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Slavery in Africa: Archaeology and Memory

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SLAVERY IN AFRICA

Archaeology and Memory

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16

The Present in the Past: How Narratives of the Slave-Raiding Era Inform Current Politics in Northern and Central Nigeria

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Introduction

Slaving has a long history in pre-colonial West-Central Africa and the trans-Saharan export of slaves may be millennia-old (Kaese 1991). In comparison with the Atlantic slave trade, scholarly attention to the Sahelian region has been more limited, and indeed has fallen away since the 1980s, perhaps as a response to trans-Atlantic dominance of the historical agenda. Ironically, in the 2000s, the sense of injustice engendered by the trade to the north has begun to accelerate among both local researchers and community activists. Traditions of slaving raids and their consequences are now being recorded, regrettably somewhat late in the day. At the same time, slavery is being incorporated into 'social memory', transformed by both the nature of narrative traditions and current political and social exigencies. Academic publications, pamphlets, newspaper articles and radio broadcasts all testify to a renewal of interest in West Africa.

These fresh accounts cannot always be taken at face value. Descriptions of the impact of slaving in the 'Middle Belt' are intertwined with emerging political agendas as minority peoples struggle to reassert their identity in an environment where both globalisation and dominant regional ethnic and religious models threaten local values. Such intertwining is not confined to this region: Shaw (2002), quoting Halbwachs'(1925) formula 'The Politics of the Present is in the Past', describes the metamorphosis of Temne society in Sierra Leone as a consequence of the slave era and refers to analogous situations among the Diola, Ewe and Kabre. O'Hear (1997) provides an account of the history of the divisions in Ilorin emirate, tracing the political conflicts of the 1970s and 1980s to the slaving economy established in the early nineteenth century. However, the elements of Islam and the desert trade, as well as the relative antiquity of slavery in this region, have undoubtedly created quite

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distinctive surface manifestations. This chapter[1] explores the evolution of slavery in Nigeria and adjacent regions and the nature of recent responses among victim populations in relation to broader social currents.

Fragmentary records put slaving as far back as Herodotos, but a more concrete sense of its antiquity and operation can be gathered from the records of Kanem-Borno available in medieval Cairene archives (Walz 1978). Apart from the export trade, internal slavery in Africa was an established institution essential to the economic structure of many Sahelian states, and was only formally abolished in Nigeria as late as 1936 (Lovejoy and Hogendorn 1993; Jumare 1994). Despite Quranic strictures, slavers seem to have had few scruples about raiding Muslim populations as well as traditionalists. The nineteenth century saw a major expansion of long-distance raiding fuelled by the rise of the Hausa states, the availability of firearms, the spread of the horse and the greater effectiveness of caravan routes to North Africa. This acceleration had significant negative consequences for the minority populations of the Middle Belt, restructuring settlement patterns, inter-ethnic relations, trade and religion. During the colonial era, strong support given to Hausa-Islamic culture through the system of Indirect Rule and a highly discriminatory distribution of educational institutions meant that affected minorities were unable fully to articulate their resentment for the transgressions of this era. As a consequence, Hausa settlement and dominance of parts of the Middle Belt became further entrenched in the colonial period (James n.d. esp. ch. 4). Indeed, so great was anxiety during the final years of the colonial era in Nigeria that the government commissioned a major report on the 'Fears of Minorities' (Willink *et al*. 1958) which has been several times reprinted within Nigeria in recent years.

Since the independence of Nigeria in 1960, greater access to education and thus to local political power has dramatically reversed relations between the Muslim north and the Middle Belt minorities. In the Nigeria of the 2000s, slaving has become an iconic metaphor for the rejection of Hausa/Muslim domination. This has been expressed by increasing civil strife and attacks on trader communities, but also by the evolution of indigenous political structures that mimic those of the Hausa, while simultaneously excluding ethnic Hausa. Local publications now attempt to reverse the narrative currents of the colonial era, by reframing the history of the slaving period. Though slavery had largely vanished by the 1930s, it remains in the memory of a generation some of whom are still alive and who have transmitted their anger to a younger group seeking excuses to evict settlers.

[1] The subject of this chapter is remote from my usual publications, so my thanks to the editors for their faith in me. I would like to thank Gerhard Muller-Kosack for the narrative of the Dghwede, Barau Kato for the tale of his grandfather, Selbut Longtau for numerous corrections and additions, and Jörg Adelberger for putting me in touch with recondite references I would certainly have missed.

Slaving in the Middle Belt: Origins and Development

Slaving and the Sahelian polities

Slaving between North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa has considerable antiquity (Deschamps 1972; Manning 1990; Petré-Grenouilleau 2003). An eighteenth dynasty engraving on the tomb of Horemheb (Figure 16.1) from the New Empire period preserved in Bologna Museum shows what are undoubtedly black slaves, perhaps from Nubia, although their exact source is unknown (Heers 2003). Herodotos, Book IV, refers to the slaving activities of the Garamantes of the Fazzan in modern Libya around 500 BC, probably directed against the ancestors of the present-day Teda/Tubu (Law 1967; McCall 1999; Liverani 2000). The Arab geographers record Berber raids on the desert city of Djado in AD 665 and the ruined citadel still stands today

The first account that describes slaving in West Africa is that of al-Ḥakam, whose *History of the Conquest of Egypt, North Africa and Spain* describes raids in AD 666–7, both on the Fazzan and on territories further south in the Sūs and the Sūdān (Levtzion and Hopkins 1981: 12–13). It appears that in the first instance the slavers were Ibadite Berbers and not Arabs (Savage 1992). The Kitāb al-Buldān (AD 889–890) of al-Ya'qūbī contains the first references to Kanem and also to neighbouring states which are so far not identified (Levtzion and Hopkins 1981: 21). The slave trade to the north is already treated as an established pattern of commerce (Segal 2002). This is reprised in more detail in Al-Bakrī (عبدالله عبيد بز البكري محمد بن العزيز عبد بن , 1014–1094), whose 1068 *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-'l-Mamālik* (Book of Highways and of Kingdoms) describes trade in slaves from Kanem to Zuila and thence to North Africa (Levtzion and Hopkins 1981: 62–87). A letter in the Cairo archives dated 1391 from the ruler of Kanem, Uthmān Biri ibn Idris, to the Mamluq sultan in Egypt, Barqūq, complains about the incursions of Arab slavers and the fact that they are raiding Muslims (Walz 1978). Leo Africanus (Hasan ibn Muhammed al-Wazzan al-Fasi) (1488?–1554?) (Figure 16.2) travelled in northern Nigeria around 1510 and describes the exchange of slaves for horses by the ruler of Borno (Africanus 1550).[2]

After this references multiply (Fisher 2001). Walz (1978, 1985) provides a detailed account of materials in the Cairo archives relating to the Sudan trade. The Turkish physician Evliya Çelebi (چلبي اوليا, 1611–82), collected information about Kanem and the arrival of the yearly slave caravans in the late seventeenth century (Çelebi 1995–2007). Habraszewski (1967) summarises all the information that can be gathered from Çelebi's account of Borno. Orhonlu (1974) began

[2] There has been considerable scholarly discussion over the text of Leo Africanus and a modern edition is now available, but this does not affect this particular issue; see Rauchenberger (1999), available at www.mandaras.info/MandarasPublishing/RauchenbergerLeoAfricanusCosmographia.rtf .

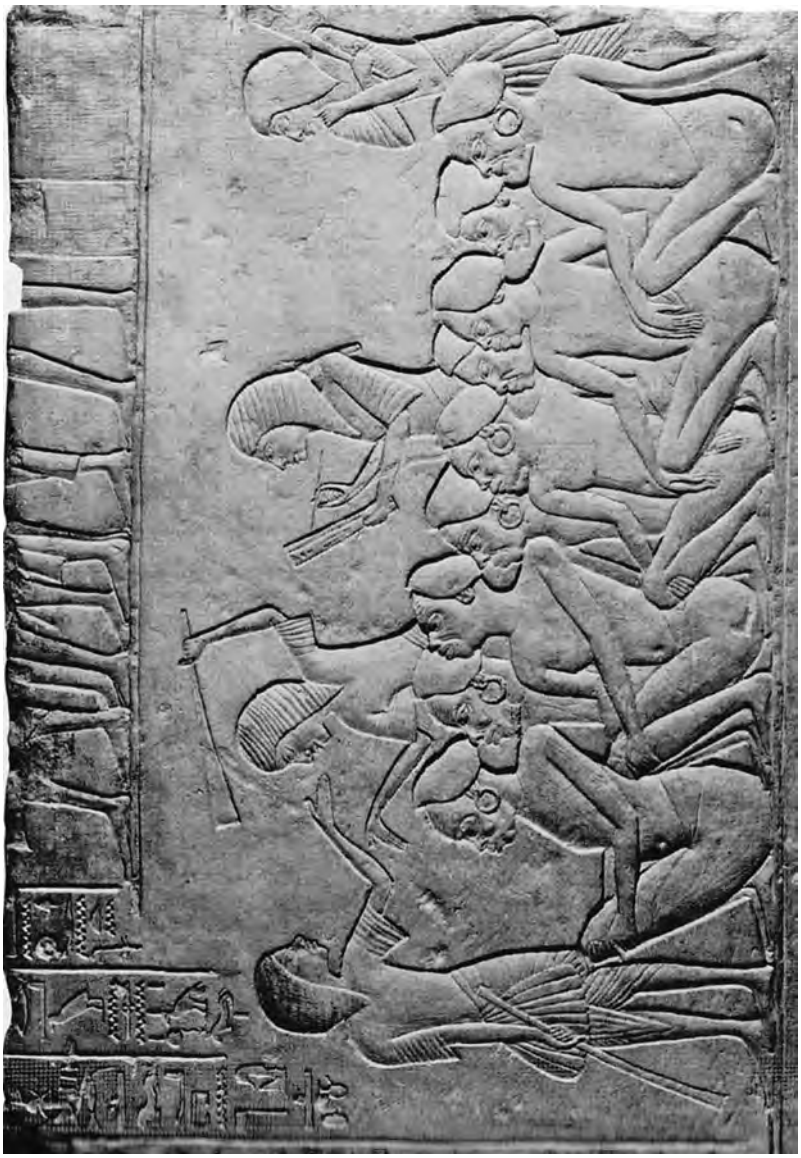

Figure 16.1. Sub-Saharan slaves in ancient Egypt (fourteenth century BC).

Figure 16.2. *Leo Africanus*, title page, 1632 edition.

a project to search the Ottoman archives systematically for material on sub-Saharan Africa which unfortunately stalled. Toledano (1998) has restarted work on issues of Ottoman slavery and in particular describes the growth in demand for eunuchs from sub-Saharan Africa. La Rue (2002) describes the capture of a slave caravan at Asyut in Egypt in 1880 based on this archive material.

The earliest phase of slavery may have been simple raiding of unstructured and diverse ethnic groups. However, once even small-scale polities develop, then predatory raiding and economic gain for both sides enter the equation. Al-Yakūbī, writing about Sahelian polities such as Kawkaw and Ghana in AD 889, says, 'I have been informed that the kings of the Sūdān sell their people without any pretext or war' (Levtzion and Hopkins 1981: 22). Organised 'long-distance' slavery is likely to be associated with the rise of larger polities in the region (Brett 1969; Renault 1989). Historical records suggest that the first of these was the empire of Kanem-Borno, for which kinglists suggest an origin in the eleventh century (Urvoy 1949; Palmer 1926, 1928a, 1928b; Lange 1987). From an early period the Kanembu kings regarded the raiding of minority peoples, both for domestic work and for sale, as a significant source of income. By the sixteenth century slaving had become an essential part of the economy of Borno, and Fisher and Fisher (1970) argue that domestic slaves were common even among quite ordinary households. McLeod (1912: 227) notes that even the Yedina [=Buduma] of Lake Chad, a scattered and acephalous people, were likely to own two or three slaves per household. Further east, we are fortunate to have a descriptive account of commercial slaving in the early nineteenth century by another non-Arab group, the Fur (El-Tounsy 1851: 466ff.). Individual Fur could make up raiding parties, and then seek authorisation, *salatyeh*, from the sultan. The principal exchange model was slaves for cloth and the merchants would sometimes accompany the *ghazoua* (raid) to obtain priority access to newly captured slaves (cf. also Fresnel 1849). Cordell (1977, 1985) describes the parallel trade routes leading from Wadai through Libya to the markets of North Africa.

The second historical phase was the rise of the Hausa states following the *jihad* that began in 1804 (see e.g. Dunbar 1977 for Damagaram or East 1971 for Bauchi). Originally driven by Fulfulde-speaking reformers, it rapidly became transformed into an exercise in political and economic hegemony, spreading as far as Adamawa in northern Cameroon (Burnham 1980; Morrissey 1984). Within a few decades, the original Fulɗe element had become transformed into an expansion of the Hausa states, with the more traditional patterns persisting only in Adamawa (Yola and eastward) (Strümpell 1912). Later in the century, the Arab slaver Rabeh formed a short-lived empire based in Dikwa in north-east Nigeria with a far more developed military organisation than had previously existed in this region, with forts, cannons and carrier pigeons (Figure 16.3). Rabeh was overthrown only by French military action (Gentil 1902; Hallam 1977).

Figure 16.3. Cannon used by Rabeh. Source: National Museum, Ndjamena.

Apart from the trading of slaves across the desert, slaves were increasingly used on plantations intended to supply the ruling classes in the expanding cities (Sellnow 1964; Ayandele 1967; Tambo 1976; Lennihan 1982; Porter 1989). Slavery was very wasteful in human terms: in meeting demand for eunuchs it was claimed that only one in ten victims survived the castration operation (Ruelle 1904; Toledano 1984). Nachtigal (1879–89: vol. III, 72) estimated that for every slave arriving in Kuka, some three to four must have died en route.

The greater effectiveness of the slave raiders was associated with the large-scale importation of horses into the western Sudan (Law 1976; Inikori 1977; Gemery and Hogendorn 1978). Although ponies apparently arrived in the region much earlier, larger Maghrebin horses were being brought across the desert by the sixteenth century (Blench 1993). Indeed there was a rough equivalence in value between slaves and horses (Meillassoux 1986: 268). The Kano Chronicle (Palmer 1928b: 111) records the mid-fifteenth-century exchange of twelve eunuchs from Nupe for ten horses from Kano. The more specialised food requirements and higher maintenance costs of horses imply a state system with sufficient surplus labour to keep them alive. Horses are likely to have been an essential instrument of the slavers, making possible rapid deployment of the raiders and instilling fear into agricultural populations. Goody (1971) draws out these consequences for northern Ghana with the corresponding evolution of 'anti-horse' shrines among indigenous populations. The presence of ponies in local Nigerian polities meant that the slavers occasionally met some well-equipped and determined resistance (Morrison 1982). The Mwaghavul [=Sura] routed the forces of Yakubu, emir of Bauchi, with their highly mobile ponies, while the Boze [=Buji] and Berom of Du ambushed the Bauchi army in 1873.

It seems that the states south of the desert first became familiar with firearms from the desert trade, as many Sahelian languages have a word for 'gun' based on Arabic *al-bunduqqiya* (e.g. Hausa *bíndígà*) which is in turn derived from the Arabic name for 'Venice'. In the 1570s, Turkish musketeers were brought across the desert by Mai Idris Alooma of Bornu and used in his campaigns (Palmer 1926). Muskets were used in the overthrow of the Songhai empire by the Moroccans in 1591 (Law 1976). Nonetheless, it seems that in practice the vast majority of guns came from the coastal trade and took a long time to penetrate the interior in quantities large enough to make a major difference to military tactics. Firearms were being imported on a large scale through southern ports by the nineteenth century and local blacksmiths learnt how to make copies of the relatively simple flintlocks, locally known as 'dane-guns' (Inikori 1977). There is a strong argument for suggesting that this confluence of technology was responsible for ramping up the incidence of slaving in the Middle Belt.

What little evidence exists for the ethnic affiliation of slaves suggests that the earlier depredations were directed against more northern populations. Çelebi records two languages, Bornavi and Maiburni, both essentially Kanuri, from his

Cairo informants. Seetzen was able to record an entire grammar of Áffadéh [Kotoko on the Logone] from captives in North Africa (Vater 1816). Kanuri 'islands' resulting from the slave trade persisted in the Sahara until recent times (Fuchs 1983). However, with the rise of the Hausa states and the expansion of demand for slaves, the depredations spread further south, with a greater impact on what is now the Middle Belt of Nigeria and corresponding areas of Cameroon and Chad. Ironically, as demand began to increase in the early part of the nineteenth century, the two slave trades began to encounter one another and compete. Sigismund Koelle, who collected linguistic data from freed slaves in Sierra Leone in the 1850s, recorded a significant number of Middle Belt languages (Hair 1965). Castelnau (1851), conducting interviews amongst slaves in Brazil, recorded vocabularies from several Plateau languages as well as Hausa and Fulfulde.

Direct evidence does not really become abundant until the nineteenth century, when the first travellers (who were obliged to make use of the caravans mounted by the slavers) began crossing the desert to report on the kingdoms of the Sahel. In the region of northern Nigeria, the key publications are those of Shabeeny (1820), Denham *et al*. (1828), Clapperton (1829), Richardson (1848, 1853), Vogel (1855), Barth (1857–8), Nachtigal (1879–89) and Lenz (1886), all of whom experienced the slave trade at first hand. A reconstruction of the biography of Madugu Mohamman mai Gashin Baki recorded by Eduard Flegel in the nineteenth century provides a first-hand account of a slaver comparable to Hamman Yaji in the 1920s (Flegel and Duffill 1985). In the 1960s, Smith *et al*. (1967) recorded the memories of Ali Eisami Gazirmabe of Bornu who had participated in the last days of the trade. Images of slave raids such as that witnessed by Clapperton (1829) (Figure 16.4) and the cruelties of the slave caravan (Figure 16.5) excited popular sympathy with the abolitionist lobby in Europe. However, it was also a minor thread of inspiration to Orientalists seeking topics at a tangent to the more conventionally lurid nature of harem pictures (Figure 16.6).

The scale of internal slavery in the Sahel could be quite significant: figures given by Klein (1994) for some settlements in Francophone Africa estimate that some 40–50 per cent could be of slave descent. Perbi (2004) records extensive internal slavery in Ghana from the fifteenth century onwards. Nonetheless, slaves were predominantly for export to North Africa (Austen 1992; Lavers 1994; see the comparative estimates in Wright 2007). The rise of the regency of Tunis in the late eighteenth century can be attributed to its direct control over the trans-Saharan trade and its links with Kanem-Borno (Limam 1981). Italian records from Ghat, Murzuk and Tripoli exist but have not been exploited in much of the literature (cf. e.g. Anon. 1886; Corò 1941; Folayan 1971; Carolis 1986).

It might be imagined that the conquest of Nigeria by Lord Lugard in 1901 would have led to the immediate and unconditional end of slavery, given the strong moral position taken by Britain a century previously. In reality, however, the British colonial authorities were compelled to develop the notion of 'Indirect

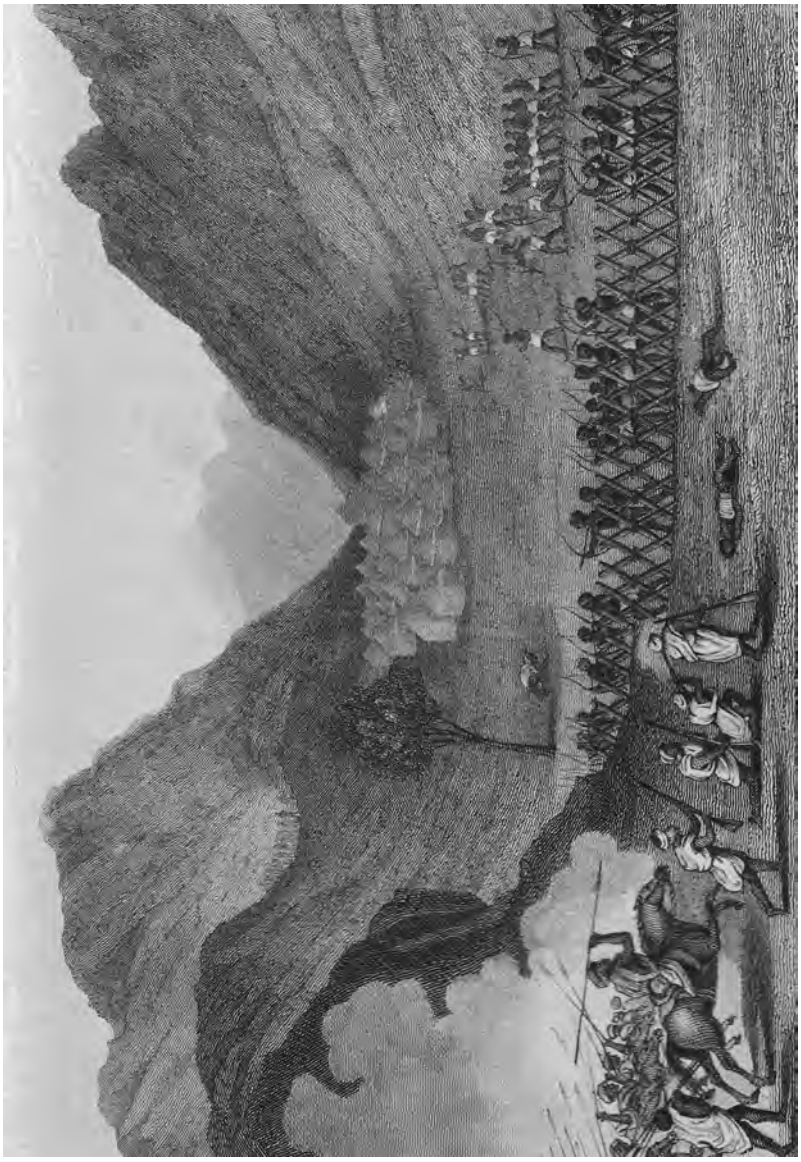

Figure 16.4. Slave raid in Borno witnessed by Clapperton in 1823. Source: Denham *et al.* (1828: vol. I, facing 314).

Figure 16.5. Saharan slave caravan. Source: Richardson (1848), frontispiece.

Figure 16.6. Female slave presented to her master in Timbuctoo. Source: Anon. (*c.*1850), from Petré-Grenouilleau (2003).

Rule' which allowed them to govern this vast area with very limited troops and resources. There was, moreover, quite a strong element of fantasy in the notion of Indirect Rule, which in Lugard's view amounted to little more than reforming the taxation system and allowing 'native' institutions to function. However, this required the maintenance of an uneasy relationship with slaving culture, and the authorities both permitted the keeping of slaves taken in the pre-colonial era and took no action on active slaving in remote and 'unpacified' regions. As Tibenderana (1987) points out, from the surrender of the Waziri of Sokoto in March 1903 to the 1930s, the British authorities regularly over-rode traditional kingmakers and appointed the sultans, fearing Mahdist-inspired revolts,[3] such as that at Satiru in 1906. Indeed, Governor Hugh Clifford's 1923 reference to 'these days of Pan-Islamic propaganda' has a curiously modern ring to it (quoted in Tibenderana 1987: 245).

The most notorious example of this was the Fulɓe slaver Hamman Yaji, the emir of Madagali, who was operating in the Adamawa area until 1927. Unusually, Hamman Yaji left diaries, written in Arabic, which provide a striking insight into the mentality of these individuals (Vaughan and Kirk-Greene 1995). There is a strong argument for saying that the move by the colonial authorities against Hamman Yaji was motivated not by any liberal abolitionist impulses, but by a very real, if probably unjustified, fear of Mahdism. Vaughan and Kirk-Greene (*ibid*.: 17) establish that he had ceased slaving some years before and the administration's real motive may have been fear of his Mahdist sympathies. Alternatively this was a cover for their embarrassment at not having taken action sooner.[4]

Consequences for distribution of population

Persistent slave raiding had very significant consequences for the settlement patterns of the peoples living due south of the Muslim polities all across the region into Central Africa (e.g. for Chad see Azevedo 1982). In describing the Nigerian Middle Belt, W. Wallace observed in 1902: 'In Nassarawa country, a once fertile and populous province, one can only view the remains and ruins of large and totally deserted towns, bearing witness to the desolation wrought by 100 years of internecine strife and slave raiding by the Fulani' (quoted in Sciortino 1920: 5). Wilson-Haffenden (1930: 45), commenting on the impact of slaving on plains settlements in Nassarawa province, says:

> The remaining inhabitants of such towns fled to the hills in all directions; those who approached the eastern and north-eastern confines of the Province, until they

[3] Mahdists were followers inspired by the Mahdi, a charismatic leader in Sudan responsible for the fall of Khartoum and the death of General Gordon.

[4] Thanks to Gerhard Muller-Kosack for this suggestion.

> learned how to defend themselves, were further raided by the Headhunting tribes who inhabit these hilly localities . . . Such was the state of the Province when the arrival of Sir Frederick Lugard put a stop to the slave-raiding, and evolved law and order out of chaos and ruin.
>
> (Sciortino 1920: 5).

The hill communities and their abandonment was the subject of some study at the end of the colonial era. Conant (1962) and Gleave (1965, 1966) described the 'down from the Hills' progression as it was in about 1960. Nonetheless the exact impact on population density remained controversial (Gleave and Prothero 1971, with reply by Mason; see also Mason 1969). Communities such as the Kofyar, on the southern edge of the Jos escarpment, were still very much a hill people when described in the 1960s (Netting 1968). By the time Netting's students came to restudy them in the 1980s, they had largely descended to the plain, and radically changed their agriculture and settlement patterns (Stone 1996). The hill settlements retain considerable importance for many peoples, and the Tarok, for example, still climb to their old settlements for the celebration of key annual rites. Mangut (1998) describes the structure of abandoned hill dwellings among the Ron people from an archaeological perspective.

Open country made a permanent relocation to the hills more difficult, and many peoples had to resort to hiding in caves to escape the mounted raiders. In 1979, the Gbari peoples west of modern-day Suleja (previously Abuja and a notorious slaving centre) were still able to identify the caves formerly used as refuges in the slaving era.[5] Prins (1909), travelling in the south of what is now Central African Republic in 1901, encountered populations which had established permanent cave settlements as a consequence of fear of slaving. Nachtigal (1879–89), describing a Bagirmi raid on the Kim people on the Logone, illustrates the platforms built in very large trees used as a protective strategy against horse-mounted raiders (Figure 16.7).

Alternatively it was possible to protect settlements through concentrating houses in nuclei and surrounding the whole settlement with spiny 'cactus' (*Euphorbia kamerunica*). The poisonous sap of the euphorbia made attacks by horse-mounted raiders risky. The Berom of the Jos Plateau, for example, built compounds entered by passing through a maze of narrow tunnels, with blind alleys and misleading passages, enabling the inhabitants to attack horsemen (Denyer 1978: 9). Seignobos (1980) and Bah (2003) describe the complex systems of *fortifications végétales* built in northern Cameroon and Chad to frustrate Borno and Wandala slavers, which involved a whole variety of different plant species. Figure 16.8 shows a typical compound of the Dowayo people of the Mandara Mountains, which uses *Euphorbia kamerunica* both to demarcate fields, control livestock and protect the whole productive area.

[5] Interview with Musa Doma in December 1979.

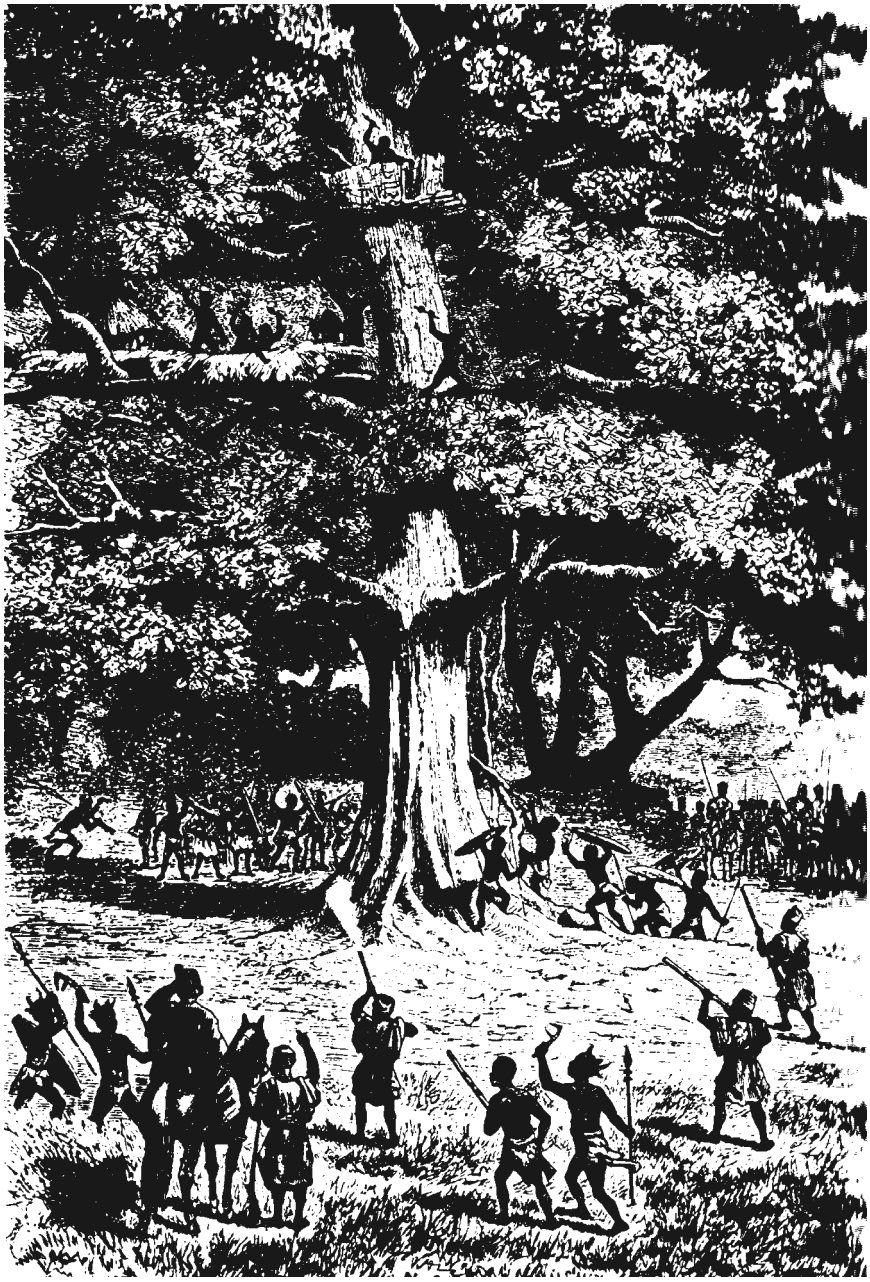

Figure 16.7. Bagirmi raid on the Kim(re) people. Source: Nachtigal (1879–89).

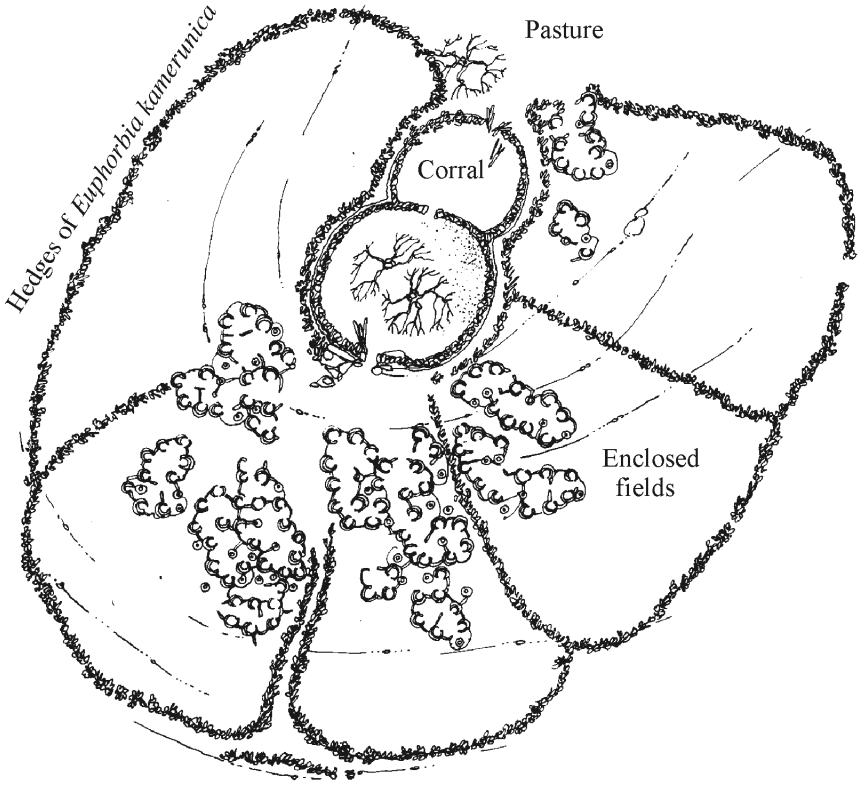

Figure 16.8. Dowayo compound with euphorbia hedge. Source: adapted from Seignobos (1980: 194).

A related consequence of the slave trade was the establishment of outposts of Hausa traders in *zongo*s all across the Middle Belt (James n.d.). Towns such as Keffi and Kontagora became important centres for the slavers and thus more general hubs of trade routes, and so were eventually converted into chiefdoms (Hogben and Kirk-Greene 1966). In Adamawa, the Fulɗe remained dominant in the towns while even Kanuri settlements such as Lafia were retained (Sciortino 1920). These in turn became important economic centres, serving long-distance trade, increasingly in foodstuffs, as the urbanisation following colonial rule increased demand from the cities.

Another aspect of the transformation of the Middle Belt was the establishment of *rinji* or slave settlements within the territories of the indigenous populations (Hill 1976). These were inhabited by a core of Fulɗe and *rumada* or settled slaves (Bruce 1982). The *rumada* were slaves who no longer retained an ethnic identity and so were less likely to run away. Slave settlements could not be maintained without the consent of the local populations, since such villages would be too vulnerable to

attack. In the case of Gindiri, south of the Jos Plateau, the *rinji* became the focus of a trade between the local Fyem [=Pyem] people and the Hausa. More strikingly, an important source of the slaves was not raiding but purchases from other nearby ethnic groups. Bruce (1982: 193–4) cites examples of Ngas and Zaar [=Sayawa] men selling their daughters for cash to increase their social status. Males were not sold in this way, but the Fyem apparently engaged in the kidnapping of children on bush paths for transformation into slaves (see also Machunga n.d.).

The End of Slaving and the Colonial Readjustment

The embarrassing reality was that slavery in Nigeria underwent a 'slow death', to use the opportune term of Lovejoy and Hogendorn (1993). Although Lugard's pronouncements in the early post-conquest period seemed to suggest it would no longer be tolerated, it was evidently difficult simply to halt the process in northern Nigeria in view of how deeply it was embedded (Ubah 1991). Moreover, and this is part of the ambiguity of the colonial attitude, it was necessary to keep traditional rulers on board as part of a longer-term strategy to counter real or imagined radicalism. Klein (1998) records similar problematic attitudes in the Francophone regions of West Africa. Even relative liberals such as Temple (1918) argued that the system of domestic slavery should not be summarily dismantled. Slaves whose original ethnic identity had been abolished were still working within the Hausa system in the first quarter of the twentieth century (Figure 16.9). A decree finally abolishing slavery was only promulgated in 1936, although by this time, almost all those former slaves who maintained an ethnic identity had left for their home area (Olusanya 1966).

At the same time, colonial policy promoted the use of Hausa and Islamic courts, which had the contrary effect of cementing the power of the former slavers. Indirect Rule kept the Muslim rulers of outlying settlements such as Keffi and Ibi in place. Indirect Rule also maintained these islands of Hausa dominance through the colonial era and preserved their authority through a court system controlled by Muslim *qadis* even in rather marginal Islamic areas. Fulɓe pastoralists could count on the incursions of their cattle into fields of crops being subject to only minor penalties in the courts when they were opposed to non-Muslims. It also became advantageous for local rulers either to convert to Islam or to adopt its outward form. Turaki (1993: 99) observes;

> It can hardly be doubted that the practice of placing large numbers of pagans under Fulani District Heads and supporting the authority of these by the powers of government when and where necessary, led to an extension of Islam . . . The pagan headman tended to start wearing Muslim dress especially when they were called to meetings at the District Headquarters and this donning of the garb of the Muslim often proved the first step to Islam.

Figure 16.9. Domestic slaves in Kano. Source: Temple (1918).

This in turn has had a direct impact on issues such as the boundaries of post-colonial Nigerian states. The original Kaduna state, for example, was a long narrow strip that stretched from Katsina on the northern border down through Zaria. Kaduna included many of the communities in southern Zaria that were subjugated by Zazzau in the slave-raiding era. Even when the Katsina emirate became a separate state, the remaining rump of Kaduna state persisted with this awkward conjunction, binding together resentful minority communities, generally oriented towards Christianity, with their former antagonists from further north. Historically this has often been the source of conflict and this state of affairs is likely to continue.

Restructured Relations in the Post-Independence Era

After Nigerian independence in 1960, a slow but ineluctable shift in power relations began. The anomaly of Hausa/Fulani political and economic dominance in the Middle Belt became increasingly apparent as more members of indigenous communities began to pass through the school system. The slow growth of representative elections to local government posts initiated a shift in power from a traditional Islamised elite to an ethnically diverse constituency (Ngu 1994). Frequent periods of military rule had a tendency to freeze the political process, but gradually, as more minority populations became politically active, the inequities of minority power in the Middle Belt were more apparent (Aliyu and Koehn 1982). As a consequence, deferred resentment over the dislocations of the slaving era have intensified, culminating in communal riots, probably beginning with those in Kafanchan in 1987, in which indigenous populations attacked the Hausa trading community (Akinwumi 2004). The consequence has been that the Hausa (and indeed Muslims in general) have tended to leave these areas and retreat further north, just as attacks on Christians in northern towns, accelerating in the 1990s, have reduced the resident southern communities and further polarised the opposition between them (cf. essays in Otite and Albert 1999; Bagudu 2004).[6]

The key process has been the gradual taking of power in local government by the minorities. Nigeria has a complex system of local government areas (LGAs), which are in a constant state of fission (O'Donovan 1992). From only 140 in 1960, there are now 774, with unilaterally declared LGAs adding to the total. In governance terms, this is not cost-effective as expenditures on salaries and infrastructure eat into operational funds. Yet they are highly satisfactory in political terms since they express clearly local conceptions of ethnicity or sub-ethnic units, such as clans. So power-brokers have gradually shifted away from the Hausa, Kanuri and Fulɓe to courting minority ethnic groups (Wunsch and Olowu 1996). At the same time, the court system has gradually shifted from Sharia to the national system; the justice it provides may be no more attractive to external observers but it signals a movement away from an increasingly alien system.

Sharia criminal law was introduced in 1999 in many northern states, including those with substantial non-Muslim populations, in direct conflict with Nigeria's federal constitution. Originally applying Sharia law even to Christian/traditional communities, many states have had to backtrack, for example Borno and Kaduna, and allow the system of justice to be decided by individual local LGAs. The adoption of Sharia law can be interpreted as an attempt to seize back the political initiative from the increasingly assertive

[6] There is a parallel with the gradual desertion of the Russian 'Far East' by ethnic Russians since 1991 and a reassertion of power by the long-suppressed minorities.

minorities. Nonetheless, the intermingling of communities has created a rich vein of conflict which has several times surfaced in violence, especially in the 'Plateau Crisis' of 2001 when peoples such as the Berom and Rigwe rose up and expelled or killed northern migrants, even where they had been settled in the region for as much as a century (Bala *et al*. 2002).

Perversely, there has been a simultaneous expansion of the numbers and titles of traditional rulers among minorities, based largely on the Hausa model they affect to despise. A study by Blench *et al*. (2005) showed that pressure to create 'chiefs' has resulted in the appointment *de novo* of 'traditional rulers' in many areas as well as the upgrading of existing chiefs. The colonial authorities initiated a system of four 'classes' of chief and this system has been both maintained and further consolidated within the Nigerian bureaucratic system (Oladimeji 1985). These chiefs have little real power, as their financial resources are limited, except where they have become wealthy prior to appointment; indeed traditional titles are now sometimes seen as a confirmation of wealth and prestige acquired in civil society. Intriguingly, typically Hausa icons of power, such as long trumpets, swords, sandals and ostrich-feather fans, are often faithfully reproduced, even among non-Muslims. For example, the Ninkyob people in Kaduna state were traditionally a segmentary society with no central political authority and a strongly anti-Islamic ethos. However, after years of agitation, a chief was created by the state government in 2004.[7] A 'palace' was promptly constructed and Hausa-style regalia commissioned. Figure 16.10 shows the newly made sword of office.

Reframing Oral Traditions

The manipulation of oral traditions by elite groups is hardly new, and Stevens (1975) presents a case-study of the restructuring of the Kisra legend to underpin current power relations in the Borgu emirate. The slave trade has a tendency to be downplayed in elite narratives and minorities are supposed to have submitted peaceably to the rule of the emirates. Despite this, the era is increasingly a source of anger in the descendants of those affected and episodes from the trade are recalled in notional oral traditions. Two cairns at Panshanu on the Jos–Bauchi road represent a very public reminder of the impact of slave raiding on the Izere people and others in the Toro area. The individual stones represent the heads of every non-Fulani killed in the resistance.[8] In the face of this, part of the process of restructuring relations between the elite and the minorities is the reframing of oral traditions to match the new equations of power.

[7] Interviews in Ninkyob, November 2005.

[8] Thanks to Selbut Longtau for this information.

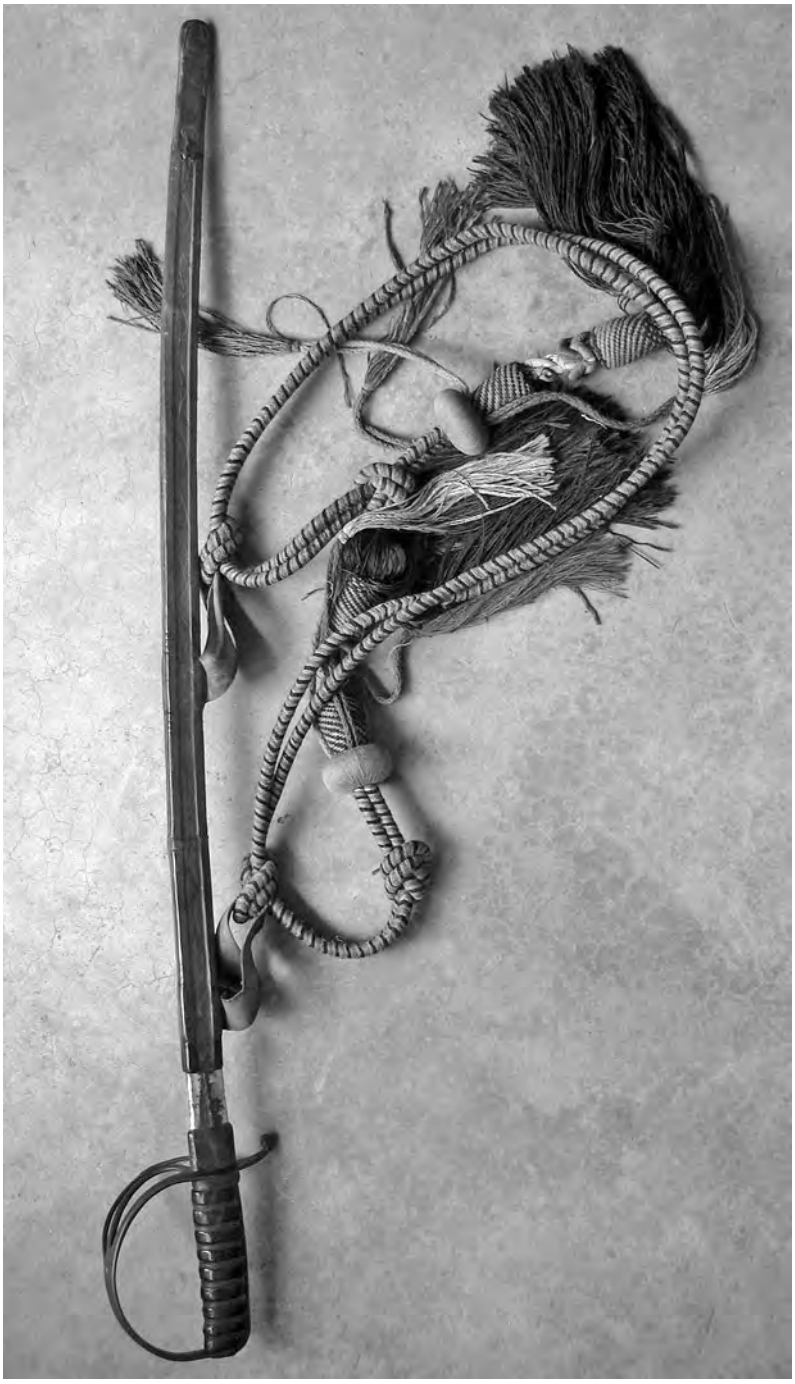

Figure 16.10. Ninkyob sword of office.

The case of Hamman Yaji, the Adamawa slaver, is mentioned above as part of the final days of raiding. Hamman Yaji was arrested in 1927 by the British, first taken via Yola to Sokoto and then finally exiled in Kaduna, where he died of septicaemia in 1929 (Vaughan and Kirk-Greene 1995). However, this is a far from theatrical or moral end for an individual who caused so much misery, and the populations he raided have now developed their own distinctive narrative more in keeping with retributive justice. The lead up to his arrest has been embroidered with magical circumstances and unlikely events in keeping with older traditions.[9] According to a version recounted by the montagnard peoples of the Gwoza Hills, they assembled at Durghwe (a major landmark and regional rain shrine) in Dghwede and sent a delegation to the Shehu of Bornu, in Maiduguri, to complain about Hamman Yaji's slaving activities. Vaima, a member of the Dagha (peacemaker) lineage, was chosen to lead a multi-ethnic expedition. The Dagha are ritual specialists who hold power through the magical properties of *Cissus quadrangularis*, a succulent liana. Vaima publicly swallowed a large number of cut pieces of the liana together with sorghum beer. The expedition followed a certain predestined route which involved passing sites where further ceremonies with the remaining *Cissus* had to be carried out. The expedition led them to the Wandala of Mora, to Dikwa, the regional colonial headquarters, and from there to Maiduguri where they informed the Shehu of Hamman Yaji's atrocities. Acting on this, the Shehu of Bornu informed the British governor who invited the delegation to go with a group of British soldiers to Madagali. By the time they reached Madagali, Hamman Yaji had escaped into the hills, but his hiding place was discovered. The British officer was so angry with Hamman Yaji that he wanted to shoot him on the spot, but Vaima stopped him because Hamman Yaji had licked Vaima's back as a sign of submission. However, Hamman Yaji *was* later killed, though with difficulty because of his magical powers.[10] None of the Dghwede delegation survived long, including Vaima, perhaps owing to the ingestion of significant amounts of *Cissus quadrangularis*. Vaima's courageous actions are still recounted today as part of a broader anti-slavery narrative despite their tenuous relation with recorded historical material.

Another example of how the memories of the slave trade are still very much alive in current politics can be found among the Mada people. The Mada live north of Akwanga in central Nigeria and were extensively slaved in the late nineteenth century. The grandfather of Barau Kato, a modern researcher on Mada, was captured by the slavers in around 1895.[11] He was carried in a caravan to Keffi

[9] I am indebted to Gerhard Muller-Kosack for this information, recorded orally in 1994.

[10] This type of reversal of known facts is not uncommon in popular Nigerian versions of history. For example, in *The Complete Story and Trial of Adolph Hitler*, the final pages recount the trial (!) of Adolph Hitler, his escape by shooting a gun 'up and down the court' and the fact that 'nobody could tell Hitler's whereabouts up till today' (Anorue n.d.).

[11] Barau Kato provided this information in January 2008, based on conversations with his grandfather.

and kept in a slave encampment until a sufficient number could be aggregated to be sold on further north. He managed to escape and made his way back to his home community, but other Mada disappeared forever during this period. His ability to recount this experience to the community stimulated intense opposition to Hausa domination in a region where the British promoted the use of Hausa-speaking officials in the colonial era. This was also responsible for the rejection of Islam by a majority of the Mada and for their early adoption of Christianity.

The Realignment of Historical Scholarship

Historical writing in Nigeria has many of the same qualities as oral tradition; it constantly reshapes the past to respond to the political exigencies of the present. The earliest generation of local academic historians were trained in a more traditional style, and tended to represent the position of dominant ethnic groups. The emphasis was typically on documents and administrative history, and pictured the past through conventional oppositions, particularly in their critique of colonialism. However, as the pool of writers has become more diverse and publishing has become cheaper and easier, a literature that might be described as 'parahistorical' has emerged, which reflects the interests of the many minorities of the Middle Belt. Although claiming to be based on oral traditions, and occasionally appending references,[12] most of its narratives are extremely difficult to confirm in the field. Filaba (2002: 294) quotes with approval the formulation of Temu and Swai (1981: 1) that 'all the events have been distorted [in colonial historiography], most of the important causes concealed, some of the principal characters never appear and all who figure are so misunderstood and misrepresented that the whole result is a complete mystification' in presumed opposition to the history now being told. This alternative version is well exemplified in the writings of James (1997, n.d. [but *c*.2000]) which mix speculative recounting of mythic narratives, archival research and open pleas to specific political agendas, such as the creation of new states or local governments. Here, for example, is James (1997: 55) on the traditions of the Kurama:

> The Akurmi-Kurama claim to have left the area of Medina because they were punished for giving false measures of corn. They settled in Borno for over 700 years before another upheaval sent them further west into area known as the Hausa plains.

Later (*ibid*.: 146) we learn that 'communal violence . . . broke out between the Akurmi (Kurama) local inhabitants and the Hausa community of Lere town in the

[12] To illustrate this, Filaba (2002: 302) references Siegfried Nadel's authoritative ethnography of the *Nupe as A Black By Zan-Tium, London 1973*, which strongly suggests the author had never seen a physical copy but had merely heard of it.

Saminaka now Lere Local Government Area in 1980 and 1987'. Later still (*ibid*.: 260) the book turns into an account of the demand for the creation of a southern Kaduna state. Interestingly, although these publications have all the overt apparatus of historical writing, no footnote reassures the reader that any of these claims have a basis in fact.

One aspect of this reshaping of the past is the inclusion of resistance to slavery. Here is Filaba (2002: 290) on the Kurape chiefdom near present-day Abuja:

> By the end of the 18th century a noticeable development and contradiction started as some village heads started to rebel against the cruel and repressive attitudes of the kings of Kurape. The kings of Kurape were great slavers who raided even their own subjects and sold them off.

It is hard to know what to make of this, since no source is given. However, given that the start of the *jihad* and the militarisation of the northern emirates began only in the early nineteenth century, the dates are clearly suspect. An alternative view appears in Ohiare (1988: 382) which suggests that at least some of the minority communities in this region made alliances with the slavers in order to expand their territories at the expense of their traditional enemies, thereby exacerbating the raids. Cordell (2003) makes very similar observations concerning the 'myth of invincibility' in relation to resistance to slaving in Central Africa.

In another example, the Bida emirate was established following the *jihad* of 1804 and established Fulɓe suzerainty over the Nupe peoples. Bida became a major centre of slaving, sending captives both north to Kano and south to Lagos. Its history is recounted in Burdon (1909), Nadel (1942) and Mason (1973, 1979). By all accounts, the Nupe were fairly ruthless raiders and efficient at suppressing dissent, although endlessly engaged in internecine struggles. But this is hardly congruent with the new narratives of resistance. A recent commentator, Idrees (2002) pictures the rulers of Bida as endlessly beset by uprisings from their subject populations. He says, 'However, despite the apparent sagacious steps Bida took in the administration of the district, resistance movements against it did not cease. There were many uprisings organized by the indigenous groups to throw off the yoke of what they considered as "alien" rule' (Idrees 2002: 642). Despite his work purportedly being a historical account of the subjugation of Nupe by the British, Idrees fails to reference even well-known eyewitness accounts such as Vandeleur (1898), suggesting a gap between standard academic discourse and a type of theatrical rodomontade partly fabricated for polemical purposes.

A related narrative theme is the people who 'were never conquered'. The Tarok people live in the region some 200km south-east of the Jos Plateau.[13] They have strong military traditions and since the 1990s have been enthusiastic publishers on their culture and history. A recent account of their history (Shagaya

[13] Thanks to Selbut Longtau for corrections to this account.

2005: 168) says, 'Tarok clans which were in strong defensive positions in the hills preferred to resist the Fulani of Wase. Although subjected to continual raids, they were never conquered by the Fulani . . . They continued to live in the hills but farmed at the foot of the hills, always armed, ready to fight or flee in the event of the appearance of Fulani raiders.'

This presents an image rather without nuance. The Tarok of Gani occupied the Wase basin before the *jihad* and submitted voluntarily to Madakin Hassan, the founder of Wase, paying tribute to the Fulani in Bauchi. However, the Tarok to the west of Wase were never conquered and resented Fulani suzerainty over part of their territory. Since the 1990s, Tarok country has been endlessly convulsed by rioting between the indigenous Tarok and the neighbouring Hausa/Fulani/Jukun communities. Coalitions of indigenous peoples, coordinated by the Tarok, have mounted attacks on Hausa communities, for example at Yelwa on the Benue in 2001. Indeed, one consequence of the expulsion of the Hausa was that the original name of the town, Inshar, has now been reclaimed.

External historians might well ask whether these purported traditions have any empirical basis. They do not feature strongly in the earlier works cited; could these centralising writers simply have missed this crumbling at the periphery? Since the evidence cited is very slight, and control over the sources very poor, its validity will inevitably be questioned. But essentially two quite different intentions are now at cross-purposes: 'history' is adopted pragmatically as a tool of current politics, rather than meeting some imagined academic goal underpinned by presumed objectivity. The thrust, resistance to domination and slaving in the nineteenth century, represents a transfer of resentment concerning the past to the assertion of economic and political hegemony in the present.

Conclusion

Slaving in the West African region has a long and dishonourable history and was bound into the economic fabric of society in much of western Sudan from the late first millennium AD, and perhaps even earlier. However, greater access to trade and a corresponding increase in the power and extension of indigenous states stimulated a major expansion in demand for slaves from the early nineteenth century onwards. Greater availability of firearms and larger horse breeds extended the capacity of the slaving groups to mount raids. In pre-colonial Nigeria, the chief victims of this surge were the acephalous populations of the Middle Belt, who were both scattered and driven into hill settlements by the incursions. Not all were victims, however, as some groups collaborated with the Fulɗe to funnel slaves to plantations and northern markets.

The British colonial era eventually led to the end of slavery and the return of unassimilated slaves; however, the simultaneous promotion of Hausa/Fulɓe

culture suppressed expression of resentment for this era. Since Nigerian independence, a gradual shift in power towards autochthonous populations has led to attacks on Hausa traders and settlements in the Middle Belt and a reframing of historical narratives which shifts the emphasis towards resistance and instability and away from triumphalist accounts of pre-colonial order. This process is dynamic; it seems certain that a sharpening of ethnic identity and a further crystallisation of the Muslim/non-Muslim divide is set to continue.

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