The Dynamics of Early 19th Century Nupe Wars

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1. The Nupe in Nigeria

The Nupe of Nigeria inhabit the "low basin formed by the valleys of the Niger and Kaduna rivers, between 9^{O}E 30' & 8^{O}E 30' north." They occupy an estimated total land area of about 7,000 square miles.[1] With reference to a modern map of Nigeria, Nadel delineates Nupe's southern boundary to be a line

> drawn from Leaba, on the Niger, eastward to Kataeregi marks the northern boundary of Nupe land, another line drawn eastward from Shari (or Tsaragi) to Abugi and on to the Niger south of Baro .... The Niger, flowing almost straight north-south between Leaba and Jebba, divides Nupe country from Yoruba in the west; the slowly rising country, east of Lapai and Gidi, sloping upward towards the hills of Gbari country, forms the eastern boundary of Nupe.[2]

The Nupe are composed of several groups of people of distinct dialects, two of which derived from outside of Nupeland. They speak different but mutually intelligible dialects of Nupe and live within contiguous geo-political boundaries. These subgroups include the Kusapa, the Chekpan, the Batachi, the Bini, the Kyedye, the Benu and the Gbedegi. The last two groups were said to have derived from Borno and Yorubaland respectively. [3] To their immediate south and southeast are the Owe, Bunu, Yagba, Kakanda and a few clusters of the Bassa. The latter two groups are settled on the west-bank of the Niger river as far down as the point just above its confluence with the Benue in Igala territory.

Following the nineteenth century outbreak of the the Nupe war and its subsumption into the Sokoto jihad after which the Nupes were incorporated into the Sokoto caliphate, Nupeland was divided among the five emirates. These included Rabah/Bida, Lapai and Agaie, all to the north of the Niger, and Shonga and Lafiagi, to the south. The non-Nupe polities of Kakanda, Owe, Yagba, Bunu and Bassa, all became entangled in the Nupe war and ended up in different levels of political dependency vis-à-vis the Nupe

The Owe, Bunu and Yagba live further away from the flood plains. They are an inland agricultural people living in habiting the upland area on the southern border of the Nupe and west and southwest of the Kakanda and Bassa. Throughout the 19th century, the entire study area was convulsed in wars. other Nigerian societies were undergoing similar experiences around the same time. The Hausa states to the north were in the throes of the jihad wars of Uthman Dan

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1 Forde, D., "The Nupe", *Peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence*, London, 1955, p. 17.

2 Nadel, S. F., *A Black Byzantium*, London, 1942, p. 1; see also R. K. Udo, *Geographical Regions of Nigeria*, Berkerly, 1970, pp. 116-117.

3 For a fuller discussion, see Nadel, *Black Byzantium*, pp. 26-33; Mason, M., "Nupe Kingdom in the 19th century: A political History", Ph.D dissertation, University of Birmingham, 1970, pp. 8-14, 26-31.

Fodio that began in 1804. The Yoruba wars were also being fought around the same time and by mid-century, the Niger Delta states were engaged with similar socio-political turbulence.

Very well known is the unfortunate fate of those people who suffered capture, enslavement and deportation as a result of the Nupe wars, but not so the causes, the course and the character of the wars that produced these visible effects.[4] Though, a number of 19th century European expeditions to the Niger left records of military and demographic devastation wrought on communities bordering the Nupe, especially along the Niger river banks,[5] the too few published studies on Nupe have made no more than generalized, schematic and inadequate references to the scale and prevalence of violence in these societies during the period under examination.[6] Only a published text by Micheal Mason contains a chapter that evidences a serious reconstruction of the early 19th century Nupe wars. This is in sharp contrasts with studies of the jihads among the Hausa states or the late 18th and early 19th century wars among the Yoruba.[7] A similar depth of research into the Nupe wars is lacking. This paper is one attempt to feel this gap. It will describe the wars and analyse its politics and economics. It will also attempt to lay out the impact of the wars on the society and on warfare in Nupe.

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4 P. Curtin and Jan Vansina, "Sources of the nineteenth century slave trade", *Journal of African History*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1964, pp. 185-208; Mason, M., 'Population Density and "Slave Raiding." The Case of the Middle Belt of Nigeria', *Journal of African History*, 10, no. 4, 1969, pp. 551-564.; Lovejoy, "Background to Rebellion: The Origins of Muslim Slaves in Bahia", Lovejoy and Nicholas Rogers, eds., *Unfree Labour in the Development of theAtlantic World,* London, 1994.

5 See F. J Kolapo, "Military Turbulence, Population Displacement and Commerce on a Southern Frontier of the Sokoto Caliphate: Nupe c.1810-1857" PhD dissertation, York University, 1999, see especially,Chapter 4.

6 For cursory mentions of the Yagba, Akoko, Kaba societies with respect to the Nupe wars of early 19th century, and at best, outline sketches of these wars in general, see M. Crowder, *The Story of Nigeria*, London, 1962, p. 91; R., Hallet, "Introduction" in Richard and John Lander, *The Journal of Richard and John Lander*, (edited and abridge with an Introduction by Robin Hallet), London, 1965, pp. 25-6; H.A. S. Johnston, *The Fulani Empire of Sokoto*. London, 1967, pp. 136-8; J. Hatch, *Nigeria: The Seeds of Disaster*, Chicago, 1970, p. 114; M. Mason, "The Jihad in the South: An outline of Nineteenth Century Nupe Hegemony in North-eastern Yorubland and Afenmai", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, vol. 5. no. 2, June, 1970; S. A. Akintoye, *Revolution and Power in Yorubaland 1844-1893: Ibadan Expansion and the Rise of Ekitiparapo*, London, 1971, p. 35; R. A. Adeleye, *Power and Diplomacy in Northern Nigeria 1804-1906: The Sokoto Caliphate and its Enemies*, London, 1971, pp. 34-5,56; E. Isichei, *A History of Nigeria*, London, 1983, p. 212; A. R. Mohammed, "The Sokoto Jihad and Its Impact on the Confluence Area and Afenmai", *State and Society in the Sokoto Caliphate*, edited by Ahmad Mohammad Kani and Kabir Ahmed Gandi. Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto, 1990, pp. 142-157; S. J. Idris, "The Establishment of Pategi Emirates. The Historical Background c.1810-1818", M. A. Thesis Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 1992. pp. 207-9.

7 J. F. A. Ajayi, "The Aftermath of the Fall of Old Oyo", J.F.A. Ajayi and M. Crowder (eds.), *History of West Africa*, Vol. II, Longman, 19774. pp. 129-166; S. O. Biobaku, *The Egba and their Neighbours, 1842-1872,* London, 1957; J. F. A. Ajayi, and Robert Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, 1964; R. C. Law, "Chronology of Yoruba Warfare in the Early Nineteenth century", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1970; Akitoye, *Revolution and Power*; Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*; T. Falola, *The Political Economy of a pre-colonial African State: Ibadan 1830-1900*, Ile-Ife, 1984.

2. The early 19th century Nupe wars

The Nupe wars began as a civil war between members of the Nupe royal family. However, foreign Muslim clerical immigrants and revolutionary jihadists from Sokoto to the northwest soon intruded into the fray, immediately giving the wars an altogether new and complex character. The general progress and outcome of the wars were henceforth closely impacted by the factor of Islamic jihad. This was demonstrated in the successful establishment of the aforementioned five Nupe emirates as members in the Sokoto caliphate. Nonetheless, other ideological motivations were also important. Thus nationalist, cultural, militarist and economic sentiments all asserted their influence on the Nupe wars and produced the unrelenting, vicious and complex character that the Nupe wars of the first half of the 19th century assumed.

The military camps and factions in the wars revolved around a number of contenders to the Nupe throne. There was at the same time contention among factions within the jihadist camp that became established in Nupeland, and between particular jihadist factions and the local indigenous royal contenders. The various groups engaged each other in different combinations of strategic alliances for as long as was necessary.

The Nupe wars occurred in at least nine more or less clear phases between c.1810 and 1857. The first phase between 1810 and 1812, saw Abd al-Rahman raise a local jihad against the state and for six months occupied "the Nupe capital", most likely Mokwa.[8] *Etsu* (king) Yikanko at Mokwa counterattacked and drove out the reformer as a result of which the former requested for military assistance from the Sokoto jihadists.[9] This alliance succeeded in killing Yikanko as well as establish the presence of a significant revolutionary jihadist community in Nupe. The second phase of the wars involved the two surviving local royal claimants from their separate capitals of Rabah and Gbara. Mohamman Manjiya, who probably participated in the sack of Mokwa, forged an alliance with the immigrant scholar/clerics and jihadist forces to strengthen his hands, as a reslt of which his forces achieved a victory over those of *Etsu* Jimada and succeeded in killing him.[10] Temporarily, at least, a new king in Manjiya, and a new capital at Raba, emerged in Nupe. Jimada's son, Idirisu, the heir to the Gbara throne, and Makolo, late Jimada's military commander, together with some supporters, sought refuge in Ilorin.

The third phase of the Nupe wars was fought c.1820-1824. Manjiya determined to establish himself unchallengeable and to wean himself away from his powerful jihadist allies whose leader was a Muslim cleric called Mallam Dendo. He sent his forces against the latter and expelled them from Nupe, whereupon they fled to Ilorin where another Muslim cleric had established a considerable political following.[11] At Ilorin the exiles entered into a rapprochement with Idirisu, heir of the late *Etsu* Jimada and became allies in opposition to *Etsu* Manjiya. In a bid to pre-empt the danger brewing on his southern border, Manjiya sent a large expedition against the Muslim forces in Ilorin. His attack failed, his enemies counter-attacking and

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8 H. Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa from the Bight of Benin to Sokatoo, to Which is Added the Journal of Richard Lander from Kano to the Sea Coast*. London, 1829, pp. 121, 123, 133.

9 M. Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate*, New York, 1967, p. 40, footnote no.113 and Mason, *The Foundation of Bida of Bida Emirate*, Zaria, p. 26.

10 Dupigny, Dupigny, E.G. M. *Gazetteer of Nupe Province*, London, 1920, p. 9 para. 11; Elphinstone, K. V., *Gazetteer of Ilorin Province*, London, 1921, p. 30, para. 3.

11 Elphinstone, *Gazetteer of Ilorin Province*, p. 31, para. 6; and Mason, "Nupe Kingdoms," p. 65.

eventually driving him back across the Niger, and out of Rabah, the Nupe capital.[12] This left the Muslim forces of Mal. Dendo and their allies, the Nupe who supported Idirisu, as the most powerful political group in Nupe. The Muslim forces thus became ever more powerful as their support seemed clearly to determine which local royal line and its supporters had the upper hand in the struggle for central Nupe *etsu*ship. As the *de jure* kingmakers and the predominant ruling force in Nupe, they made their ally Idirisu the new *Etsu* Nupe in place of Manjiya.

Several aristocratic Fulani clerics whose communities in Nupeland had been dispersed by the late policy of Manjiya, had also teamed up with Dendo to drive Manjiya out of Rabah. With the success of the alliance, these clerics seized the opportunity in 1823-24 to return to their former territories, and there organised military campaigns by which they establish their independent little territories, each of which became the emirates of Lafiagi and Agaie.[13] Trouble in the ruling family of Lafiagi resulted in a schism that produced another emirate, Shonga.

The fourth phase of the the Nupe wars in 1825 and 1828, began when Idirisu the appointed Nupe king turned against his allies and, taking advantage of the apparent neutralization of Manjiya's forces, sought to drive out Mal. Dendo and his supporters from Rabah. Mal. Dendo, however, wooed Manjiya back into another alliance which succeeded not only in raising the siege but eventually in emasculating Idirisu and marginalizing him from the political scheme of things in Nupe.[14] The wars went on for several years at different locations north and south of the Niger concurrently. Lafiagi emirate, south of the Niger that was established by Mal. Dendo's compatriots, came under the attack of the supporters of Idirisu. The wars assumed a protracted and indecisive nature during this phase, each side winning and loosing battles. Manjiya, who had again become the leading *Etsu* Nupe, maintained a continuous alliance with the jihadist faction until his death, c.1841.[15]

After Mal. Dendo died in 1833, sure of its predominant military and political position, the jihadist faction declared an emirate over central Nupe and Usman Zaki, Dendo's son, was appointed *emir* at Rabah. Masaba (Mohammad Saba), Usman Zaki's brother contested Usman Zaki's choice of Momadu Gborigi as, *shaba*, heir to the throne. His short-lived rebellion within months of Dendo's death marked the beginning of the fifth phase of Nupe wars. Quickly driven out of Rabah, Masaba settled at Lade near Lafiagi and from here organised a large following aimed at sacking Rabah. He allied with the two local royal lines that had all but been sidelined with the assumption of the *emir*'s title by Usman Zaki. Together with his allies, in 1834/35, he launched a first attack on Rabah that was repulsed.[16] Meanwhile, Masaba's rise to prominence at

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12 M. Sulu, "History of Ilorin." Compiled by M. Sulu, Ilorin Native Courts Registrar chiefly From accounts given to him by old people in Ilorin Town in 1953." Mss. Afr. 1210, Bodleian Library Oxford. See also, Frobenius, p. 578; Elphinstone, *Ilorin Province*, p. 31 para. 8; Dupigny, *Nupe Province*, 1920, p. 10, para. 15.

13 Dupigny, *Nupe Province*, p. 10 para. 15; Elphinstone, *Ilorin Province*, p. 31, para. 9.

14 Frobenius, L., *The Voice of Africa: being an Account of the Travels of the German Inner African Exploration Expedition in the Years 1910-1912*. Translated by Rudolf Blind, London 1913, vol.1, p. 579; Dupigny, *Nupe Province*, p. 10 para. 16.

15 R. Lander, *Records of Captain Clapperton's Last Expedition to Africa*, London, 1967, vol. 1, pp.179, 180-181.

16 Dupigny, *Nupe Province*, p. 10, paras. 19 and 20.

Lade impinged on sidelined Idirisu's political sphere and it brewed hostilities between them. This led to a couple of military encounters between the two on the south side of the Niger.[17]

The sixth phase of the Nupe wars occupied the period between 1838 and 1844. For this phase, there is a record of at least seven battles in which Tsado, the successor to Manjiya, supported by both Masaba and Idirisu, engaged the Rabah forces.[18] South of the Niger, between 1842 and 1843, forces loyal to Tsado and Masaba invaded Lafiagi and Shonga country to dislodge Usman Zaki loyalists. The capitals of these two emirates were attacked and their kings fled into exile.[19] Meanwhile on the north side of the Niger, after Tsado's year-long siege of Rabah, Usman Zaki, the *emir*, gave in and fled into exile.

The apparently charismatic *Etsu* Tsado died shortly after the sack of Rabah, leaving Masaba in an unassailable military and political position as undisputed Nupe king south of the Niger with his capital at Lade. In a series of raids into non-Nupe territories, Masaba expanded his sphere of influence by bringing the northeast Yoruba and southeastern Kakanda, and some Igbira and Bassa groups under his political sway.[20]

The seventh phase of the Nupe wars broke out due to the conflicts produced by Masaba's attempts to eliminate the two contending local Nupe rulers who now constituted his rivals and who were a threat to his position. Accordingly, in a series of moves between 1844/45 and 1848/49, he instigated the two Etsus against one another. He then leagued up with the forces of *Etsu* Isa, successor to Idirisu, and the soldiers of the visiting emir of Gwandu (Sokoto jihad leader in charge of the emirate over which Usman Zaki had ruled) in a battle against *Etsu* Jia who succeeded *Etsu* Tsado. Eventually, Masaba directed his forces against *Etsu* Ma'azu Isa who succeeded *Etsu* Isa, driving him out of his capital in c.1848/9.[21]

The battles fought in 1853 and 1854 made up the eighth phase of the Nupe wars. Masaba's military general, Umar, rebelled against him and instead offered his services to *Etsu* Maza of the Manjiya royal line. The allies invaded Lade and drove Masaba into exile. Masaba, though assisted by gun-equipped Ibadan soldiers, counter-attacked to no avail. Umar, the non-Nupe war-general, became the most powerful person in Nupe and for the next three years practically reigned as the Nupe king.[22] The wars connected with Umar's eventual defeat made up the ninth and the last phase before the reunification of Nupe in the jihadists' hands.[23] Following Umar's defeat in 1857, Usman Zaki was recalled from exile to reign as the first emir of the united Nupe state of Bida emirate. Masaba was recognized as the heir to the throne, succeeding as emir after Usman Zaki died in 1859.

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17 *Ibid.*, p.11, para. 21

18 Frobenius, *Voice of Africa*, vol. 1, pp. 583-4; Dupigny, *Nupe Province*, p. 11, para. 26; S. Crowther and J. C. Taylor, *The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger. Journals and Notices of the Native Missionaries accompanying the Niger Expedition of 1857-1859. By the Rev. Samuel Crowther and the Rev. John Christopher Taylor, Native Missionaries of the Church Missionary Society*. London, 1968, pp. 192-3.

19 Elphinstone, *Ilorin Province*, p. 34 para. 20.

20 See Kolapo, "Military Turbulence", Appendix 2.

21 Elphinstone, *Ilorin Province*, paras. 30 -31; Dupigny, *Ilorin Province*, p.13, para. 33

22 Elphinstone, *Ilorin Province*, p. 35, para. 26, pp. 35-6, para. 29; Baikie, *Narrative of an Exploring Voyage Up the Rivers Kwora and Binue commonly Known as the Niger and Tsadda in 1854*. London, 1966.

23 Elphinstone, *Ilorin Province*, p. 36, para. 32-34; Dupigny, *Nupe Province*, p. 14, para. 40-41; A. C. G. Hastings, *The Voyage of the Dayspring. Being the Journal of the Late Sir John Hawley Glover, R.N., G.C.M.C., Together With Some Account of the Expedition up the Niger River in 1857*, London, 1926, p. 90.

The phases of the Nupe wars delimited above overlapped, battles being waged concurrently at different locations. Overall, the maximum duration of peace in between battles during this 50-year period never exceeded three years. Moreover, no part of Nupeland escaped the brunt of the wars. Indeed, no other emirate of the Sokoto Caliphate compared with the Nupe in the scale, duration, and general complexity of its military crisis during its eventual rise to emirate status.

The internal Nupe wars were concurrent with raids launched by the Rabah and Lade jihadist factions against non-Nupe communities on their borders. These Nupe against non-Nupe wars have been variously described in the literature as raids, razzias, expansionist wars, jihad, and slave-raids; they were perpetrated against weak and defenseless communities at the southern frontiers of the Nupe.[24] Though external and different in motivation, these wars were organically linked and critically structurally related to the internal wars within Nupe. As a matter of fact, the dynamics of the one meshed with those of the other. Those engaged in it wished thereby to obtain military, demographic and economic resources (e.g., taking captives, conscripting troops and levying tribute) to break their military deadlock and facilitate their assumption of superior military and political positions. This was to be achieved either as these resources facilitated a direct increase in military efficiency or indirectly as captives sent as tributes helped to facilitate their position with the Emir of Gwandu, the Sokoto Caliphate overlord in charge of the Raba emirate. In deed Masaba's success in subverting Usman Zaki from Lade was based on the military, political and material resources so garnered.

3. Early 19th century Nupe military & warfare

How were the wars organized, what was the economics of war mobilization like and how were the campaigns conducted? How did these war impact on the socio-political structures of the Nupe? There is no data on the strength of the sectional armies of the Nupe during the first half of the nineteenth century. Early 20th century Nupe informants told Nadel that Manjiya invaded Ilorin in 1823/4 with10,000 strong army and that the final struggle for the Nupe throne in 1856/7 involved some 4,000 horsemen.[25] R. A. C. Oldfield in 1833 reported that Usman Zaki's cavalry and infantry numbered about 5,000 and 20,000 respectively.[26] Given the fact that each side in the Nupe struggle

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24 C. Meillassoux, Meillassoux, C., *The Anthropology of Slavery: The Womb of Iron and Gold*, Chicago, 1991, referencing Mungo Park's evidence for the interior of Western Sudan, distinguishes between two types of wars: "one consisted of raids executed by a restricted number of individuals, the other involved mounted expeditions in which a greater number of soldiers participated." And again, "wars which represented the bloody expression of the settlement of account between kingdoms, armies versus armies, princes versus princes and which were carried out with a certain degree of formality; [in contrast to] the great expeditions, bringing along thousands of men to the pillage of some distant country, in the course of which no quarter was given." The former describes the wars among the Nupes and the immigrant clerical aristocrats with their military bodies while the latter, with some modifications, fits the raids under consideration in this chapter. The modification to the latter is that they did not have to be "great", although some were. The soldiers involved, where it was a raid by a subordinate official to the emir, might not number in the "thousands" and the victims did not have to be a "distant country." See also "The role of slavery in the economic and social history of Sahelo-Sudanic Africa", J. E. Inikori, (ed.), *Forced Migration: The impact of the export slave trade on African societies*, New York, 1982, p. 78.

25 Nadel, *Black Byzantium*, p. 78.

26 M. Laird and R. A. C. Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa by the River Niger in the Steam Vessels Quorra and Alburkah in 1832, 1833 and 1834*, London, 1837, vol. II, p. 86; Mason, "Nupe

maintained a cavalry force,[27] it may be assumed that the overall size of the various troops fighting in Nupe during some of the major wars was considerable. The Nupe had a long martial cavalry-based tradition, as Tsoede, their founder-king, was said to have "owned no less than, 5,555 horses; and stirrups supposed to have belonged to him are preserved at Gbagede in Nupe."[28] Traditions of Nupe neighbour, like the famous Yoruba Empire of Oyo, bear evidence of Nupe effective use of cavalry.[29] Nupe maintained a valuable and important trade in horses with Kano and Borno and was actually the principal supplier to the Oyo Empire in the period up to the start of its internal wars.[30] Moreover, there is indication that Nupe may have bred horses, besides importing them from its northern trading partners.[31]

3.1 Organization

The late 19th century Nupe army according to Nadel was composed of "a small nucleus of regular troops, represented in the king's bodyguard", and "levies of slaves, volunteers, and mercenary soldiers..." Moreover,

> The troops who carried guns were mostly slaves, the sons of slaves from the king's household, while others were free men, mercenary soldiers—among them many foreigners, from Hausa, Bornu, and Yoruba—who had taken service under the *Etsu* Nupe ...The horse troops were composed again of slaves and mercenary soldiers. The slaves who served in the royal cavalry were the sons of titled slaves, every court slave of rank having to send one of his sons into the *Etsu*'s bodyguard, and the volunteers were all foreigners.[32]

The pattern described above had been established in the earlier period. The prevalence of wars, the threat of war, and the overall insecurity perpetrated by the contending elements within the fabric of the Nupe political community resulted in a virtually permanent body of troops that was handy and could be called upon in emergencies.

Evidence shows the presence, in the Nupe armies, of a considerable number of mercenaries and volunteers. This was especially true of the jihadist factions' armies, and especially, Masaba's. Revolutionary jihadists' recruitment of supporters among the oppressed and subaltern classes of the pre-jihad in Ilorin and Nupe had followed the strategy of granting liberty to slaves on condition of serving in the jihad army. The Nupe factions with the jihad flags could thus easily recruit slaves into their military.

Kingdoms", pp. 449-50 unfortunately does not provide estimates for pre-Bida armies.

27 This is evident from the instance of 800 of defeated Idirisu"s soldiers defecting to Wawa in 1829. See Lander and Lander, *Journal*, p. 106.

28 Nadel, *Black Byzantium*, p. 74; R. C. C. Law, *The Horse in West African History. The role of the Horse in the Societies of Pre-colonial Wesst Africa*, London, 1980, p. 20.

29 A. Obayemi, "States and peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence Area", O. Ikime, (ed.) *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, Ibadan, 1980, p. 158; Law, *The Oyo Empire c.1600-c.1836. A West African Imperialism in the era of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, Oxford, 1977, p. 39.

30 Lander, *Records*, vol. II, p. 13.

31 Nadel, *Black Byzantium*, p. 20. Nadel was informed that the Benu group of Nupe, who had immigrated from Borno tried their hands at horse breeding but were forced to abandon it due to tsetse induced failures.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 109.

Richard Lander, the Scottish explorer who, together with his brother John, "discovered" the mouth of the Niger, passed through Nupe in 1830 and left a keen remark on early 19th century military recruitment policy of the leading jihadist factions:

> It has been the policy of Mallam Dendo, who, by all accounts, is an able and crafty chief, and a courageous man, to advance foreigners of all nations to certain lucrative and important posts, either about his person, in the army, or as governors of conquered towns; and by this means he conciliates, in a great measure, the black, or original population of the country, confirms his reputation, and establishes his sovereignty with little trouble over lands and districts which he may have subjugated and added to his dominions....the number of foot soldiers he has at his command is so great, that it is not known. All runaway slaves are encouraged to join the ranks on condition of receiving their freedom; and they are joined by a vast number from surrounding country. The natives are commanded by captains from among their own countrymen, and the Falatahs, also by theirs; the greatest good-will prevails among them, and we have nowhere observed quarrelling of any kind.[33]

Oldfield also reported in 1833 that the

> army of Rabah is composed of liberated slaves, whose freedom is granted them on consideration of their taking up arms. In the winter or wet season they follow their ordinary occupations; and in the summer or dry season, when the Quorra [River Niger] is low, they assemble from all parts of the kingdom of Houssa, Soccatoo, Kano, &c. They travel very quickly, taking the unsuspecting inhabitants by surprise. They seldom fail in capturing hundreds of prisoners, as well as cattle, horses, &c.... The Felatah army of Rabah is commanded by several Bornouese.[34]

Mercenaries, volunteers, and foreigners seem to have had a considerable leverage in the Nupe army of Mallam Dendo and Usman Zaki. This is demonstrable in the chief-of-staff positions held by the Bornouese Umar Bahaushe, and the Yoruba second-in-command, Ubandawaki. Driving Masaba out of his Lade capital, Umar, for three years, was the undisputed military and civil lord of Nupe. Such foreign elements and chosen slaves came to constitute the core of the standing armies of many Western Sudanese states by the middle of the 19th century.[35] As late as 1862, Rev. Samuel Crowther in reference to Frederick Abbega, a freed slave of Kano origin, mentioned "many of his [Abbega's] roving countrymen who have hired themselves to the services of Masaba in destroying towns and villages..."[36]

The use of slaves in the military was of such importance in the royal guard as well as in the mass of foot-soldiers that members of each contending party, from senior nobility and well-off client-soldiers (*bara*)[37] to the least of the slave soldiers were concerned with acquiring these human resources. Since new captives could be impressed into the military (after a period of "seasoning") it

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33 Lander, R*ecord*, pp. 192-3.

34 Laird and Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition*, vol. II, pp. 87-8.

35 See Joseph P. Smaldone, "Firearms in the Central Sudan: A Re-evaluation", *Journal of African History*, vol.13, 1972, pp. 599 and 601.

36 *Niger Mission*. C. A3/O 4 (a) *Rev. Samuel Adjai Crowther*. Letters and papers 1857-63. Crowther to CMS Sec. Gbebe, Oct. 3rd 1862.

37 The *Bara* were young peasants and townsmen both native and foreigners who volunteered to enter the service of a feudal lord as clients. Nadel, *Black Byzantium*, p. 110.

can be imagined that slave capture influenced the expanded scope of the campaigns alluded to in the phases earlier section of this paper.

However, given the fact that the major wars were essentially carried on within Nupe, recruiting captives from among opponents into ones army might prove to be a Trojan horse. Moreover, they spoke the same language as their captors and could easily locate their places of origin. They might thus find it easy to effect escape or find someone to ransom them. Given the ideological divide and the partisan nature of the wars, Nupe captives might prove difficult to convert into loyal recruits in their captors' army. The easiest solution was of course to sell them off. This must have facilitated the expanded scope of the wars. The slave-booty acquired from defeated Nupe opponents was capitalized when converted into resources for the purchase of war implements like horses, foreign slaves and mercenaries, and other goods from outside Nupe. It is not surprising the reputed viciousness with which the wars were fought.[38]

3.2 Horses, slaves and guns

In his study of Nupe military organization, Nadel learnt that the cavalry "represented the elite of Nupe army [and that it] was composed of senior bara-men (free clients)..."[39] However, other evidence shows that the composition of the cavalry elite force in Nupe cut across all social groups to include slaves as well as free commoners and nobles.[40] The use of cavalry by the various Nupe warlords thus implies a steady importation of horses from Bornu and Sokoto at prime cost, besides their need for slaves. In 1833, Oldfield reported that Usman Zaki was "daily purchasing horses to add to his troops."[41] The wherewithal to obtain these horses was essentially captives, hence, the ability to maintain the war machine in top condition by purchasing as many horses as possible depended on more "successful" wars.

Horses and slaves were very valuable strategic, commercial, and currency articles. As well as being an important military article, owning a horse, like the possession of slaves, was also a mark of nobility or achievement among the Nupe. Egga was an important market for further southward importation of Borno horses into Nupe and into communities south of Niger-Benue confluence.[42] So also was Rabah. Right from Idah in Igala country up to Rabah, the Nupe capital, missionary and European visitors to the Niger observed that slaves and horses were complementary trade articles.[43] In 1833, Oldfield reported at Rabah that the

> finest horses are brought from Soccatoo by the Arabs; they are all entire, and capable of enduring great fatigue. The white horse, the property of the king — was a noble animal, about sixteen hands high, and in England would be worth about a hundred and fifty guineas. The horses between Rabah and Idah, the latter being the first town where many are met with, are of a much smaller breed, and very sure-

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38 Elphinstone, *Ilorin Province*, p.32 para. 6; p. 35, para. 23.

39 Nadel, *Black Byzantium*, p.110.

40 See Law, *The Horse*, 148 and A. W. Banfield, *Life Among the Nupe Tribe*, Berlin, Ontario, 1905, p. 6.

41 Laird and Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition*, vol. II, p. 86.

42 W. Allen and T. H. R. Thomson, *A Narrative of the Expedition sent by Her Majesty's Government to the River Niger in 1841 under the command of Captain H. D. Trotter*, London, 1968 [1848] vol. II, p.100.

43 Laird and Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition*, vol. I, pp. 133, 409; vol. II., pp. 80; Allen and Thomson, *Expedition to the River Niger*, vol. II, p. 85.

> footed: they are to be purchased at Iccory market (Ikiri) for sixty thousand cowries (three British pounds).[44]

Captain Trotter noted that a charger at Rabah in 1833 cost as much as a young female slave: "sixty to one hundred and twenty thousand cowries."'[45] Other British anti-slave trade commissioners on the Niger, Allen and Thomson, also left information about the brisk trade in horses from Idah and Niger-Benue confluence on the southeastern Nupe border up to Egga in Nupe during their 1841-42 expedition. Early in 1842, they reported that "a horse was valued at 22,000 cowries around the [Niger-Benue River] confluence."[46]

Thomas King, a member of the 1841 British Niger expedition supplied information on the tactical importance of the horse in slave raiding activities. He observed that "parties of about ten horsemen and some foot soldiers would lie in wait in the 'bush', near a village, and at daylight, when the unsuspecting natives go to their work in the fields, they are seized and hurried off to their camp."[47] All this bears out Robin Law's point that the connection

> between the horse and slave trade lay in their relation to war. Horses were valued primarily for their use in warfare, and were perhaps especially useful in the pursuit and capture of fleeing enemies, that is in securing slaves. Slaves, conversely, were most readily obtained through capture in warfare. The exchange of horses for slaves therefore, tended to become, it is often suggested, a 'circular process': horses were purchased with slaves, and could then be used in military operations which yielded further slaves, and financed further purchases of horses. Trade and war fed upon each other in a self-sustaining process which reinforced the domination of the warrior aristocracies — producing what Smaldone has christened the 'war complex' of the western Sudan.[48]

The extent and effectiveness of gun use in battles during this period is not clear, though some seemed to have been used. Nupe oral traditions consider gun-use vital to the turn-around in the military fortunes of *Etsu* Idirisu in 1828. His Beni[49] supporters were said to have used guns very effectively. Richard Lander learnt that they made use of "a great number" of "European muskets" and that "very few [of their enemies] escaped with life."[50] Thus guns had obviously found their way up the Niger as far as Labozhi, the port-town of Rabah, where there were colonies of Beni/Kyede people. These riverain Nupe groups could have procured guns through trade contact with Idah or Aboh traders who visited the trade marts of the Niger-Benue confluence.[51] In 1830, the Lander brothers saw many muskets in the assortment of weapons that were held by people they came across in their journey down the Niger river, from Labozhi to the Niger Delta. The use of guns could be expected to have increased only late during the period under examination, following Masaba's employment of gun-carrying soldiers from Ibadan in 1853-54. It seems, rather, that guns or muskets

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44 Laird and Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition*, vol. II, p. 88.

45 Allen and Thomson, *Expedition to the River Niger*, vol. I, p. 401.

46 *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 365.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 361.

48 Law, *The Horse*, p. 63.

49 The Beni sub-tribe of Nupe, distinct from the Benin that was recorded.

50 Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition*, pp. 180-1.

51 Baikie, *Narrative*, pp. 293-294.

served more a tactical function of frightening people in sudden raids when loud and repeated gunshots created terror and facilitated the seizure of captives.[52]

Overall, though, guns seemed to have been neither a permanent nor a prominent feature in the wars before the 1850s. The Nupe in particular did not use many guns. More than in Nupe territory, gun sales and gun use was common among the Igala, Igbira, and Kakanda southern neighbours of the Nupe.[53] Nupe chief weapons of war were bows and arrows, spears, swords and bludgeons.[54] None of the effects that the early 19th century warfare had on the people of our area of study related to the acquisition, exchange of or attempts to monopolize guns. But their occasional use could be expected to have had demonstrative effects in battles. It is interesting to note that all the people or groups in the Nupe area mentioned in connection with guns during this period were eventually subject to defeat, raids and tributary status by the jihadists whose principal weapons consisted of horsemen and foot soldiers using javelins, swords, bows and arrows.

The nature of military armaments noted above imposed an economic dynamics on the prosecution of the Nupe wars. Effective waging of wars depended on the acquisition of horses and other war equipment, as well as soldiers—slaves and free. The acquisition of both reinforced the need for captives to sell for money or in direct exchange for the resources required. The battles thus snowballed into more battles. The scope of the wars was broadened. Violence, length of campaigns and the areas covered by the wars expanded, all in bids by contenders to establish or consolidate military/political over-lordship and to acquire booty. Booty was the profit of war, convertible value for procuring the services of mercenaries, for the purchase of horses, foreign slaves and other goods, all of which would enable more effective campaigns in the future.[55]

Apart from the high cost of horses, the logistical problems of maintaining a cavalry force were enormous. [56] In the first place, the greater part of Nupe is tsetse infested. Thus, the combined mortality of horses due to wounds sustained in battle and the prevalence of tsetse-induced disease imply a high turnover in horses.[57] The pressure to procure booty and especially slaves to finance this military equipment would in itself have occupied a major place in the war-slave-horse-war cycle.

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52 See Smaldone, "Firearms", p. 594 quoting Baikie in F.O. 97/334, Baikie to Russell, no.3 of 1864, 20 Jan. 1864; and R. A. Kea, "Fire-arms in warfare on the Gold Coast and Slave Coasts from the 16th to the 19th century, *Journal of African History*, 12, no. 2, 1971, p.209.

53 References to guns outside of Nupe: Lander, *Records,* vol. I, p.180 and Laird and Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition*, vol. II, pp.184, 230, 268, 277, 294-5.

54 References to the bows, arrow, spears, clubs, swords together with horses could be found in Lander, p.193; Lander and Lander, *Journal*, pp.184,192; Laird and Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition*, vol. II, pp. 2, 3, 86, 194.

55 This was a widespread practice, see Denham and Clapperton, 1826, A, p. 326.

56 See Allen and Thomson, *Expedition to the River Niger*, vol. I, p. 401.

57 Reporting about his experience with horses in one of the Nupe areas where the early 19th century wars were fought, Banfield reported c.1904, "In seven months I lost three horses by these flies, and I noticed that in the months of November, the natives of Pategi lost twenty three. All these horses died with the same disease." Banfield, *Life Among the Nupe*, p. 72.

3.3 Military ethics

Nadel was convinced that "warfare in Nupe possessed its etiquette, its conventions, and rules, which show how highly developed and specialized a technique it had become."[58] He gave an example of the fact that an "ultimatum" was issued prior to attacking an enemy.[59] However, it is doubtful if this was the case before 1857. Due to the reasons of increased frequency, scope and length of military activities, and the use of mercenaries and soldiers of fortunes, it is more likely that military etiquette and ethics of war would be held more in the breach than otherwise. For instance, in 1843, soldiers returning from Masaba's aborted campaign directed towards the Niger Delta ran amok and pillaged some of the communities from which they came.[60] Thus, a contemporary opinion that the soldiers had "no principle to restrain their cupidity" is perhaps not far from the mark.[61] Evidence obtains for the period as late as 1857/8 indicating that military elements acting independently of centralized control imposed capricious demands on helpless victim communities.[62] There is no evidence that the feudal levies that engaged in the various Nupe wars betrayed a chivalric culture. Indeed, the presence of several military-political centres with separate feudal levies having primary loyalties to their immediate superiors would render the military generally un-amenable to such ethics. As Smaldone observed, the "institutional relationship between fief-holding, cavalry, and military functions presumed and sustained a dispersion of power."[63] In such situations, a centralized code of military ethics would have been difficult to uphold. In fact, a central point of the Nupe wars was the attempt to centralize diffuse political and military power.

It could therefore be expected that, apart from their politico-military and economic objectives and capabilities, the mixed groups that constituted the competing military contingents in Nupe did not possess necessary ethical and institutional restraints to unbridled violence on victims. In situations where Ibadan warriors, Borno mercenaries and Kakanda volunteers found themselves operating as a military force against an enemy, conflicting allegiance, attempts to make the effort pay and differences in military traditions would have shaped the particular nature that warfare assumed during this time. The increased violence, the torching of towns and villages, the killing of many and enslaving of many more, rather than being ordinary effects of warfare, seem to be a reflection of the nature and activities of a mixed soldiery that was unrestrained by any effective ethical codes.

The mass mobilizations of military personnel to fight over the distances in the wars and for the length of time indicated entailed material expropriations, requisitions, and violence unleashed on the populace that found itself along the line of military advance. The soldiers were generally not centrally provided for and had to fend for themselves once the provisions they set out with were exhausted. Rev. Samuel Crowther's 1857 report probably applies to the entire first half of the 19th century. He observed that the "king's soldiers [were] not paid, but [were] obliged to provide for themselves the best way they [could]."[64] He went on to show that the declaration of war on a victim

58 Nadel, *Black Byzantium*, p. 110.

59 *Ibid.*

60 S. Crowther, *Journal of an Expedition up the Niger and Tshadda Rivers, undertaken by MacGregor Laird, Esq., in connection with the British Government in 1854*, London, 1979 [1855] p. 39.

61 *Ibid.*

62 S. Crowther and J. C. Taylor, *The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger. Journals and Notices of the Native Missionaries accompanying the Niger Expedition of 1857-1859*, London, 1968, pp.70, 72 and 155.

63 See Smaldone, "Firearms", p. 605.

64 Crowther and Taylor, *The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger*, pp.162-3.

district was all the license they needed to start plundering, kidnapping and exacting on the unfortunate people. [65] Volunteers and soldiers of fortune set out for war carrying "their own weapons and rations sufficient for two or three weeks in the field."[66] Once the soldiers' take-along rations were exhausted, the satisfaction of food requirement could not but lead to considerable impositions, severe exaction and extortion of the conquered peoples. In this way soldiers kept themselves supplied with provision, captives and money.

"Smaller raids organized by feudal lords" - mobile forces of limited military contingents that swept through territories, burning, looting, and taking captives, were also recurrent during this period. The motivation of these raids was simply to procure booty, slaves included. In many cases, these invasions led to up-front payments of tribute or the surrender of a number of people as slaves. In most cases, the victims were either sold off into slavery or released to their relatives on payment for exorbitant ransoms.[67]

Given the need of the competing factions to maintain ready military contingents, capable forces with enough horses and mercenaries, the "smaller raids" into non-Nupe territory seem to have constituted a vital economic element in the entire equation of the military-political problems of Nupe during this period. Mercenaries had to be paid or rewarded and clients encouraged with presents. Soldiers also cemented their relationship with their noble patrons by giving them a portion of booty they got from raids and battles. Nadel's research indicates that

> the *bara* [client] soldiers could keep all booty in kind—called *dukia*, (wealth)— but were expected to present some of it to their overlords as "gift of thanks"; of the slaves whom they captured they had to surrender half the number to their overlords. The independent fighters, i.e. the sons of noble houses, [and soldiers of fortune] kept whatever they captured, both "wealth" and slaves, except for a voluntary gift to the head of the house.[68]

While describing Usman Zaki's "frequent" expeditions for "kidnapping and plundering", Crowther observed that in

> the event of slaves being caught, the kings and chiefs claim[ed] the larger share, and the soldiers but a very small portion for his pay or part of the spoils. However, to distinguish such, he [was] either provided with a sword, or rewarded with a tobe; and if very deserving, he [was presented with] a horse, to aid him in his future acts of man-stealing.[69]

The use of the various forms of emolument, given the non-development of salaried soldiery, interacted with the causal factors of the wars to reinforce each other in vicious and unending circles and thereby increased the extensity and intensity of the Nupe wars. Warfare in Nupe, as Nadel

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65 *Ibid.*

66 *Ibid.*, p. 598

67 Laird and Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition*, vol. II, pp. 23, 85; Allen and Thomson, *Expedition to the River Niger*, vol. 1, pp. 91-2; Crowther and Taylor, *The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger*, pp.70, 72.

68 Nadel, *Black Byzantium*, p.112. For legal distribution of booty from a jihad expedition see Mason, *Foundation*, p. 32. See also Last, *Sokoto Caliphate*, p. 106.

69 Crowther and Taylor, *The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger*, pp.162-63.

asserted for late 19th century, was already, during the first half of the 19th century, becoming "a profession" and "a source of income."[70]

The nature of military organization in Nupeland in the first half of the 19th century was reflected in bigger and more frequent wars, more violence, and in the general brutalisation of the Nupe population. All these seem to have encouraged both great slaughter and huge capture of opponents where possible. Guns, slaves, horses and cowries (tribute-money that could buy these articles) were complementary goods that served military, social-political, and economic purposes all at once. Each of them also constituted a store of wealth, and they were generally interchangeable, as one was sold to procure the other.[71] These articles were very important tools in the execution of military violence. They were also important as booty of war and store of wealth in the larger society. Their procurement and deployment in the Nupe wars linked up military-political and economic factors together, thereby giving early 19th century Nupe warfare a "total" characteristic.

3.4 Political diffuseness and warfare in Nupe

At most times, there were three or more centres of authority with the temporary dominance of a central state structure usually sustained by the partial co-option of the superseded rivals. In this condition there was little control over the outbreak and scope of wars. The various centres of power and influence were themselves targets of military attacks. The breakup of the royal house of *Etsu* Nupe into two contending factions, the invitation to Dendo, his active service in aid of Manjiya and the eventual independent military activities of Dendo and the immigrant Fulani clerics of the Lafiagi area, resulted in a situation of pandemic wars in Nupe. Many centres capable and willing to organize war to enhance their positions emerged. Indeed, up to 1855 when Etsu Maza was killed in the seventh phase of the Nupe wars, the two *Etsu* Nupe, though overshadowed by the jihadist emir, nevertheless maintained their royal courts and mobilized and raised military establishments. They received tribute from subjects loyal to them, and one or the other was consciously courted by each ascendant Fulani jihadist ruler of the day.[72]

The decentralized nature of military organization and mobilization in Nupe during the crisis ca. 1810-1857 meant that more than one centre had access, even if by sufferance, delegation or default, to the means of violence. Each was capable of en masse killing of enemies, laying waste entire communities, of massively enslaving people and massively relocating populations.[73] Depending on the levels of their subordination and discretion, the various feudal lords, nobles, district and town officials, and household heads from whom slave and free conscripts were obtained, wielded and executed such powers. They could terrorize, capture, raid, and/or enslave in accordance with the opportunity and their power. The widespread state of disturbance and

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70 Nadel, *Black Byzantium*, p. 106

71 Laird and Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition*, vol. II, pp. 80, 88.

72 R. Lander, and J. Lander, *The Journal of Richard and John Lander. Edited and Abridge with an Introduction by Robin Hallet,* London, 1965, pp.171,185,198; Laird and Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition*, vol. II. pp. 31, 35, 39, 67, 78, 108.

73 The entire population of Manjiya"s hometown of Tabria fled to Igualinze in Borgu during battles between Idirisu and Manjiya a year or two before the British explorer Hugh Clapperton"s visit ; see, Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition*, pp. 125, 128.

disruption of agricultural production resulting from slave raiding, kidnapping, and military violence reported by contemporary witnesses derived from this condition.[74]

Explorer Richard Lander reported a disturbance around Kulfo, northeast Nupe, in 1828 in which people of the walled town of Koofo captured and sold, contrary to custom, the wife of a man belonging to a neighboring village, who was supposed to have been slain in one of these engagements. The consequence was a mutual system of retaliation and petty warfare which embroiled all the country in domestic dissentions. [75]

He reported that

> the combatants arm[ed] themselves with bludgeons, bows and arrows, and spears; and the conflict [was], in almost every instance, prosecuted with the bitterness and animosity of the most ruthless savages, frequently terminating in the death or capture of numbers of each party, when the latter [were] uniformly sold into slavery.[76]

Explorers and African/European missionaries left reports of widespread scenes of ruined settlements both north and south of the Niger and in places as as far apart as the extreme southeast, southwest, northeast and central Nupe. [77]

3.5 The Jihad factor in the Nupe wars

Once the jihadists assumed a considerable measure of military-political ascendancy in Nupe, Mal. Dendo at Rabah, and his compatriots at Lafiagi, Lapai, and eventually Shonga, declared their respective territories emirates under the suzerainty of the Sokoto caliph. The jihadist's intervention in the Nupe wars was premised on Islamic ideology and their entire political agenda was based on the ideological justification and political legitimization of Usman Dan Fodio's jihad. The administrative arrangement of the Sokoto caliphate placed the Nupe emirates under the charge of the emir of Gwandu. Bye and bye, though, starting off as victims of jihadist incursions, successive indigenous contenders to Nupe central *etsu*ship came to unofficially recognize Gwandu's authority over them, but only as a sort of an arbitrating force in the ongoing military political conflict. Each thus, strategically alternated the assertion of independent attitudes and policies with those that increasingly deferred to Gwandu military and political intervention. With the general impasse among the various factions, a big room was created for any foreign force that could be made use of to resolve the crisis to the advantage. For one, each of the factions increasingly banked on the powerful legitimization that was conferred on those approved by the Sokoto Caliphate, in this case by Gwandu. They individually sought Gwandu's approval and engaged in diplomacy to defame

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74 See J. P. Smaldone, "Firearms in the Central Sudan: A revaluation", *Journal of African History*, vol.13, 1972, pp.598, 605 and Goody, pp. 49-56.

75 Clapperton, H., Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa from the Bight of Benin to Sokatoo, to which is Added the Journal of Richard Lander from Kano to the Sea Coast, London, 1829, p. 193.

76 *Ibid.*

77 *Ibid.* p. 196; also, W. H. Clarke, *Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland 1854-1858*, Ibadan, 1972, p. 171; May, D. J., "Journey in the Yoruba and Nupe Countries in 1858." *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, vol. XXX, 1860, pp. 228, 230.

their rivals. Well after Mallam Dendo was established at Rabah, forces from Sokoto were sent to assist Manjiya in his war against Idirisu.

Thus, during the course of the Nupe wars, Halilu, the incumbent Emir of Gwandu, who reigned between 1833 and 1858, played very active roles in attempting to manage the crisis to his and Sokoto caliphate's advantage. He intervened to conciliate opponents, to support one against the other, to confirm claims of contestants, to participate in some of the battles, to contain tendencies towards independence and, generally, to entrench and maintain Gwandu's interests. For instance, Gwandu forces joined Masaba and *Etsu* Isa against the other *Etsu*, Jia in 1848/9.[78] Also, after Usman Zaki's deposition,[79] the military contingent that accompanied the Emir of Gwandu to Nupe again fought and routed a pocket of rebels at Echu, in apparent support of Masaba.[80]

In all this process, an important factor that seems to have influenced the predisposition of Gwandu to each of the contenders in the Nupe struggle apart from the current comparative strength of the claimants, was the flow of bribes, tribute and presents.[81] The intrigues between rival power groups and the obvious interest of Gwandu in playing the rivals against one another resulted in the contenders' need for ever increasing resources that could be sent to Gwandu as tribute and presents. Thus, other than the need for, and the reinforcement in, booty, cheap slave labour, servile military manpower, civil and military artisans, there was an added factor to the expansion in the Nupe wars to capture opponents: the generation of impressive presents and tributes—captives, slaves, cowries and other plunders—that could be sent to the central Caliphate authorities and other allies to enhance their respective positions.

4. Changes in military structure and tactics

Nupe military struggles of the early part of nineteenth century started changes that became pronounced in the second half of the century.[82] As already alluded to, professionalism in the military was on the rise. In 1830, while at Wawa, the Lander brothers observed that 800 of Etsu Idirisu's "horse soldiers" deserted to Wawa following their defeat, thereby raising, at least temporarily, Wawa's military rating above Borgu's.[83] By 1857, this development had gone further, especially with respect to the military establishment that resulted from Masaba's search for guns.

By the third decade of the 19th century, the continuous search by the Nupe contenders for personnel, equipment and allies during their wars was already directing attention of Nupe military to the potentialities of having access to guns. The reports of Clapperton and Lander in 1826 and 1830 indicate that guns were available in the Nupe hinterland in small numbers but that they did not have any significant impact on military engagements. The Yorubas of Ibadans who assisted Masaba in his war against Umar were themselves still mainly armed with long swords and other cutting and piercing weapons during their 1840 war with Ilorin. But by 1851 muskets had become the major weapons.[84] And these were to quickly spread throughout Yorubaland and from there into the Nupe

78 Dupigny, *Nupe Province*, p. 13, para 32.

79 *Ibid.*, pp.11-12, paras. 27, 28; Elphinstone, *Ilorin Province*, p. 34 paras. 20, 21.

80 Elphinstone, *Ilorin Province*, p. 35, para. 22.

81 Dupigny, *Nupe Province*, pp. 12-13, paras. 30-32; Elphinstone, *Ilorin Province*, p. 37, para.37.

82 On the rise of professionalism in the military as a result of war, see, Isichei, E., *History of Nigeria*, p. 213.

83 Lander and Lander, *Journal*, p. 106.

84 Smaldone, *Warfare in Sokoto,* p. 103.

country.[85] To gain access to guns in the wars of 1854, Masaba had applied to the Bale Ogunmola Alatise of Ibadan for soldiers.[86]

In the area of military structure, Masaba's use of Ibadan auxiliaries was of great import. By his employment of foreign soldiers, he initiated a policy that was to recur in other emirates of the Sokoto caliphate in the two decades following the 1850s. Emirs began to centralize the military through the creation of firearms-equipped slave regiments, thereby, gradually extricating themselves from dependence on feudal levies.[87] As Smaldone puts it, "slave musketeers and standing armies commanded by slave officers supplanted levies of feudal cavalry, the social and functional integration of the ruling elite was necessarily undermined."[88] In Masaba's case, his elite strike-force and bodyguard during the struggle for the Nupe throne consisted of trained soldiers of another independent state, with which he had managed to establish a working diplomatic relationship. At the general level, Masaba was perfecting one of the means that could ensure his effective centralization of the military and, consequently, state structure. The foundation of a unified military/political state structure—the Bida emirate—over and above the divisions into dynastic sections, was being laid during this time of war, forged in the very processes of war.

There were other changes. Many authors have stressed the seasonal nature of the wars of precolonial Sudanic Africa.[89] Most campaigns, of the jihad wars for instance, were launched during the dry season usually to be called off as the rainy season set in.[90] The seasonal nature of wars was due in part to the logistical problems of a cavalry-based soldiery. A major consideration was the problem of horse mortality due to the prevalence of disease-carrying tsetse flies during the rains. Lying along the banks of the Niger and some of its tributaries and having access to more moisture and more wooded vegetation than the more northerly emirates of the Sokoto Caliphate, Nupe had more tsetse flies. Other factors include the need for military levies to return to their farms during the farming season without which famine could break out, as well as the need to prevent newly harvested crops from being plundered after the rains. Nupe was not exempted from these factors. The deployment of cavalry forces, therefore, tended to be aligned with the onset of the dry season. Manjiya's invasion of Ilorin with his 4000 horsemen was reportedly executed around March/April.[91] The two warring Nupe parties of Manjiya, with his allies, and Idirisu suspended hostilities in April 1826 and proposed to resume the war after the rains.[92]

However, during the course of the Nupe wars, especially from the 1850s, the dry season warfare rule started giving way in Nupe. The one-year siege of Etsu Tsado against Rabah, the expulsion of Masaba from Lade, and Masaba's counter-offensives, all lasted through both dry and wet seasons. In the first case above, Tado's ability to keep his troops for over a year was perhaps a result of Tsado's charismatic leadership and the ability to maintain an unbroken source of military supplies, most likely through better organization and distribution of what the Nupe had produced and what allies would supply. Masaba's year round warfare, on the other hand, was a product of

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85 Ajayi and Smith, *Yoruba Warfare*, p. 18.

86 Crowther, *Journal of an Expedition*, p. XX.

87 Smaldone, *Warfare in Sokoto* pp. 132, 146-7.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 146.

89 *Ibid.*, pp. 76-7. See also, Law, *The Horse*, pp. 138-9 and Lander, p. 176.

90 Smaldone, *Warfare in Sokoto*, pp. 36, 73-4.

91 Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, p. 201.

92 Lander, *Records*, p. 176.

military/technological innovation. By employing a thousand infantry soldiers from Ibadan armed with guns, Masaba was able to overcome the drawbacks of dying horses, and the need to replace them. He could actually do without the trouble of raising a mass of cavalry and the logistical problems of feeding the mass of the soldiers and grazing the horses. They were not under any compulsion to give up on a campaign because of the onset of the farming season. They could thus afford, also, to be very ruthless.

Perhaps more than anything else, Masaba's innovative use of this foreign soldiery was the beginning of the transformation of the essential character of Nupe military organization. It marked the start of genuine professionalisation of the military and the effective establishment of a standing army that went beyond a royal guard. The thousand-man gun-equipped Ibadan soldiers lent to Masaba was the major factor that enabled Masaba to control restive Lafiagi/Lade area between 1854-55, before he was finally driven out when his rebel war-General moved his entire troop against him.[93] With the help of the gun-wielding troop, Masaba staged a quick comeback to the Lade area in late 1854. W. Baikie reported, in late 1854, that Masaba had succeeded in winning the support of his people at Lade with the promise of a more responsible rule. But the threat of force that was provided by his loyal Ibadan auxiliary troop must have been a factor in silencing his enemies in Lade.[94] Masaba thus was responsible for initiating the modernization of a traditional military establishment in Nupe and probably in the whole of the Northern Nigerian area.

5. Nupe wars and demographic change

The Nupe wars impacted the demographic structure of the society. There is evidence for the depletion of the population of the rural districts of Nupe and the concentration of population into urban and semi-urban areas. Immigration attendant on preparation and mobilization for war caused urbanization. On the other hand, depopulation of the rural districts was caused by the removal of the youth through military conscription into the various armies, as well as by the flight of people as a result of military violence or its threat. The transfer, for tribute and the resettlement in new towns and villages of captives and slaves were additional factors in this development. Also, the outbreak of the jihad in Nupe witnessed an influx of immigrant groups—traders, cattle-rearing Fulani, intellectuals and clerics from Hausaland and Borno, and traders. By 1810, the military/intellectual group of jihadists had already joined in the immigration into Nupeland. However, the concentration of various groups of immigrants in particular locations within Nupe apparently depended on the nature of their vocations and how these played out in the social and political condition of early 19th century Nupe.[95]

5.1 Urbanization

By the beginning of the 19th century, the articulation of these immigrations with politically induced internal population relocation within Nupe resulted in the rise and decline of rival political centres. The division, by the start of the 19th century, of the Nupe monarchy into factions resulted in the

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93 F. O. 84/1278, MacLeod to Stanley, 2nd January, 1867 cited in Mason, *Foundation*, p. 94, footnote 2.

94 Baikie, *Narrative*, p. 271; Elphinstone, *Ilorin Province*, p. 35, para. 29.

95 Elphinstone, *Ilorin Province*, "Nupe History", pp. 30-31, paras. 3-4. For instance, clerics like Mal. Musa and Dendo, ended up in bigger towns and political centres where they could be patronized by nobility and royalty.

establishment of urban Rabah, as a rival capital-city to Gbara, after Yikanko's death had plunged the old capital of Mokwa into decline.[96] Rabah's further development, following Jimada's expulsion from Gbara,[97] was facilitated by the influx of immigrant Fulani clerics, mercenaries and cattle rearers who supported Manjiya, as well as local Nupe partisans relocating away from areas liable to victimization or attacks by Jimada's forces and supporters. Rabah became an important market and a powerful military centre in Nupe. Its successful establishment with the assistance of immigrants, in defiance of Gbara, encouraged more immigrants to come to Rabah.[98]

Other population centres like Zugurma, Lafiagi, Shonga,[99] Agaie, Lapai, Yeni, Lade and Bida, were established through similar processes. Prior to their development into urban or semi-urban centres as a result of such immigrations, a few of these settlements like Zugurma, Lafiagi, Yeni were small Nupe villages. Others urban centers like Lapai, Agaie, Shonga were newly founded in the process of the Nupe wars discussed above. As new religious and political centres, they offered prospects for military-political promotion as well as economic benefits to traders and to militarily inclined immigrant elements.[100] Hence, from very humble beginnings, Rabah, then Lade and later Bida, each attracted traders, scholars, artisans and every other category of immigrants from the Yoruba states, Ilorin, Hausaland, Borno, etc., to become big urban Nupe political centres. By the mid-19th century, Bida was one of the largest cities, as well as one of the most popular markets in the central Nigeria area.[101] Because these settlements arose and became political centres in the process of war, a large portion of their populations consisted of captives, slaves, pawns and other elements of servile status. Each contending party in the Nupe wars was particularly mindful of procuring captives, some of which were sold to buy horses and trade slaves from distant countries. These bought trade slaves and even some of the captives were then impressed into the military, and others were employed for domestic use.

The relocation of the captives and slaves from place to place within the advancing or retreating military forces was inextricably part and parcel of the military-political programs of the various Nupe political contenders. It is worth reiterating that raiding, capture and transfer of captives and slaves constituted important avenue by which mercenaries (and regular soldiers) were remunerated. The forced migration of both freed and slave/captive population was thus both a war policy and an effect of war and Nupe urban centres benefited from these movements during the wars.[102] Contemporary sources document forced mass transfer or movement of captives, tribute and slaves to various centres (Rabah, Egga, Gori, Ikiri, Sokoto, Gbebe, Lokoja, Otuturu, Idah, Lade, and

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96 Nadel, *Black Byzantium*, p. 77; S. Ibrahim, *The Nupe and their Neighbours From the 14th Century*. Nigeria, p.29.

97 S. J. Idris, "The Establishment of Pategi emirates. The Historical Background c.1810-1818", M.A. Thesis, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 1992, pp. 223-4.

98 S.A. Balogun, "Gwandu Emirates in the Nineteenth Century with Special Reference to Political Relations: 1817-190", University of Ibadan., Ph.D Thesis, 1970," pp.134-5. See especially oral information Balogun collected to the effect that Dendo"s "following increased" his influence grew ... as a result of which the followers started demonstrating their strength by ...overbearing attitude". Also, Idris, p. 217.

99 Mason, "Nupe Kingdoms", on Shonga, Lafiagi.

100 See also Elphinstone, *Ilorin Province*, p. 36, para. 31; Dupigny, *Ilorin Province*, p. 14, para. 37.

101 In less than a year of its establishment, it was estimated to have contained at least 60,000 inhabitants. See F. O. 2/23. Baikie to Earl of Clarendon, Letter No. 15, 28 Sept. 1857, para. 7.

102 The observations recorded by Clapperton are particularly useful in this regard. Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition*, pp. 122, 125, 128.

Bida).[103] Since some of this population relocation happened along the line of advance or retreat of the soldiers, the result was the mix of peoples of different ethnic backgrounds observed in many of these Nupe settlements.[104]

As the military/political balance changed in the Nupe-Igala-Igbira area during the first half of the 19th century, so the political and economic fortunes of towns and cities changed. Some towns and villages disappeared; others declined and lost their fame while new ones replaced them. The direction of population influx also changed accordingly. Rabah, the first capital of the jihadists and a big trade mart, was destroyed and deserted. Lade, Masaba's capital which replaced it, eventually suffered a similar fate. The populations of the cities were not only transferred to centres like Egga and, eventually, to Bida, but the roles of the cities as important slave and goods markets ceased. Egga and Lade took over from Rabah, Gori, Idah, Gbara, Kulfo, while Bida took over from Lade and Egga.[105]

5.2 Ruralization

In contrast to the urban situation, the rural Nupe districts suffered a loss of population. A typical army of an *Etsu* Nupe consisted of three categories of troops; the *dakari* or ordinary foot-soldiers, *bidingacizi* or "foot-troop carrying guns", and *dokocizi* or horsemen. The nobility contributed these troops to the cause of their royal patrons. Of the latter categories, the *dakari*, who were said to be volunteers entering the service of a feudal lord as soldier-bara or "'client', were all young men" composed of "peasants and townsmen, Nupe as well as foreigners."[106] A greater part of these levies, together with other youth, pawns and slaves that were attached to local nobles, royal tribute collectors and supporters of the indigenous Nupe royal claimants, were drawn from the rural districts. Whenever hostilities commenced, they were moved out of the rural districts under the leadership of their "*Etsu Dakari,* Chief of the Foot-Troops, a *bara* of higher rank, who was in charge of these volunteers and was responsible for their training."[107] This was the first step in their loss to the rural districts and their relocation into pre-war and post-war urban centres. Many became captives and slaves, distributed within and outside Nupe in accordance with the dictates of their captive, enslaved, and subordinate or dependent political positions and statuses.

An obvious change in settlement pattern is the case of the Kakanda, Oworo, Bassa and some Nupe groups on the west bank of the Niger. Their towns and villages were destroyed and the entire area left vacant due to direct military attack or its threat.[108] The corollary is that refugee centres developed on the east side of the Niger, some of which became permanent settlements with considerable populations.

Hence, one of the general results of the Nupe wars was that a wide strip of depopulated area emerged beside new clusters of fewer but larger and mixed refugee-fed communities. Thus Crowther observed in 1854,

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103 See Appendix 4, Kolapo, "Military Turbulence" for each of these cases.

104 Examples of many liberated Africans from different parts of the Nigerian area coming across their relations on stations along the Niger River can be found in Crowther and Taylor, *Gospel on the Banks of the Niger*, p.204.

105 See *Ibid.*, p. 72.

106 Nadel, *Black Byzantium*, pp. 109/10.

107 *Ibid.*

108 Crowther, *Journal of An Expedition* p. 46.

> the left bank of the river is now more thickly populated than in 1841. In consequence of the invasions of the Filatas [i.e. jihadists], all the inhabitants of the right side have removed to the left, and built their houses upon the mountains as places of refuge.[109]

New large centres like Gande and Gbebe,[110] and others settlements newly established by the Bassa, were thrown up where none previously existed.[111] Crowther in 1857 noted a cluster of about twenty village groups "in the district of Orisapia," with two of the groups entirely "Nupes, who, during the political disturbances of their country, sought refuge here in the country of Igara."[112]

The situation for the Kakanda, Igbira-Igu, and Igala on the banks of the Niger also applies to the heartland of Nupe. Contemporaries observed a noticeable presence of displaced Nupes outside their homeland. Commissioners Allen and Thomson noted, "the long-continuance of civil wars" and the frequent invasions of the jihadists "have scattered them [Nupe] among all the surrounding nations, where they are the most active manufacturers and merchants."[113] Confirming this observation, Crowther in 1859 also remarked that the "slave wars ... scattered ... many Nupes among the inhabitants of the lower parts of this river..."[114]

It might be plausible to consider demographic factor as an important conditioning element in the resort by Masaba and other contestants in the Nupe struggles to wooing and impressing foreign conscripts, seasoned mercenaries and volunteers from across the Nupe borders.[115] The change in military recruitment policy was forced on them because the rural districts had lost a large percentage of male youth to recruitment, emigration and war, and had become incapable of meeting further recruitment demands of the multiple armies. This might also explain the south and southeastward directions of Masaba's military expansion and his eventual conscription into his army of the Bunu, Yagba and Kakanda non-Nupe tributaries[116] as well as his hiring of Ibadan soldiers. Given this dire demographic situation and the urgent need for soldiers, it could be expected that the withdrawal of youthful and other able-bodied persons by recruitment into the military from within the rural areas must have been pushed to near inelastic limits between 1810-1857. Some scholars have attributed the current relative low population density of the middle belt area in which Nupe is found to these wars.[117]

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109 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

110 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

111 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

112 Crowther and Taylor, *Gospel on the Banks of the Niger*, pp. 52-53, entry for Aug. 9.

113 Allen and Thomson, *Expedition to the River Niger*, vol. I, p. 380.

114 C.M.S., Niger Mission. C. A3/O 4 (a) *Rev. Samuel Adjai Crowther*. Letters & papers 1857-63. Letter to Sec. CMS. Dec. 3rd. 1859, para. 11.

115 Crowther, *Journal of an Expedition*, "Preface", p. XX.

116 *Ibid.*, p.39; Baikie, *Narrative*, pp.302-3.

117 In *Gospel on the Bank of the Niger,* pp.57-8, Crowther painted a complex picture of population mobilization; also, the discussion with regard to low population densities between Mason Gleave and Prothero cited in the bibliography; and concerns from colonial officials about low population density in Nupe recorded in NAK Nigerprof162/12/24. NO. Ma2. 1/44. "Decline of population among the Nupe of Niger province"; A. T. Jacobs, and J. Kolo, "Report on Nupe Areas of Niger and Ilorin provinces", *Traditional Land Tenure Surveys - 1964 Research*, Institute of Administration, Zaria, 1965, p.117.

6. Conclusion

The factionalization of Nupe into multiple poles of political, economic and demographic power contributed in a large measure to the intense and prolonged nature of early 19th century Nupe wars. The logic and economics of financing the war machines and maintaining good standing with the jihadist Emir of Gwandu were important factors in the expansion of the scope of the wars. Changes in military strategy and technology were taking place. All these elements constituted the internal dynamics of the early 19th century Nupe wars.

The Nupe wars eventually resolved into the successful consolidation of the central Nupe state into the hands of the jihadist. This resulted in the creation of a unified Bida emirate under a new central administration that was Islamic in ideological orientation. In deed, the wars were part of the processes of state and identity formation and reformation that was going on in most of the Nigerian area during this period. The wars were devastating in all respects, but they were not aimless. While, the original purposes of these wars were multifarious, in the course of their progress, a welter of interposing factors led to the changes—negotiation and renegotiations and total reformulations of the strategies, aims and goals of the wars. But by the end of 1857 a new enlarged ideologically driven political and administrative structure had emerged, itself a part of a larger system of the Sokoto Caliphate, the largest state and economy of its type in 19th century sub-Saharan Africa.