus; reeds or the stems of certain wiry creepers. A wide mouthed basket with a short funnel stem passes into another basket with a long funnel, and this discharges into a largeish chamber of the same wicker-work which has a hole at the back through which fish are taken out. These weir baskets are usually fixed in a horizontal position with stone weights, and more often placed across the neck of a small inlet or gult. Sometimes large baskets of about 6-feet diameter and inches mesh are put between a row of stakes fixed in the mud, often as many as 50 baskets in a row.²¹ These baskets were weaved and operated by men, and they belonged to individual fishermen in a given household family. There were two types of seines operated by the Bakenhe fishermen. The first one was operated from the floating papyrus islands. Fishermen stood on the floating islands and propelled them with long poles in a circle sweeping the fish before them into baskets. It involved more labour power. At least six men were required for punting and each man had his own few baskets. As a method of fishing, it was only operational in good weather, as it was conducted mainly at night and at best times as it was a hazardous business. The catch consisted of nandere (tilapia), and as many as 40 or more of these could be caught per basket in one night.²²

The second type of seining was operated from the sandy beaches. In this case fish are driven towards the baskets by men wading into the shallow water of the Lake, carrying after them a rude kind of seine made of long strips of papyrus stalks or banana leaves fastened to a floating or a sunken line. This seine is gradually drawn in towards the narrower part where the baskets are placed, and the fish in this way driven into the baskets, or may be driven right to the shore without the use of baskets at all. The catch consisted of tilapia (nandere), labeo (ningu), haplochromis (nkejje), engraulis (mukene). The catch(es) were normally shared among the fishermen for consumption. This form of seining also involved communal labour, mainly men.²³

The seine was considered property of the family, with the head of the family as the custodian. However, this did not give him any dominant position in its operation, and use and distribution of the catch. The crew operated as co-owners of the instrument(s) of production, and each had equal right or say over the seine, the production process, and the products.

The Bakenhe fishermen also employed long line (malobo) to catch fish. These lines had floats and stone weights, and were set from rafts or dug-out canoes along the shore line. They mainly caught lungfish (mamba), mudfish (male), bagrus (semutundu), labeo (ningu) and barbus. For baits these fishermen used fingerlings of tilapia, worms and small fish species like haplochromis (nkejje). The use of long line followed the acquisition of iron hooks from the Bunyoro-Kitara traders, who sold their goods to the people of northern Busoga at Kasato, Bukungu, Kidera, Iyingo along the southern shores of Lake Kyoga.

Bakenhe women and boys also fished using single line (rod and line) from rafts or dug-out canoes in the shallow waters of the Lake. The fish fence traps were built by the Bakenhe along the shoreline. Part of the trap consisted of two-reed fences angled to one another with a small gap at the apex through which fish enter but which they cannot locate to go out as it is almost invisible from inside the trap. The fence was the property of a household, and it was checked every morning

and evening catches. The construction of fence traps was done

by men assisted by their sons who in the process acquired the knowledge of constructing the same.²⁴ When a man was constructing a fence trap (likwira) no woman might approach it. He lived apart from his wife (or wives) and might not wash or eat fish until he had tested his fence. When he caught fish, these first lot were cooked and eaten as a sacred meal by members of the household, and extended family.²⁵ In the dry season(s) the Bakenhe fishermen banded together for communal fish hunt. These fishermen dammed the channel of the swamp at particular points, and then moved up the stream up to the dam. The men used spears and when near the dam the conical shaped basket are thrust in the mud. If fish is caught it is removed through the hole on the side of the basket near the apex. Women at times used canoe-shaped dip baskets with which they scooped up the mud and then sort out the catches of small mommyrid, haplochromis (nkeje) and barbel. During such dry spells when the water were at a low ebb, even hands could be used to dig out fish hidden underneath. And the fish caught or trapped were for consumption, and only exchanged to acquire other usevalue products.²⁶

Unit of Production

The basic unit of production was the household, save in the seining form of fish production where members of different households, belonging to the same extended family worked cooperatively. Fishermen were primarily co-owners of the instruments of production (crafts and gears), and had direct control over the process of production and distribution of the catch(es). In the course of fishing the crew members operated as equals, and all and sundry decided on whether it was opportune to go to the lake and fish or not. *How about distributu*

There was a division of labour based on age and sex and the nature of work among the Bakenhe fishing Community. Men went to the Lake to fish and bring the catch ashore. They were also the ones responsible for weaving fishing baskets, construction of fence-traps and fishing canoes and rafts.

The Bakenhe women specialised in the processing of fish with the assistance of children for immediate use at home. They scaled and gutted fish at the landing beach, and then took them home for cooking.

Part of the catch were preserved. They were either smoked or sun-dried.

Women also participated in actual fishing by using single line from the floating islands or dug-out canoes in the shallow waters of the lake. Young boys and girls assisted their parents with the collection of firewood for cooking and smoking fish. They also looked after fish left in the sun to dry. Such fish were often eaten by monitor-lizard (enswaswa) and birds like hammerhead stock, hawks etc. In fact young boys did ~~more~~^{more} than that. They acted as apprentices to their parents, as they were weaving baskets, constructing fence traps, hollowing dug-out canoes or moulding hooks (malobo) etc., and in turn they learnt about fishing, and how to make the fishing instruments.

Perhaps the important question to pose is whether there was anything in the structure of the canoe fishing as a form of production that more or less determined the sexual division of labour or whether it was a matter of what Marx called;

"an extension of the natural division of labour imposed by the family" 27

The meaning of the word "natural" (natural wiichsig) in this context could refer to heavy and laborious nature of canoe fishing in Lake Kyoga. The dug-out canoes were propelled by human labour. Besides that, the process of fish production entailed paddling to the fishing grounds, setting the long lines (malobo), baskets (enjeru), and returning regularly to inspect the catch, and the subsequent ~~mending~~^{mending} of baskets, fixed fences, replacing floats and stone weights, hooks and repairing the canoes. All these tasks left the fisherman with very little time to engage in the processing and preservation of fish once brought ashore. Furthermore some of the fishing took place at night, and of necessity women remained behind to look after children.

labour
labour
fish
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It is therefore logical for us to deduce that there existed a limited and rudimentary division of labour among the Bakenhe fishing community of Lake Kyoga and its swampy environs, and that this kind of division is complementary and not antagonistic, as in a class society.

In any case all these fishermen had access to the instruments

method

of fish production, and the fishing ground, and hence had not developed antagonistic relations.

Production of Use-Values

The primary object of fish production was to satisfy immediate needs, consumption. The Bakenhe fishermen engaged in the industry not to acquire wealth, but for self-sustenance, that is their own "material" reproduction" as individuals and as part of the wider community. The bulk of the fish caught were consumed. The rest were either smoked or sun-dried for future use. At the landing beach(es) part of the catches were doled out to those who assisted the fishermen to land and unload fish from the canoe, or to old and disabled people who could not go to the lake.

The Bakenhe made use of their environment to mould efficient instruments of production and consumption. However, like all peoples without a widely extended system of communications and trade, they depended entirely on their environment. Local natural vicissitudes such as drought, or floods, or storms, meant famine and movement to them. They were further affected by certain physical characteristics of their habitat which constrained their techniques and limited ^{their} modes of settlement.

Specialisation

Specialisation among the Bakenhe was rather limited. However, particular clans specialized in certain craftsmanship. The leading craftsmen among them were canoe-builders. The canoe builders often devoted more time to their crafts than did their household or villagemates; they did not, however, specialise to the exclusion of the ordinary work required for every adult who did the work. They remained actively involved in fishing. In any case most dug-out canoes were hewn during the dry seasons, and canoe-builders were not full-time specialists, and were, therefore, not engaged in the craftsmanship for purposes of exchange-value, but to ^{acquire} use-value products for the household and the community at large. This point is reinforced by Raymond when discussing

the activities of the islanders of Tikopia in the Salomon archipelago in the Pacific. He notes:

"Every Tikopia man is an agriculturalist and a fisherman, and to some extent a worker in wood; every woman weeds plantations, uses her scooper net on the reef; beats bark cloth and plaits mats. Such specialisation as exists in the development of extra capacity in a craft and not the practice of the craft to the exclusion of other others"²⁸

Firth's observation about the Tikopia man is applicable to the Bakenhe of Lake Kyoga. In fact what he articulates on the social organization of the islanders of Tikopia is ^{discernible} at all stages of mankind's economic development.: the division of labour between sexes. That is to say that any society characterized by a low level of technology, and whose production and reproduction is largely linked to the environmental constraints, needs the labour services of every member, and the social norms prevailing at the time militates against accumulation in excess of the average, and no adult has the option of holding back from participating in labour. Every member of the society is a worker, save the aged, young children and disabled. But even these categories of people are assigned some duties i.e tendering children, handwork and looking after fowls and other domestic property.

Usually the weaving of fishing baskets (enjeru), plaiting carpets, mats and bags were commonly practised by the Bakenhe men and women. Often craftsmanship were undertaken at free 'times' when people were not engaged in fishing, hunting or collecting of water lily tubers. At such times, the Bakenhe men and women would also go swimming, and the young boys and girls would either be engaged in the making of mock crafts and gears. However, the presence of numerous crocodiles (gonya), snakes, hippopotami and mosquitoes were constraints as many a time swimmers fell victims of marauding crocodiles in the Lake.

Some of the fishermen and their women also specialized in weaving of baskets, or carpets made of papyrus stalks or wiry creepers, plaiting mats, and weaving bags.

Exchange

For many years there was a limited degree of trade among the Bakenhe and their neighbours. This kind of trade was facilitated by friends and relatives, and was largely casual and occasional. But the trade was relatively undeveloped, consisting of the barter of use-values products. The use-values products traded could not strictly be termed "surplus" because they constituted a part of necessary consumption, balancing production excess in one good with deficits in another".

As few of the Bakenhe lived on the mainland and practised agricultural food production, they relied on their neighbours for the supply of obugeke (dried banana), grains, sweet potatoes (emboli), goats, etc. These they exchanged with fresh, smoked or dried fish.

Furthermore as we noted above, the commodity most lacking in the floating islands and swampy environs of Lake Kyoga was/is the iron stone with which to make iron ores for axes, hoes, hooks, knives as well as prongs for fish spears. For such items the Bakenhe used to be absolutely dependent upon outside people. They often made journeys in a dozen canoes up to Kasato. They went with fish, mats, baskets and hippo meat to barter for requirements of hoes, axes, hooks, knives and spears and bark clothes. In mass they were able to brave the lake and also have greater confidence and leeway to bargaining with the Banyoro and Budiope traders.

In Bunyoro as Bazaara puts it: Iron deposits were found in various parts of the country like at Bujenje, Masindi, Kyempisi and Kiryana".²⁹ The southern shores of Lake Kyoga, that is northern Busoga on the contrary was not endowed with iron deposits, and hence the people relied extensively on imported iron tools. To quote Bazaara again:

"Apart from the hoes, the iron industry produced axes for futting down trees, knives for domestic work, spears for hunting and defence and hooks for fishing."³⁰

The Bunyoro traders also supplied these people with salt. Lake Kyoga Region had no salt licks. Salt was made by burning reeds and other water plants, and passing water through the ash. The water is then

boiled and strained and a rough gray salt is made. This kind of salt was of poor quality compared to salt (omunyo) coming from Bunyoro-Kitara. Hence the people of the Region relied on salt from Kitara which reached them through Kidera Peninsula at Kasato.

The contacts between the Bakenhe and their neighbours were not very extensive, and even after the introduction of cowrie shells as a medium of exchange in the mid-nineteenth century, barter of use-values products continued as the principal form of exchange among the peoples of Lake Kyoga, especially the Bakenhe. In fact the impact of regional trade on the Bakenhe economy and social organisation remained limited. Thus the sustenance of the society and its members remained the principal driving force behind trade adventures, and not the accumulation of wealth, as the commodities bartered by the Bakenhe did not reproduce themselves. Above all there was no class of middlemen who specialised in trade, those who paddled their canoes to Kasato and other landing beaches to barter fish, meat, mats, baskets etc for 'foreign' goods were themselves actively engaged in fishing. They did engage in trade only to realize use-value products produced elsewhere, and which they could not produce in their immediate environment.

However, with the rise of states in northern Busoga, the command of canoes permitted the Bakenhe to serve as important functionaries of state organization, controlling landing beaches, and ferriage, handling trade and fishing. These were mainly the Bakenhe who lived on the firmland. The majority of the Bakenhe as we noted before left the firmland, and went to settle in the floating papyrus islands of Lake Kyoga. This saved them from being caught in the cross-fires of the feuding warlords of the burgeoning states in Busoga.³¹ Invariably the command of the dug-out canoes enabled the Bakenhe to escape the subjection experienced by their contemporaries in the states. They propelled the canoes into the thick and swampy areas of the Lake which were not easily accessible to the rulers of Busoga states and their retinues, whenever they felt ~~threatened~~ ^{threatened} or attacked.

Thus the economy of the Bakenhe was a "natural economy", that is the stage of simple reproduction when household production is structured to meet the food requirements of the household members.

Social Organization.

As we noted above the two incursions into northern Busoga forced the Bakenhe to leave their settlement on Mpologoma-Malaba River system. They moved to the shoreline and floating islands of Lake Kyoga. Here they led a more or less nomadic life, moving from one fishing ground to the other. Their life was solely depended on fish, water-lily tubers, sweet potatoes, and hippo meat. The Bakenhe were, therefore, inevitably isolated, and cut off from the mainstream of wider historical and social developments taking place in most parts of Lake Kyoga Region at this time. This isolation significantly contributed to the process of socio-economic formations among them in the precolonial era. To use Mukherjee's own words:

"The Bakenhe having cut themselves off from the mainland, and living at a very low stage of economic development (being interested in fishing) their social organization remained essentially tribal"³²

The Bakenhe lived on clan basis, and each clan had its own village. There was "no person responsible for the government of the whole tribe; each had its own headman to whom members look for advice and redress should there be any dispute among members"³³ The clan head was elected by his male clanmates. The clan leaders had the mandate of these people who at the same time had the right to get rid of those who proved incapable and inefficient in discharging their duties. As Roscoe observes:

"The headman is chosen by the clan when a vacancy occurs through death. When chosen a man hold office until death, unless he forfeits his right through vice or in some ways shows he is unworthy and incapable of fulfilling his duties. Such cases were rare"³⁴ [Clan authority was, therefore, restricted to men, and women and children did not directly participate in choosing the clan heads, and it was assumed that their interests were catered for by the male adults. There was hence discrimination based on age and sex, which is characteristic of transitory societies.

In the absence of a ruling class living on the sweat of ordinary members of the community, the Bakenhe fishermen had no compulsory tributes to pay to their clan heads, who were themselves also engaged in productive activities. The fishermen did not pay any taxation, "except when there was a case to be tried, when the parties concerned pay an amount of fish to the headman before the action is commenced, they sometimes paid a goat".³⁵ Such fees were only paid if the issue at stake was the sort of problem that could possibly lead to the split of the clan or more specifically where loss of life was involved.

→ The goat or ckicken would be slaughtered and sacrifice made to appease the gods and ancestral spirits.

This sometimes led to difference in wealth, but these differences were seldom on a large scale. The socio-economic functions and wealth of different families were often too similar to give rise to social differentiation. Above all given the social organization of the society, which was based on kinship (clan), the headman was merely the embodiment of the communal customs and rites, the correct fulfillment of which he ensured when discharging his responsibilities.

Storage

For example if a fisherman drowned in the Lake, the head fisherman took charge of the ceremonies for the propitiation of the spirits of the Lake. During such a time fishing would cease for several days and ceremonies held. A red sheep was slaughtered, chopped up and thrown in the water, and this was followed by a sacrifice of a white cock which was roasted, eaten and its bones thrown into the Lake. Under the direction of head fisherman beer was brewed and various dances performed, with frequent prayers asking the spirits of the Lake to keep fishermen safe and continue to provide them with abundant fishes. At the same time the canoe which caused the death of the fisherman or fishermen would not be used for a year or more depending on the number of people who drowned.

It is evident from the foregoing analysis that the Bakenhe due to the low level of their technology did not have control over their physical environment, and hence whenever there were

deaths caused by accidents or epidemic diseases, or decline in the number of fish caught, they would attribute them to the supernatural forces. Deaths, ^{to them} therefore, occurred whenever the spirits of the Lake were angered, and so ^{to} avoid future occurrences sacrifices of the type alluded to above would be offered to appease the spirits. Such practices also demonstrated the central place of the canoe in the fishing industry at this period. Fishing was essentially a religious activity characterized by the worship, praise, thank giving and dedication at the time of cutting the tree, hollowing the canoe, its launching at the beach and when it capsized, and the religious aspect of the pre-colonial Bakenhe community must be grasped on the basis of their concrete material conditions. As Marx said: "All religion..... is nothing but the fantastic reflection in men's minds of those external forces which control their daily life, a reflection in which the terrestrial forces assume the form of supernatural forces". ³⁶

Tribal democracy hence remained the cornerstone of the Bakenhe social organization in the precolonial era.

The Bakenhe were numerically small, and as such they made very little impact, if any, on the other communities of the southern shores of Lake Kyoga. This as Mukherjee articulates:

"..... is a common trait of communities who maintain a secluded life in unfavourable regions, so that neither internal or external forces could initiate significant changes in their societies leading them out of their tribal existence". ^{# 37}

The Bakenhe as a community lived as equals, and every adult had access to the means of production, and ^{was} ~~was~~, therefore, expected to participate in the process of production. In their daily activities, these people behaved "not as labourers but as owners of the instruments of production and as members of a community who also labour". ³⁸

Conclusion

The Bakenhe was, therefore, a communal, "classless" society where the prime object of production and exchange was to

promote or satisfy the material needs of society, and in which each person had an obligation to render assistance to his fellow kinsmen in need of assistance to overcome their unusual burdens. And for many years even the Bakenhe women related to the means of production and reproduction as owners and had a say over the use of their products. This is not say that the Bakenhe/were equal to men. They were not as the payment of bride wealth gave men authority over their wives, and hence subordination of the latter. But they were not subject to similar conditions as their counterparts elsewhere in Busoga, Buganda, Bunyoro, etc. who were bartered or exchanged for grains, iron, hoes, spears, and at times even sold as slaves. A social structure broader than the clan was not yet formed.

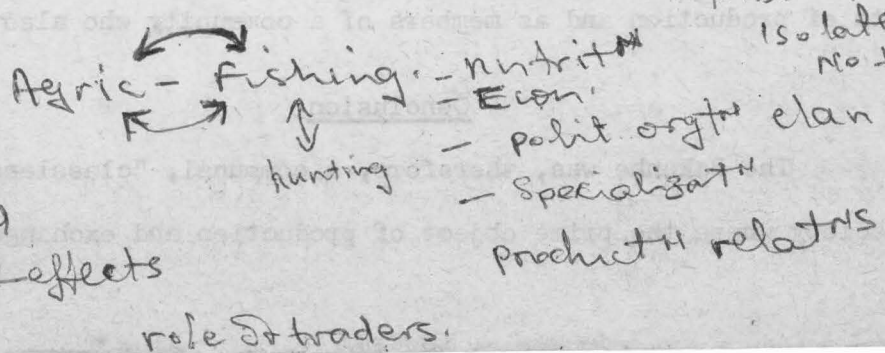
It was, however, not a static society. Its increasing contacts with neighbouring peoples especially in the second half of the nineteenth century were gradually, but steadily sowing seeds of transformation. They had trade like links with Basoga, Iteso, Jopadhola, Langi and Banyoro, and these relations were becoming more and more regular towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Perhaps equally important was the functionary roles they were playing for the rulers of the burgeoning states of northern Busoga like Bulamogi and Bugabula, as controlling the landing beaches, and ferriage and handling of trade across the Lake, and Mpologom^a-Malaba Rivers.

The Bakenhe were thus not completely cut off from the outside world, and with time and space such contacts were bound to influence the nature and trend of social formations of the community. But in 1894 Uganda was declared a British Protectorate, and this set in motion new socio-economic forces which later on shaped the dynamics of socio-economic developments among the Bakenhe, and the peoples of Uganda as a whole.

production
distribution

seasonal



tribal format
 isolated clans
 no tribal leader.

effects

- eastern shores of the Lake. For more details on the Abasuba. See Henry Okello-Ayot, A History of Luo-Abasuba of Western Kenya, East African Literature Bureau, 1975, and Paul Abuso, A History of the Abakuria, Kenya Literature Bureau, 1982.
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22. Ibid
23. I am indebted to David Omiah, Samuel Munanka, Blasio Kibangali, Odhiambo odinga and "Mama Samaki" on this information (Sept./Dec. 84).
24. Ibid,
25. Ibid,
26. Ibid,
27. See Marx, K. and Engels, F. The German Ideology Part I and III, International Publishers, New York, 1967.
28. Firth, R. Tikopia: Primitive Polynesian Economy, Routledge and Sons, London, 1939, pp. 37-38.
29. Bazaara-Nyangabyaki, "Famine in Bunyoro (Kitara) 1900-1939", MAWAZO, Vol.5 No.3, June, 1983 p.66.
30. Ibid,
31. Elders of Lake Kyoga gave this information in January, 1985.
32. Mukherjee, R. The Problem of Uganda, Akademia Verlag, Berlin 1954, p.58.
33. Roscoe, J. quoted by Mukherjee, R. Ibid, p.88
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
37. Mukherjee, R. op. cit. p.88.
36. Engels, F. "Anti-Duhring" in Marx, Engels and Lenin, On Historical Materialism, Progress Publishers, 1984, p.224.
38. See Marx, K. 1966 op. cit. p. 100.

Footnotes

1. See Tadria, H.M. Kabusenge, Changing Economic Gender Patterns Among the Peasants of Ndejje and Sseguku in Uganda, a Ph. D. Thesis, University of Minnesota, May 1985, p.33
2. Ibid,
3. Mamdani, M. Politics and Class Formation in Uganda Heinemann, 1977, p.40
4. Ingham, K., A History of East Africa, Longman, London, 1970, p.38.
5. Cohen, D.W. Historical Tradition of Busoga, Oxford University Press, London, 1972, p.123
6. I owe a great deal to Kisolo Kaundo, Onyango Otakna, Stephen Augo and Alfred Obenge Kaluoch on this point.
7. Cohen, D.W. op.cit., p.130.
8. Ibid,
9. Langlands, B.W. Notes on the Geography of settlement of Ethnicity in Uganda, Department of Geography, Makerere University, Occasional Paper No.62, 1975, p.130.
10. See Ngobi Robert, The Fishing Industry in Lake Kioga: A Case of Iyingo Fishing Village, B.A. Dissertation, Dept. of Geography, Makerere University, Kampala, 1983.
11. See Marx, K. Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations, translated by Jack Cohen, International Publishers, New York, 1966, p.68.
12. By ecology I mean the sum total of climate, soil, negatational, animal, fish, insects and human resources of the Lake Kyoga complex.
13. See Beadle, L.C. The Inland Waters of Tropical Africa, Longman, 1974, pp.244-45.
14. Ibid. Also discussions with the elders in the region do corroborate the same.
15. op. cit, p.198.
16. Ibid,
17. Blasio Kibangali of Bukungu Fishing Village gave this valuable information in December, 1984.
18. Ibid,
19. I owe this information to elders at Bukungu, Kyankole, Iyingo, Kiwantama, and Kibare along the southern shores of Lake Kyoga. (Sept./Dec. 1984.)
20. Wakienga is one of the Basuba clans, who specialized in iron-working in the pre-colonial era. They settled in Rusinga island



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