

## THE FACTOR OF TRADE IN THE DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN THE NUPE PEOPLE AND THE ILORIN EMIRATE

AbdulRahman Adebayo Suleiman  
University of Ilorin, NIGERIA

### Abstract

Several scholars who wrote on migration have put forward many reasons why people move from one place to another. These include but are not limited to political, social, cultural and religious factors. Scholars of Nupe history have recorded several push and pull factors that were responsible for the Nupe migration into places around the world. However, little or no attention has been placed on the factor of trade in the Nupe migration into Ilorin. This paper therefore, intends to examine the place of trade in the Nupe diplomatic relations with the people and authority of the Ilorin Emirate. These among other things relate to the identification and appreciation of values of the relations between Nupe and the Ilorin Emirate. Since this study is on the relations of the two cosmopolitan communities, it will be useful in pointing sources of mechanism valuable to sustain effective policy of peaceful co-existence, crisis management and global peace. This study adopted the historical research method, which involved the use of archival materials, oral evidences, and text content analysis. The study concluded that trade (with involvement in activities such as caravan trade, agriculture, currency production etc.) played prominent roles in the Nupe migration, integration and diplomatic relations into the Ilorin Emirate.

**Keywords:** Diplomacy, Trade, Polity, Relations, Migration and Integration

### Introduction

Nupe people are located around the Niger basin in Nigeria. They speak Nupe language. At the Southern part of Nupeland, the float of River Niger separated the Nupeland from Ilorin Emirate. Some Nupe speaking-people of the Niger area were aboriginal, while some people, across the wider areas of the Niger migrated to the Nupeland and got integrated together with their descendants. Thus, the existence of Nupe in the Niger basin is historically linked with evolutional and migration facts. These group of people became prominent in different trade which enable their dispersal to Ilorin and the other part of the world. Several Nupe history writers categorised Tsoede as the eponymous ancestor of Nupe people because he was able to transform all Nupe settlements into a confederation in the fifteenth century. The successors of Tsoede engaged in several activities, which led to the expansion of Nupe territories and migration of Nupe people to several places in Nigeria. In the pre-colonial era, Nupe rulers directly conquered some of their neighbouring countries, such as Ijumu, Kakanda, Kabba, Oworoland, Igbomina and Ekitiland, in the south-western Nigeria.<sup>1</sup> Failure of Nupe to conquer Ilorin in the eighteenth century, provided avenue, in the nineteenth century for alliance between Nupe and Ilorin Emirate to conquer and colonise some settlements in the south-western areas of what later became Nigeria. Such contact and alliance facilitated trade among other factors that contributed to migration of Nupe people to Ilorin Emirate in the pre-colonial period. British conquest of Nupe and Ilorin Emirate in 1897 paved new trend in trade, migration and integration of Nupe people in Ilorin Emirate.<sup>2</sup> British's declaration of Northern Protectorate of Nigeria in 1900 engendered the introduction of Provincial

Administration under which the first two provinces (Ilorin Province and Middle Niger Province) were created in Northern Nigeria.

“The Middle Niger Province comprised the whole of Nupeland within what is now Niger State plus all the Kabba territory and Oworoland, including Lokoja in Kogi State. The then Ilorin Province consisted of the Nupe, Ibolu and Igbomina/Ekiti lands of what is now Kwara State.”<sup>3</sup>

It is important to mention that up till the time of this documentation, the Nupe-speaking people dominant towns of Lafiagi, Tsaragi, Pategi, Gbugbu in the northern hemisphere of Ilorin Emirate are under Edu Local Government Area (L.G.A.) of Kwara State as the areas have been captured since the introduction of British colonial administration. Therefore, the British colonial administrative creation also enhanced trade relations, migration and integration of Nupe people into the Ilorin Emirate.<sup>4</sup> In post-colonial period, trade and other aspects of the integrated Nupe people of Ilorin Emirate are sustained alongside other integrated linguistic groups, such as Hausa, Yoruba, Malians, Kanuris, Tuareg and Gobriawa in Ilorin Emirate of Kwara State of Nigeria.<sup>5</sup>

### **Nupe-Ilorin Economic Connection/Relations in the Pre-Emirate Era**

Since the time when Ilorin had been a vassal settlement of Oyo, economic factors wielded substantial reasons why relations existed between Nupe and Ilorin. In the pre-Emirate era of Ilorin, the said Nupe-Ilorin relations were encapsulated into Nupe-Oyo (Yoruba) relations under the feudal authorities of both sovereign states of Nupe and Oyo. This was a result of the territorial expansion of Nupeland to Ilorin in the fifteenth century by Tsoede, the Nupe feudal ancestor.<sup>6</sup> After Tsoede had declared the independence of the Nupeland from Idah, it was not easy for him to sustain the economy of the land because, Idah, (his mother’s paternal home) was still fortified against the then Nupeland. Also, it was quite impossible for him to capture the Kyede people. Motive to capture more people into the Nupe kingdom for tribute collection was among the other reasons for annexation of Ilorin territory by the Nupe rulers. In addition, Tsoede diplomatically accommodated several scholars, traders and warriors from northern kingdoms such as Kano, Katsina and Bornu. The immigrants latter integrated to become Nupe before migrating to some areas, which included Ilorin. On matter related to trade and religious, for example, Kijan and Immam Gambari families of Ilorin were among the integrated Nupe families that migrated to Ilorin in the Nineteenth century. Abdullahi and Nurudeen of Kijan family in Ilorin were descendants of immigrants of Nupeland. Nurudeen was a scholar while Abdullahi was a trader. They moved out of the land as a result of the Nineteenth century incessant Nupe rivalry wars. They first moved to Lokoja in the present Kogi State of Nigeria. They transacted potash from Lokoja to Okesuna in Ilorin. Abdullahi was said to further export war implement from Okesuna smith workshop to Oyo Ile. Abdullahi was said to patronize the Gambari market. Before the era of Oba AbdulSalam of Ilorin Emirate, the market was managed by collective responsibilities of Bako, Dose and AbdulMumeen. Bako was a Hausa origin man while Dose and Abdulmumeen were Nupe descents.<sup>7</sup>

The Nupe that traded their wares into the market were accommodated by Dose and AbdulMumeen. The *Aláròbò* and *Dilálì* (commission agents) were responsible to *Serikinfawa* (the market controller), who in turn delivered the commission collected to Dose and AbdullMumeen, who share the commissions on mutual understanding. It should be noted that Dose and AbdulMumeen accommodated majority of Nupe that migrated to Ilorin in their era. Dose combined authority of the Gambari market with that of Awodi, for he was said to have established Awodi market (where he had his smith workshop) prior to the establishment of the Gambari market. Awodi market was about one kilometer away from Gambari market.<sup>8</sup> It should be mentioned that relations between the Nupe and the Yoruba had existed since the period of Elempe, the king of Nupe and Oranmiyan, the founder of Oyo stool. The relations persisted in the period of Tsoede, pionner of Nupe confederate States. In the period of Tsoede, Ilorin was known as integral part of Yorubaland. In the pre-Colonial and pre-Emirate era, Nupeland functioned as a link/rest centre for travelers/caravans that were willing to convey their goods to Yoruba States. In the trans-Saharan era, thousands of caravans moved into Rabba, the Old capital of Nupe, and majority of them furthered their journey towards Benin and Yoruba country. The Fulani herders sojourned at foreigners' quarters of Labozi and Lalemi of Nupe kingdom and served as escorts to the Nupe who wanted to migrate to Ilorin through the bush path. Based on terms and mutual understanding, token and /or kind payment is paid by the Nupe to those Fulanis<sup>9</sup>, Nadel confirmed the presence of Yoruba in Nupe foreigners' quarters of Labozi and Lalemi<sup>10</sup>, yet, AbdulRahman Mahmud asserted that (according to Nupe oral transmission) Ilorin merchants were generally categorised as the Yoruba. Those Ilorin merchants acculturated both Nupe and Yoruba (Ilorin) languages and cultures that one could hardly distinguish them as either Nupe or Ilorin.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the Yoruba (Ilorin) merchants of Labozi and Lalemi transited Ilorin and Nupeland. However, some of them finally settled at Nupeland, while majority settled at Ilorin because of its commercial opulent. A section of Sotafu Nupe family of Ilorin claimed that their ancestor, Ahmed Abdullahi migrated (as onions merchant) from Labozi to Ilorin in the late Nineteenth century. The foreigners were accommodated to have their own headmen under the Etsu's administration. The head of Yoruba was known as Serkin Yoruba or Asari.<sup>12</sup>

Bida economic administration in pre-colonial period was significant for it fostered sensitizations among the caravan merchants and the settlers. Before the colonial period, the Yoruba slaves and war captives of Nupe had significantly added up to the population of Bida to become heterogeneous. Also, through tacit of several aspects of diplomatic, economic and socio-cultural long relations between Nupe and Yoruba, some Yoruba citizens had migrated to Nupeland to become stakeholders. In addition, the Nupe's Yoruba war captives and the Yoruba who were Nupe's slaves later became free born as a result of long term civic relations between the Nupe and the Yoruba in the Nupe communities. New civil status of the Yoruba enhanced growth of Bida metropolis and facilitated opportunity to the citizens who would like to involve in exportation of caravan and or local wares to Yorubalnds and beyond. One of the results of such civic relations was that Nupe and Yoruba languages had become bilingual for an average Nupe and Yoruba persons of Bida. Thus, there was establishment of foreigners' mini market in which commodities like embroidered gowns, beads, brass and silver wares were sold. Albarika, a Nupe and Yoruba linguist of Bida, was used to be accommodated by Alfa Sanni of Denkosin area of Ilorin Emirate. Albarika used to transact slaves from Bida to Ilorin before he migrated (with his people) and finally settled in Ilorin. His offspring are well established in Ilorin till date. In the pre-colonial era, the movement of people from Nupeland to Ilorin or from Ilorin to Nupeland depended on the use of canoe to cross the River Niger, and Raba was one of prominent places of ferry.<sup>9</sup> The Nupe were

involved in transportation of the travelers across the River. It was an occupation that fetched the Nupe their daily income. Some of Nupe migrants to Ilorin annexed the River routes.<sup>13</sup>

The geographical location of Ilorin enabled it to play an important role over the transportation of wares from northern part of Nigeria to the southern part. It is noted from Eliphinston report that Ilorin had been a depot “both for the north and south”.<sup>10</sup> It was formally regarded as “the garden of north, not because it was the main producer of export to the United Kingdom or other countries but a food-supplying depot for enormous trade that were been carried out by great number of middlemen”. The goods that were traded in, included yam, yam-flour, Shea-butter, mats, pottery, guinea-corn, and native cloths among others. As a depot, one of its features is that it enabled the movement and settlement of merchants from different ethnic groups, among whom Nupe were.<sup>14</sup>

### **Polity/Military Campaigns**

The rise of Ayorinde also influenced the economic/trade contact of Nupe and Ilorin. He was an Ibadan military commander, who sought the supports of some lieutenants in Ilorin against the people of Akoko area. Ayorinde’s political expansion was just an indirect measure to control the Akoko economic resources.<sup>15</sup> In 1860s part of Akoko and southern Ijumu were in control of Ayorinde of Ibadan. He held allegiance to Masaba’s authority and was permitted to exercise a relative degree of imperial domination provided that he agree to remit annual tribute to Bida. Ayorinde annexed the economic control of Akoko and declared its independence in 1870. Ayorinde spent part of his early life in Ilorin, where he learnt the use of cavalry. After the death of Mallam Dendo in 1835, a few Nupe and non-Nupe service men of his contingent crossed the River Niger to Ilorin as machinery of wars.<sup>16</sup> They (especially the Nupe descent ones) were received by Ilorin war lords. Those who received them later released them on commercial basis to Ayorinde, for military service under Ayorinde. Ayorinde’s contingent was of two categories, one, the slave armies, and two, the machineries, who were promised the booties of invasion and conquest of Akoko, Ekiti, and Afemai communities. Towards the conquest of the invaded place(s), any slave army that was able to distinguish his military prowess could also be given freedom and allocated a ward under his control. The conquest of Akoko, Ekiti and Afemai communities got to an end when the communities allied and sought the assistance of Massaba, a Nupe warmonger. Massaba envisaged unexpected attacks from Ilorin if he undermined her. For this reason, he sought the alliance of Ilorin against Ayorinde. At last, Ayorinde and his armies were eventually driven out of the communities. At this juncture, it is important to understand that virtually all Ayorinde’s armies from Ilorin returned to Ilorin because the town was considered safe for them than Ibadan, since Ilorin was precipitating attacks on Ibadan.<sup>17</sup>

Apart from people who ventured in Ayorinde’s army for economic reason, there were Nupe who engage in commercial activities between Nupeland and Ilorin. Throughout the nineteenth century, both Ilorin and Nupe people were directly involved in transaction of potash, copper, glass and Shea-butter in exchange of cola nut, palm oil and camwood that landed in Ilorin from Yoruba hinterland. Ilorin and the Nupe people had harmonious middlemen relations over the control of wares that came to Ilorin from Nupe and those that left Ilorin to Nupeland. Some Nupe possessed lodging accommodation that (over a time), eventually became permanent residents for them in Ilorin. In addition, indigo was important to the Ilorin weavers, but her soil was not really support its growing. As of the period of Nadel’s stays in Nupeland, it is confirmed that the commercial transaction of Idigo was

restricted. It was grown only by weavers, and just only 25 trees were found in Nupeland.<sup>18</sup> Market for Nupe indigo was mostly found among Ilorin weavers and dyers, and with the help of middlemen, who traded it to Yoruba, Idigo was disposed to the most favorable market in Ilorin. With the exception of the middlemen the Konu (sub Nupe entity) people transacted the product by themselves to the most nearest market to Ilorin.<sup>19</sup>

### **Nupe-Ilorin Trade Relations in the Nineteenth Century**

Following the construction of railway (between the first and second decades of the Nineteenth century) across the south/Yorubaland, such as Ilorin, Nupeland and northern part of Nigeria, trade and industrial activities were diversified and conducted to the south via Ilorin. Some trading articles were also conveyed to far northern Nigeria from the core south to Nupeland through Ilorin. For her domestic consumption, the Nupe “imported food stuff, especially palm-oil and European salt, cheap southern kola-nut, potash, and live-stock, while she re-exported potash and beans from north to the south; and palm-oil, European salt, and kola-nut from the south to the north.” Introduction of rail transport in the colonial period drastically improved trade convenience and the scale of wares. Smoke fish was (and up till the time this paper is written) one of essential commodities that sustained link of commercial interest among the Nupe and Ilorin. It is however confirmed that the trade in smoke fish from the riverine districts of Nupe by rail to Ilorin and Ibadan, took a new dimension at the inception of rail way. Within the introductory period of the rail, wives of Nupe farmers were actively involved in transaction:

“relay of smoke fish to the nearest river side of Jima or Muregi, where a wholesale from Jebba buys up fish in large quantities, take them, again by canoe to Jebba market and sell them to another trader who will transport the fish by rail or lorry to the final destination-the inland, markets of Bida, Ilorin Oshogbo or Ibadan.”<sup>20</sup>

### **Indigenous Industries, Trade and Commercial Connections**

Schan referred to Nupe as a country of iron. The source of Nupe iron was first referred to by Clapperton when he noted : “they get their iron from the hills, which they smelt where they dig it and which is done without mining.”<sup>19</sup> The hills are found in Nupe capitals such as Bida, Gbara and Jima. The iron materials extracted from the hills were valuable for the production of goods that attracted both local and foreign trade. Some smiths (*tswaci*) involved their apprentices in export of their products to the east-west and southern part of Nupeland. In addition, Salamat, an Ilorin Nupe extract claimed that her grandfather was a smith from Gbara in Nupeland. The smiths’ southward movements provided them chances to meet and related with the southern people, they used Ilorin as a link. They also used Ilorin as a link to import brass and copper, which they used in production of sword-hilts and dagger; horse-trappings, bowls, jugs, trays, ladles, receptacles of various kinds, made mostly of beaten brass or copper; bangles, rings,...and hairpins from Lagos.<sup>21</sup> Around the last quarter of the Eighteenth century, few indigenous industries were found in Ilorin towns. For example, the native history of the town recorded three earliest locations of blacksmith industries. The

locations included Awodi, Gbẹḍe (Oke Suna) and Gbodofu. Between 1823 and 1900 the number of indigenous industries drastically increased because of the influx of people as a result of the collapse of the Oyo Empire. Awodi and Gbodofu blacksmith industries were established by Nupe men (Tswado and Doṣe respectively), although history is yet to ascertain what linguistic group the Oke Suna smith was. It is reasonable to infer that prior to the last quarter of the Eighteenth century, blacksmith industry has well been organised as ‘craft-guild’ in Nupeland.<sup>22</sup> In Nupeland:

“the following are organized in craft-guild: blacksmith work and mining of iron ore; the craft of brass- and silversmith; glass making; weaving; bead-work; building; wood-work and carpentry; and lastly, the profession of butchers. Tailoring and embroidery, leather work, indigo dyeing, straw-hat-making, mat-making, and basket work are practiced as individual crafts.”<sup>23</sup>

Virtually, in Ilorin, the operation of all the industries and allied industries mentioned in the indentation above featured “home industries, cooperative industries, guild system/guild organized craft” as featured in pre-Colonial Nupeland. Logically, blacksmith work provided a credible outlet for relations which later facilitated the integration of Nupe into the Ilorin Emirate affairs.<sup>24</sup> History is yet to confirm whether the smiths at different quarters of Ilorin formed an association, but end users of the smith products performed a linking role among the smiths through comparison of the products that were purchased from different smiths. The technique of production among the smiths were almost the same, but a factor that distinguished the Nupe products from other smiths’ products was that the Nupe usually attach spell and fetish in the course of her production. For instance, when a spare is in its production stage, a Nupe smith is said to keep mute until the end of the production.<sup>25</sup> The spare must also be soaked in concoction for seven days before usage. In addition, the Yoruba smiths were also proficient in combining spiritual craft with her blacksmith products. For instance, the inscription such as *ejioḡbe* (‘’) was engraved on some of her war and farming tools. Such production encouraged social and spiritual relations among the smiths and other people of the State. At this juncture, it should be understood that the users of such products patronized (irrespective of his/her ethnic identity) the smith that produced efficient products. It is however inferred that the end users of the smiths’ products (through comparison of the products) served as a link between the smiths, since information about the efficiency and efficacy of the product could be passed from one smith to another. The spiritual ideas of the smith craft later crossed among the Nupe and other ethnic groups through social contact. Thus, contacts between the smiths and end users of their products is regarded as a process of integration. Hermon-Hodge presents identical features of Ilorin-Nupe smith in his description about

““‘iron stone’, which derives its colour from the very great percentage of iron which it contains. It is smelted by Yoruba (including Ilorin) and Nupe, and most of the other industrial tribes of this part of Africa.... They make into hoes, which became a form of currency. The hoes are locally turned into spears, axes, arrowheads etc, according to the requirements of the purchasers.”<sup>26</sup>

Nupe glass production, exportation and trade to Ilorin spans across pre-Emirate, Emirate and the half of the Twentieth century periods. The production of glass in Bida was aided by the

commercial deposit of laterite and silicate in some of Nupeland, especially at the core western part of Bida. In the pre-Emirate and part of the Emirate periods, the Nupe people “the Masaga” were the producers of glass Bida glass was mostly imported into Ilorin, because no glass industry existed in Ilorin. To some extent, the technique and knowledge of glasswork was restricted among the Nupe people. The importation of glass into Ilorin promoted socio-cultural relations among the linguistic groups of the State. Also, it fostered relations among the ethnic groups of Ilorin and the Yoruba of the south. From commercial and economic points of view, it provided stable income for the middlemen, who specialized in its importation. In the Emirate period, tariff was levied on the importation of glass by the government. Commission was charged on domestic transaction and distribution of any weight of glass purchased by individuals.<sup>27</sup>

The economic administration of the Emirate was not completely able to sensor all duties that were levied on the importation of glass. Some importers, with the assistance of people of other ethnic groups were able to evade the payment. For instance, a Nupe middleman who intended to avoid the payment of tariff, or negotiating a reduction of tariff usually expressed social and diplomatic rapport with the tax collectors.<sup>28</sup> In many cases, the rapport turned to stable cordial relations and permanent co-existence between the middleman and the tax collectors as well as some other government officers. Furthermore, apart from the Nupe middlemen/tax collectors’ relations, some private individuals (indigenes) of the State were also asked out by the Nupe middlemen so as to help in boycotting tariff. In that case, many Nupe middlemen secured permanent friendly relations among the indigenes. That is, some Nupe middlemen related with the Emirate authority/palace through friendship and marriage, while some others related with common people to exchange skills and occupy some land. Before the importation of European glass, Nupe glass was essential to indigenous people of Ilorin, because it was used for different domestic purposes. Apart from using mirror (looking glass) as an object of dressing reflection, it serves numerous purposes to the indigenous people (especially the group) of Ilorin. Mostly they used it for spiritual purposes, which include the following. It is used to invoke the spirit of dead ones. It is used to invoke person’s soul. It is used as love potion. It is used as part of attire materials of some Yoruba *Egungun* (masquerade). Some *Alfas* (Mallams) also inscribe spiritual letters on glass for spiritual purposes. Herbalists also use it to chase away demons from particular place. The State people also used it for house decorations. The need of glass among different ethnic groups of Ilorin engendered more relations with the Nupe because they were the sole importers of the glass in the pre-Ilorin Emirate Nupe-Ilorin era. In addition, as a result of essential purposes of glass, the Nupe suppliers gained more credence among the people and they were heartedly accommodated. However, the spiritual usages of glass mentioned above are subject to future research.<sup>29</sup>

The exportation of iron materials and produce of iron went hand in hand with the exportation of cotton to the southern neighbours of Nupe. In her pre-colonial administration, the Nupe encouraged the production and distribution of weaved cloths. Through captivity, they imported great number of weavers from Yorubaland between the last decade of the Eighteenth century and the first two decades of the Nineteenth century. The imported slaves were known as Konu, that is, the freed slaves of war.<sup>30</sup> Two Konu groups of weavers existed in Nupeland under

“titled guild-head: the head of Salu, (Yagba) weavers is called Maji, and the head of Yoruba weavers was called Leshe. He is also regarded

as the head of all Konu weavers in Nupe and used to receive from them small annual gifts or tributes.”<sup>31</sup>

The Leshe group was a component of captives from southern Nupe, which consisted of Ilorin and core Yorubaland. The weavers also formed vertical association with farmers. The head of the Nupe group of weavers in Bida has no official title but is called simply Ndako.<sup>32</sup> By 1824, that is, a year after the establishment of Ilorin Emirate Government, Nupe men and women became ubiquitous in Ilorin for production of cloth and dying of cloths respectively. This was an indication that those Yoruba/Ilorin that were initially imported to the Nupeland were directly migrating to Ilorin, or, in other words, their skills and arts reversed into Ilorin weaving industry. This was possible because the cultural affinities between those Yoruba/Ilorin that were previously imported to Nupeland and those industrialists (weavers and dyers) that stationed in Ilorin were still intact. It is reasonable to infer that by 1890s, the Nupe weavers and dyers had already incorporated their crafts with that of the Yoruba and Hausa descents of Ilorin that Ilorin cloth was rated best, among the Sudans’. The craft contact between the Nupe and other ethnics of Ilorin instigated edges that diminished demand for some types of Nupe cloths from Nupeland.

The research of Marion Johnson (1890), points out that Ilorin textile had taken the place of Nupe cloths in the sub-regions of Sudan.<sup>33</sup> Clapperton had noted that Nupe men and slaves had won renown throughout the Sudan as being the best weavers and Nupe women best dyers. One cannot dispute the fact that the emigration of Nupe craft men and women was a retrospect. Since the period of kingdoms of Nupe-Oyo relations Kutigi of Nupeland became a multinational, following the arrival of Bornu immigrants. According to Sidi, three categories of people converged at Kutigi and became its citizens. These included the Kintsozhi (aboriginals); the Ndachezhi (hunters); and the Konu (the freed slave of Yoruba origin).<sup>34</sup> The three groups became an entity prior to the rivalry wars between the Nupe rulers, and Fulani-Nupe rulers. Of all important contributions of the three groups to the growth of Kutigi, the Konu’s introduction of weaving and indigo dyeing is quite imperative. The 1890s Nupe immigrants into Ilorin perhaps involved a combination of descendants of Konu, whose ancestors were the freed slaves of Yoruba origin. In addition, women’s weaving was also a kind of weaving that existed in Bida. It was noticed as imported techniques from Yoruba in the times of Yoruba wars, through the medium of Yoruba wives, and slaves of Nupe nobility.<sup>35</sup> The woven of cloth among women in Bida was classic, not only in terms of the size of the cloths but strictly on the ground that it was restricted among the women folk of the upper class of Nupe society, because it was only wives and daughters of the nobility or the ‘intelligentsia’ that possessed a loom and practised the craft.<sup>35</sup> The finishing cloths were still exported to Ilorin by some Nupe-Yoruba merchants for trading and sampling purposes, because, as a mark of pride some dignitaries in Ilorin preferred imported cloths to the one produced in Ilorin.<sup>36</sup>

Between the reigning period of Etsu Muhammadu and Etsu Muazu 1759-1796.<sup>37</sup> Bida was a commercial centre that attracted foreigners from Hausa and Bornu, Arabs from Sudan and Tripoli, and Yoruba from south. Dues on mercantile were judiciously collected to encourage stable commercial relations among the Nupe and the ethnic groups that transacted with Bida. Yoruba Cola nut trade was another source of connection between Nupe and Ilorin. From pre-Colonial period till date, the small species of kola nut were imported from the Yorubaland via Ilorin while the big size that were produced in Labozi, Nupe country side were exported to Ilorin. The Nupe were middlemen in slave trade activities between Ilorin and northern states. Nadel reported that Lander mentioned that the slaves brought to Raba

were purchased by southern peoples, traded down the Niger, and from there ‘delivered from hand to hand till they at length reach the sea.’<sup>38</sup>

However, Nupe traders may stay at a place for several months or even years at a time, and may possibly settle at the place permanently.<sup>39</sup> One cannot rule out the fact that the Bida based southern Yoruba people negotiated (with their Nupe associates in Ilorin) a temporary or permanent accommodation to Nupe who decided to settle in Ilorin. Nupe traders who settle in Ilorin influenced the Emirate commercial activities that propelled the political wheel of the Emirate. It should be remembered that Clapperton made a reference to commission agents who sold the merchandise of traders at Kulfo commercial centre of Nupeland.<sup>40</sup> Also, in Ilorin, the Nupe and other ethnic groups of the Emirate were found among Ilorin commission agents such as *dilali*, *baba kekee*, *kobe* (all whom were commission agents of distinctive features) among others. The commission agents were mostly Nupe people. A commission agent who was a member of either of the Ilorin ethnic groups was responsive for assistance in translating the Emirate economic/trade and commercial method of procedure. Therefore, as the service of other commission agent was useful, so was Nupe’s service alongside other ethnic groups of the Emirate. The commission agents were part of economic tools of the Emirate government. The traders were classified according to line of commodities they traded in. Each line of commodities had its own commission agent, who collected a small percentage of the value of goods brought into the Emirate and those that were sold. They in turn remitted tokens to the Emir. They were loyal to the Emir because he was on the authority to ratify their selections and disqualifications. The head commission agent (*Oba Dilali*, *Oba Kobe* and others) lobbied the post among the equals. He received official recognition from the Emir. Sometimes they influence the price of commodities. Usually, they disseminated information on political/social activities apart from economic activity. The commission agents remained an Emirate institution throughout the pre-colonial, Colonial and post-colonial Emirate’s periods with modifications to contemporary global demand.

### **Trade Medium of Exchange**

One of the important factors that facilitated trade between Nupe and Ilorin included the application of exchange rate mechanism, which entailed the use of currencies. The objects that were foremost used by the indigenous Nupe people and the merchants who caravanned across the Nupeland to south-western Nigeria via Ilorin included cowries, gold dust, and trade ounce. By the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries, cowries had been introduced to Nupeland through contact with East Africans and North African merchants. By the second half of the Nineteenth century it had become a popular legal tender to the Ilorin, and the people in the southern part of Nigeria. It was used as major instrument to control trade liquidity. The use of gold dust was important to the people in the coastal areas of West Africa, especially to the merchants that plighted the Nupeland markets and coastal areas’ markets across Nigeria. Few indigenous great Nupe merchants, particularly the slave dealers who transacted slaves from and to coastal areas of West Africa appreciated gold dust because, rather than cowries, it was valued in exchange rate with trade ounce, which the English used to measure the prime cost of exchange rate.<sup>41</sup> The cowries and the gold dust were also accepted in Ilorin, thus, the currencies facilitated economic and socio-cultural relations between the trade merchants (among who were indigenous Nupe people) from Nupeland and Ilorin people. The indigenous Nupe people were among the caravan merchants who decided to stay permanently in Ilorin, since the town processed the then all needful economic

advantages. The use of cotton strips as a means of exchange in Nupeland was also a significant factor that fused relations among the Nupe, Ilorin and the Europeans. An Ilorin who was vigorous in transacting cotton strips with coastal people would foster cordial relations with Nupe because the Nupe produced an abundance of cotton. Indeed, an aspect of Nupe's praise name secures the possession of cotton by Nupe till present.

The extraction of iron in Nupeland enhanced the use of iron money among the Nupe. The Upper Guinea, Conakry and Ivory Coast were said to specialise in the use of iron money. The Nupe smiths involved in the forging of iron currencies used in Bornu. Upper Guinea, Conakry and Ivory Coast long distance traders who passed through Ilorin also introduced the currency to Ilorin people. When the European Maria Theresa dollar was introduced to Nupeland in the Eighteenth century, the currency was adopted and used among the traders. Some commodities that were exported via Ilorin were monetarily cost with the currency value. The use of Maria Theresa currency also facilitated relations between Nupe traders and Ilorin.

Before and during European contact with the Northern Nigerian people, credit institution existed as a basis of capital market. And since Ilorin was one of great entrepôts of the Tran-Saharan activities, merchants and many trade associations engaged in credit facilities. It is important to mention that some Nupe origin merchants who appreciated Ilorin environment, preferred Ilorin as a settlement from where they can transact businesses to other places such as Badagry, Ijebu and Warri. Abdullahi, one of the Nupe ancestors of Kijan family in Oke-Apomu, Ilorin was an example of merchants who used Ilorin as settlement. Through the effectiveness of such financial credit institution, Ilorin provided a commercial capital market, which promoted local and inter-regional trade. This function of the credit institution attracted several merchants of different ethnicity across the Niger area, to settle in Ilorin, among whom were people of Nupe origin. The financial credit institution also fostered social relations among the ethnic groups, some of who gradually decided to settle down as kin and kin in relations.

By the middle of the Eighteenth century, the Europeans who settled at various coastal trade centre of West Africa had begun to import silver coin in exchange for African indigenous currencies, such as ounce of gold, gold, gold dust, cotton strips, brass rod, mithguals and copper rod. The silver coins were imported to Nupeland by the Nupe merchants and other African merchants, which included the Hausa, Kanuri, and the Dioulas of Mandinka. As in the Senegambia, the silver coins were melted in Nupeland for jewelry, which in turn exported to several places across the West Africa. By the Proclamation and Legislative Council Ordinances, the British in 1881 prohibited the use of African indigenous currencies in Lagos and replaced it by the British silver, nickel and bronze coins, which were of the value of 1d, 1/2d, 1/4d and 1s denominations.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, in Nigeria, in 1904, the British finally proclaimed the total prohibition of cowries in No. 6 of 1904, and this stimulated the acceptance of British currencies in Nigeria. Hence, all trade activities in which Nupe participated were transacted with the use of British currencies. The Nupe also forged the British new coins into earrings, bangles and necklace, and sold as article of trade to earn more value of the forged coins. It should be remembered that the Nupe people made use of Manillas as a means of exchange up till 1881. It is equally important to mention that the Nupe also melted the Manillas to produce knives and bullets, which were used as munitions. Production and uses of currencies was also an important factor that facilitated the Nupe-Ilorin relations, trade and subsequent migration to Ilorin.<sup>43</sup>

## Conclusion

Ilorin Emirate comprises several linguistic people such as Hausa, Fulani, Tuarage, Malians, Yoruba, Kanuri, Senegalese, Ebira, Kannike and Nupe, all of which co-existed since 1823 when the Emirate government was established. The people of Nupe origin that integrated into the Emirate migrated from their respective local areas in Nupeland for political, economic, social and cultural reasons. This work focused on trade activities which immensely contributed to the migration of Nupe people to Ilorin. The said migrated people are completely integrated into the Emirate by all ramifications. They are formally regarded as Ilorin, rather than Nupe, yet they retained pride to their original Nupe ethnicity. In conclusion, this study has shed light on a significant yet overlooked aspect of Nupe migration into the Ilorin Emirate—the role of trade. While various factors such as political, social, cultural, and religious considerations have been explored by scholars in the context of migration, this research emphasizes the importance of trade in understanding the diplomatic relations between the Nupe people and the Ilorin Emirate. The paper underscores the historical significance of trade, encompassing activities such as caravan trade, agriculture, and currency production, as pivotal elements that facilitated Nupe migration, integration, and diplomatic interactions with Ilorin. Furthermore, the findings of this research hold practical implications for contemporary times. Understanding the historical mechanisms of peaceful co-existence and crisis management between these communities can inform present-day policies aimed at fostering global peace. The study emphasizes the enduring impact of trade in shaping the Nupe migration narrative and, by extension, influencing diplomatic relations with the Ilorin Emirate. Overall, this research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted forces that have shaped the historical ties between these two communities.

## Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria, for their unwavering support during the completion of this research. The guidance, resources, and scholarly insights provided by the department greatly contributed to the success of this study. Special thanks to the faculty members for their valuable feedback and encouragement, and to the university for fostering an environment conducive to academic exploration.

---

## Biodata

\* **AbdulRahman Adebayo Suleiman** ([abdulrahman.as@unilorin.edu.ng](mailto:abdulrahman.as@unilorin.edu.ng)) is a lecturer at the Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ilorin, Nigeria.

Received: 12 January 2023

Reviewed: 20 February 2023

Accepted: 10 September 2023

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> FALOLA, Toyin; HEATON, Matthew M. *A history of Nigeria*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- <sup>2</sup> Ja'afaru Yusuf Dogara & Hamidin Abd Hamid, "A Critical Discourse of the Impact of the Trans-Saharan Trade and the 19th-Century Jihad on the History of Akwanga Division, Nigeria," *SEJARAH: Journal of the Department of History*, Vol. 30 No. 1, 2021, p. 43-61.
- <sup>3</sup> Jimoh, L. A. Kolawole, *Ilorin the Journey so far*, Atoto Press LTD, 1994, p. 196.
- <sup>4</sup> Daniel Datok Dalyop & Shakila Yacob, "Taxation: A Veritable Instrument for the Coerced Proletarianization of the Berom People of Northern Nigeria, 1902-1960," *SEJARAH: Journal of the Department of History*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2018, 1-16.
- <sup>5</sup> Falola, T. (1998). *Violence in Nigeria: The crisis of religious politics and secular ideologies*, University Rochester Press.
- <sup>6</sup> Muhammad K. Yahaya, "The Nupe People of Nigeria", [www.krepublishers.com](http://www.krepublishers.com)
- <sup>7</sup> Falola, T. (2009). *Colonialism and violence in Nigeria*, Indiana University Press.
- <sup>8</sup> Interview with Jimoh, L.A.K., at Masankore, Gambari area, Ilorin, 26 October 2017.
- <sup>9</sup> Interview with AbdulRahman Mahmud, at Danbanfu, Ilorin, 20 September 2018.
- <sup>10</sup> Nadel, S.F., *A Black Byzantium, The Kingdom of Nupe in Nigeria*, London: The Oxford University Press, 1942, p. 326
- <sup>11</sup> Interview with AbdulRahman Mahmud, at Danbanfu, Ilorin, 20 September 2018.
- <sup>12</sup> Nadel, S.Frederick., *A Black Byzantium...*p. 326
- <sup>13</sup> Interview with Aliyu Ahmed, at Denkosin, Pataki area, Ilorin, 27 March 2019.
- <sup>14</sup> Mason Michael, *The Foundation of Bida Kingdom*, Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1981, p. 60
- <sup>15</sup> Elphinston, K.V., *Gazetter of Ilorin Province...* p. 196.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>17</sup> NAK KADDADIST Kabba District Notebook. In Mason, M., *The Foundation of Bida Kigdom,Ahmadu, Zaria, Nigeria*: Bello Press, 1981,p.78.
- <sup>18</sup> A line of history acquired from Suleiman Ashir, Ile Koto, Adangba, Ilorin, 29/7/91.
- <sup>19</sup> Nadel, S. Frederick, *A Black Byzantium...*, p.236.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 321-322
- <sup>22</sup> Mason, M., *The Foundation of Bida Kingdom, Zaria, Nigeria*: Ahmadu Bello University Press 1981, p. 1
- <sup>23</sup> Clapperton, (1829) in Mason, *The Foundation of Bida Kingdom...*,118.
- <sup>24</sup> Interview with Salamat, (a Nupe descent) at Ile Alhaji, Ojagboro, Ilorin, 12 October 2019.
- <sup>25</sup> Nadel, S. Frederick, *A Black Byzantium...*p. 271.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 257.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 25.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 257.
- <sup>29</sup> Interview with Garba Ndanusa, at Apata Yakuba, Ilorin, 21 July 2018.
- <sup>30</sup> Hermon-Hodge, H.B., *The Gazetteer of Ilorin Province*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., Museum Street, 1929, p. 25.
- <sup>31</sup> Nadel, S. Frederick, *A Black Byzantium...*p. 274.
- <sup>32</sup> Interview with Ola Alakuko, at Ile Alakuko, Oke-Apomu, Ilorin, 17 April 2008.
- <sup>33</sup> Mason, *The Foundation of Bida Kingdom...*, p. 53.
- <sup>34</sup> Sheshi, S. T., *A History of the Nupe C. 1068–1810 AD*, Doctoral dissertation, Ph. D Thesis, Ahmadu Bello University, 2017.
- <sup>35</sup> Nadel, S. Frederick, *A Black Byzantium...*p. 297.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>37</sup> Interview with Baba Lawal, at Ile kijan, Oke-Apomu, Ilorin, 5 October 2019.
- <sup>38</sup> T. S. Sidi, "A History of Nupe, C,1068-1810 A.D", p. 261.
- <sup>39</sup> Nadel, S. Frederick, *A Black Byzantium...* see foot note, 104.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 326.
- <sup>41</sup> Maso Michael, *The Foundation of Bida Kingdom, Zaria*: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1981, pp. 139-40
- <sup>42</sup> Philip, D. Curtin, *Economic Change in the Pre-colonial Africa: Senegambia in the Era of Slave Trade*, Madison:The University of Wisconsin Press, 1975, pp. 235-237.

<sup>43</sup> Ofonagoro, W. I., *Trade and Imperialism in Southern Nigeria, 1881-1929*, New York/Lagos: Nok, 1979, pp. 248-294; Also refer: Jean Suret-Canole, *French Colonialism in Tropical Africa 1900-1945*, London: Heinemann, 1971, p. 59.

## References

Daniel Datok Dalyop & Shakila Yacob, "Taxation: A Veritable Instrument for the Coerced Proletarianization of the Berom People of Northern Nigeria, 1902-1960," *SEJARAH: Journal of the Department of History*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2018, 1-16.

Elphinston, K.V., *Gazetter of Ilorin Province*.

Falola, T., *Violence in Nigeria: The crisis of religious politics and secular ideologies*, University Rochester Press, 1998.

Falola, T., *Colonialism and violence in Nigeria*, Indiana University Press, 2009.

Falola, T. & Heaton, M. M., *A history of Nigeria*, Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Ja'afaru Yusuf Dogara & Hamidin Abd Hamid, "A Critical Discourse of the Impact of the Trans-Saharan Trade and the 19th-Century Jihad on the History of Akwanga Division, Nigeria," *SEJARAH: Journal of the Department of History*, Vol. 30 No. 1, 2021, p. 43-61.

Jean Suret-Canole, *French Colonialism in Tropical Africa 1900-1945*, Heinemann, London, 1971.

Jimoh, L. A. Kolawole, *Ilorin the Journey so far*, Atoto Press LTD, 1994.

Hermon-Hodge, H.B., *The Gazetteer of Ilorin Province*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., Museum Street, London, 1929.

Interview with AbdulRahman Mahmud, at Danbanfu, Ilorin, 20 September 2018.

Interview with Aliyu Ahmed, at Denkosin, Pataki area, Ilorin, 27 March 2019.

Interview with Garba Ndanusa, at Apata Yakuba, Ilorin, 21 July 2018.

Interview with Ola Alakuko, at Ile Alakuko, Oke-Apomu, Ilorin, 17 April 2008.

Interview with Salamat, (a Nupe descent) at Ile Alhaji, Ojagboro, Ilorin, 12 October 2019.

Interview with Jimoh, L.A.K., at Masankore, Gambari area, Ilorin, 26 October 2017.

Mason Michael, *The Foundation of Bida Kingdom*, Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1981.

Muhammad K. Yahaya, “The Nupe People of Nigeria”, [www. krepublishers.com](http://www.krepublishers.com)

Nadel, S.F., *A Black Byzantium, The Kingdom of Nupe in Nigeria*, The Oxford University Press, London.

Nak Kaddadist Kabba, District Notebook. In Mason, M., *The Foundation of Bida Kigdom*, Ahmadu Bello Press, Zaria, Nigeria, 1981.

Ofonagoro, W. I., *Trade and Imperialism in Southern Nigeria, 1881-1929*, Nok, New York/Lagos, 1979.

Philip, D. Curtin, *Economic Change in the Pre-colonial Africa: Senegambia in the Era of Slave Trade*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1975.

Sheshi, S. T., *A History of the Nupe C. 1068–1810 AD*, Doctoral dissertation, Ph. D Thesis, Ahmadu Bello University, 2017.