The Tiv Military System in Warfare and Resistance to External Conquest, c.1500-1915

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Abstract

The organisation of human societies around the world has led to situations of conflict and war throughout history. This was also the case among the Tiv of the Benue Region and Upper Cross River Basin of the Nigeria area. Thus, the Tiv had a military system which sought peace for its people and society. This military system was challenged during two unique epochs: the period of their spread and the wars of self-preservation within the region and the era of the British imperialist military conquest of the Nigeria area. This development has occupied intellectual and public discourse among writers, commentators and scholars of central Nigerian area history. But many times, in the literature, the military and defence system of larger and centralised entities have mostly been highlighted while neglecting the standards set by other non-centralised entities such as the Tiv. This gap in literature has formed the subject-matter of this paper. The findings of the paper show that Tiv society's social, economic and political institutions were a unifying factor for the successful waging of pre-colonial warfare and the organised militant resistance against British imperialists in the late 19th and the early part of the 20th century. The paper has advanced the argument that the Tiv built the most formidable military machine in the Benue Region which was overthrown only by superior foreign arms of British imperial power. Considered through the interdisciplinary approach, and conflict and war scholarly perspectives, this paper also used secondary sources to achieve its aim and objectives.

Keywords: Tiv military system, wars of self-preservation, non-centralised entities, militant resistance, British imperialist conquest.

Introduction

The development of Tiv military system and warfare in the Benue region and the Upper Cross River Basin in the pre-colonial period cannot be intellectually ignored or even over-emphasised. As part of this contribution among other issues, this paper is focused on the military system, warfare and expansion of

the Tiv within the two regions and their resistance against British imperialism and colonial domination. It must be noted that military systems and organisation within these territories and groups was part of the relations forged in the social, economic and political spheres in the Nigeria area. Nevertheless, the Tiv although militarily superior than many of these groups remained non-centralised and stateless, and engaged in warfare mainly to achieve expansion and living space for their people. The major concern of the Tiv in this period was the capture of more land for the agricultural needs of an expanding generation and the incorporation of peoples into Tiv society as either slaves or communal labourers in the fields. In the Upper Cross River Basin, Tiv expansion for land hunger led to conventional wars and later a form of guerrilla warfare known as *Ogirinya* which brought untold suffering, emotional pain, sorrow, and misery upon families of both sides of the divide. But with short memories of hate, mutually beneficial relations continued to thrive in these two regions as the Tiv military dominance did not redound to political mastery over any group.[1]

This was in sharp contrast to the invading forces of British imperialism that arrived in the Tiv areas and in the entire Benue region in the latter half of the 19th century. For the British enterprise throughout the Nigeria area necessarily demanded for a political and military system of colonial occupation, control and domination for its self-preservation and sustenance. Therefore, British imperial military expeditions were undertaken against the Tiv which gave the latter the spark that rekindled their age-old tradition of resistance designed to stamp out alien ruler-ship.[2] This paper aims to achieve two things. Firstly, it aims to analyse Tiv military organisation as the basis for their successful campaigns of expansion in the Benue region and resistance to alien or foreign invasion and conquest. Secondly, the paper aims to demonstrate the vitality of this military system and its established warrior tradition, through the Tiv resistance against the advent of British imperialism in the region. Scholarly literature on resistance movements against imperialism throughout Africa have mostly focussed upon large entities, especially empires, kingdoms and states, while less attention has been paid upon small and non-centralised entities such as the Tiv. This has made the works of E. Hogan's "Roman Catholic Missionaries and the Ekumeku Uprisings, 1898-1911," Don C. Ohadike's *The Ekumeku Movement: Western Igbo Resistance to the British Conquest of Nigeria, 1883-1914,* and Toure Kazah-Toure, "Re-reading British Colonial Domination and Resistance in Northern Nigeria: Fairytales and Realities," a major touchstone for this paper.[3]

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[1] Emmanuel C. Ayangaor, *The Tiv and their Southern Neighbours, 1890-1990,* (Durham, North Carolina: CAP African World Series), 129-143.

[2] See John N. Orkar, "A Pre-colonial History of the Tiv of Central Nigeria, c. 1500-1850," PhD History Dissertation, (Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada, 1979), 221-222.

[3] Contrast E. Hogan, "Roman Catholic Missionaries and the Ekumeku Uprisings, 1898-1911," *Tangaza Journal of Theology and Mission,* (Nairobi: Paulines' Publications Africa, 2010): 60; Don C. Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement: Western Igbo Resistance to the British Conquest of Nigeria, 1883-1914,* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991), 266, Toure Kazah-Toure, "Re-reading British Colonial Domination and Resistance in Northern Nigeria: Fairytales and Realities," (Paper Presented at the CODESRIA African History Conference,

This is because the three authors exerted their efforts and focus upon smaller African entities in analysing the history of resistance movements against imperialism. This is a position that is at the heart of this particular paper.

Geographical and Brief Historical Background, circa 1500-1750

Tivland in Nigeria today falls within the geographical region known as the Middle Belt or Central Nigeria.[4] The region occupies an area equal to 9, 861 square miles, or 30,000 square kilometres. Tivland in Benue State and the northern Tiv have a common border on the east with the Chamba,[5] Kuteb and Jukun people of Taraba State, while to the west is the Idomaland and Igedeland, also of Benue State. On the Northern border can also be found the Alago, Eggon, Bassa, Agatu and other groups and nationalities in Nasarawa State,[6] and to the South is the Bekwara people of Cross River State where not only warfare, but serious and beneficial economic currents existed and flourished between the people of the Upper Cross River Basin and the Southern Tiv area during the pre-colonial period. The region was also a melting pot for several histories and origins of migration and settlement, as well as military alliances and confederacy. The population content of these two groups in the southern areas includes on the side of the Upper Cross River Basin, the Bakor, Bette, Utugwang, Boki, Yala, among others, while on the Tiv side have been the Shangev-ya, Mbaduku, Mbayongo, Gaav and Shangev-tiev. The Tiv in the contemporary era remain very populous and number up to six million and as a factor of history can be found mainly in Benue, Cross River, Nasarawa, Plateau, and Taraba States of Nigeria.[7]

Conceptual Clarification and Scholarly Perspectives

It must be stressed that the various ethnic group formations, entities and polities that emerged within the Benue region and the Upper Cross River Basin especially the Tiv had socio-economic ambitions of establishing broader, larger and more expansive territories for agriculture and commerce incorporating

Kampala, 27th-29th October, 2008), 2-5, with the work on larger African entities by James T. Gwar and Balarabe Garba Yakubu, "Militant Resistance to European Imperialism in Africa: Assessing the Significance of the Revolutionary *Mahdist* Movements, 1800-1935," *Anyigba Journal of History and International Studies, AJOHIS, Vol. 2, No. 1,* (2021): 109-122

[4] Emmanuel M. Tenge, "The Impact of Ex-servicemen on Social and Political Developments in Tivland, 1939-1960," Unpublished B.A. History Project, (Benue State University, Makurdi, 1997), 6.

[5] The Chamba is today mostly found in present day Takum and Donga Local Government
 Areas of Taraba State. They are made up of Tikari, Jidu, Pari, Lufum and what is called the Chamba proper, that is, the Pyeri, Daka Nupabi and Poba. See also D. C. Dorward, "A Political and Social History of the Tiv People of Northern Nigeria, 1900-1939," Unpublished Ph.D. History Thesis, (University of London, 1971),18.

[6] See M. Adogi, "Nasarawa State: The Ecology, Population and Politics," *Africa Journal of Peace Research,* 15, 3, (2003): 34-42.

[7] Adogi, "Nasarawa State: The Ecology, Population and Politics," 6-8.

diverse elements and other smaller entities and polities.[8] Conflicts and resistance to conquest and incorporation among these ethnic nationalities to a large extent also defined their inter-group relationships in several epochs of history beginning from the pre-colonial period.[9] Lewis A. Coser has helped the understanding of conflicting interests and relations in a social and economic system which ultimately leads to military organisation and the mobilisation for war, thus:

> Social conflict may be defined as a struggle over values or claims to status, power, and scarce resources, in which the aims of the conflicting parties are not only to gain the desired values, but also to neutralise, injure, or eliminate their rivals. Such conflicts may take place between individuals and collectives. Inter-group as well as intra-group conflicts are perennial features of social life.[10]

At one point or the other, as Umar Kaoje notes, a society of people experienced some sort of conflict and war, threats of invasion or situations of stress and tension. This was particularly so among the people of the Benue region and Upper Cross River Basin when people with different historical experiences, diverse cultures, varying economic conditions and systems struggled over scarce resources and wars among them became pervasive[11] As Howard and Paret's understanding of Carl Von Clausewitz shows, military organisation is the structure of operational command and control designed to arrange, prepare and equip troops for the planning and conduct of military campaigns by the employment of battles to gain the ends of war or fulfil the ends of policy.[12] Howard, Paret and Basil Liddell Hart, generally agree that warfare refers to the waging of war or nature of the conduct of war peculiar to a particular people. The term 'war' is thus derived from the German *Werra*, signifying confusion, discord or strife. This entails some degree of confrontation using weapons and other military technology and equipment by armed forces employing military

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[8] Thus, an indigenous Nigeria area commerce was established through the growth of agriculture which would cause conflict and war, as well as threats of invasion. In this context, the indigenous commerce refers to the articles, products and institutions of trade developed and embarked upon by the indigenous Nigeria area rulers, subjects and peoples in various sectors of the polities during the pre-colonial period. See an example of this in Kenneth O. Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger-Delta, 1830-1885: An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria,* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956).

[9] For an anthropological and historical analysis of these types of conflict and war, see Harry H. Turney-High, *Primitive War*, (Carolina, 1971), 179.

[10] Lewis A. Coser, cited in Emmanuel C. Ayangaor, "Tiv-Jukun Crisis and National Integration: A Historical Perspective," *FASS: Journal of Faculty of Arts Seminar Series, Vol. 1.,* BSU, Makurdi, (2002): 220.

[11] Umar M. Kaoje, "Conflict and Conflict Management in Nigerian Politics," in *Politics and   Political Power Relations in Nigeria,* George A. Kwanashie, ed, (Kaduna: DAT Publishers, 2003), 167-177.

[12] Michael E. Howard and Peter Paret, eds. trans. *Carl von Clausewitz's On War*, (Princeton:
 University Press, 1984), 48-67.

tactics and operational art within a broad military strategy, and subject to military logistics and support.[13] In studies of resistance movements such as in the historical idea and theory of the just war promoted by scholars such as Michael Howard, it has been demonstrated that rulers wage wars of resistance when it becomes evident that their cause is just. The leaders of the Tiv viewed their cause as such as they resisted to the death conquest and incorporation under various empires and kingdoms in the pre-colonial period and British imperialist domination and loss of their sovereignty in the 19th and 20th century era of imperialism and colonisation. This theory is also in line with the revolutionary perspectives of history which views alienation and deprivation as the motivating factors for brotherhood, solidarity, class consciousness, nationalism, and self-determination.[14]

The Pre-colonial Tiv Military System, circa 1750-1870

Before the British arrived on the scene in the 19th century, the Tiv had already developed their political and military system. This was necessary for security, social order, the waging of wars, and for defensive purposes, and the acquisition of land for agriculture, as well as the settlement of inter-clan disputes. The Tiv political and military system was based on a lineage system that was patrilineal. Several lineages were grouped together to form a single political unit or clan, generally referred to as the *hemen u tar Tiv*, the Tiv Country Council.[15] Following this arrangement, heads of the family usually met to deliberate over the social security and defence of the larger Tiv society. The heads of the family constituted the superstructure of Tiv social relations, which was anchored upon the father-right and mother-right basis of social relations, *Ityo* and *Igba*. Although the father-right basis took precedence over the mother-right basis, an individual could appeal to the maternal kinsmen for personal security and protection.[16] Another structure was at the level of the *ya* or compound. This structure in the social, political and military organisation of the Tiv was headed by the *orya* the head of the compound, who mediated several domestic disputes among neighbours and served as a major source of mobilisation and recruitment for defence and security under the approval of the council of elders, *mbavesen* and ultimately, the *ityo* or corporate agnate. A judicial council, *ijirtamen,* was organised from time to time for the settlement of disputes of a social, political, military and economic nature. The age-grades system known as *kwav,* were also significant for social and security works. They were responsible for the building of bridges, construction of roads, clearing of bush for the establishment of markets, and the execution of wars.[17]

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[13] Howard and Paret, *Clausewitz's On War*, 68-81. See also Basil Liddell Hart, *The Decisive Wars of History,* (London: Collins Books, 1929), 32-44.

[14] Michael E. Howard, *The Causes of War and Other Essays,* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard
 University Press, 1983), 7-15

[15] Tenge, "The Impact of Ex-servicemen on Social and Political Developments in Tivland, 1939-1960," 15

[16] John N. Orkar, "A Pre-colonial History of the Tiv," Ph.D. History Thesis, (Dalhousie   University, Halifax, Canada, 1979), 97-109.

[17] See Justin I. Tseayo, *Conflict and Incorporation: The Integration of the Tiv in Nigeria,* (Zaria: Gaskiya Publishing, 1975), 30.

Due to constant population movement as a result of rotational farming, it became difficult to adopt a centralised system of administration. Therefore, at the top of the system was the corporate agnate, *ityo,* who acted as the sovereign for each clan. Elders, *Mbavesen,* made up the corporate agnate, *ityo*, and were responsible for the settlement of a variety of disputes and the authorisation for the waging of wars.[18] Through this method of collective responsibility, various services were rendered to the Tiv clans and kindreds. The function of the pre-colonial political system was the enhancement of justice, harmony, collective responsibility, mass political participation and decision-making within and under the headship of the Tiv territory, or *Tar-Tiv Council*.[19] By 1870 when a large number of the European powers set out for their imperialist acquisitions especially in Africa, the Tiv social, political and military institutions had become vastly recognised.[20]

Tiv Military System and Warfare in the Benue Region and the Upper Cross River Basin, 1800-1900

The political institutions of the Tiv were also tailored to meet the demands of warfare. But the Tiv had no standing army. So, every able-bodied man was regarded as a potential soldier. The drum chiefs, known as *ator agbande,* served as leaders at the war-front, prepared medicine for warriors as protective device, and advised on ways by which wars could be won. Wars were planned through the summoning of a war assembly. This was done through the process of sounding of a wooden gong, *u kumen indyer,* or the sounding of a horn, *u tongun korough*, to assemble a fighting force scattered over wide areas. Tesemchi Makar wrote that the Tiv political and military system saw the emergence of war heroes in the period. Prominent among these were Agaku Atikyongo of Ugondo, Vembe Gbev of Shitire, Agia from Tombo, Chia Chile Tali from Mbagen, Gbayange Ato of Nongov, and Gbayange Wundu Kume from Ihyarev, and the Gaav military leader Ashwa Mondo, who was of exceptional ability and who was said to have been very instrumental in wars with the Udam, among many others.[21] R.A. Sargent's work shows that the war strategy adopted by the Tiv was commensurate with their savannah terrain. Large troops were deployed since there was easy mobility. The main weapons used included spears, javelin, bows and arrows, which were skilfully deployed by the Tiv warriors.[22]

It was this political and military system that enabled the Tiv to fiercely defend their territory from other groups and to resist the aggressive tendencies of other militarily strong entities such as the Jukun, Ndama, Chamba, Igede, among several others. These successes culminated in the defeat of the Iyon, the Bafun, and the Chamba, in the 17th and 18th centuries, as well as the Fulani Jihadists

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[18] Orkar, "A Pre-colonial History of the Tiv," 99-104.

[19] Tesemchi Makar, *The History of Political Change Among the Tiv in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1994), 152.

[20] See the work of Elizabeth A. Isichei, *A History of African Societies to 1870*, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1997).

[21] Isichei, *A History of African Societies to 1870*, 152-153.

[22] R.A. Sargent, *The Tiv-Hausa Wars,* (Halifax: Dalhousie University Press, 1975), 125.

authorised for conquest from the Sokoto Caliphate and drawn from Lafia, Keffi, and Bauchi in 1879.[23] Sargent has observed that in this way, "the Tiv built up a reputation in the Benue region for their bravery and military capabilities."[24]

The various Tiv neigbours on the southern flank in present day Cross River have been known to the Tiv collectively as the Udam. Of the Udam people with whom the Tiv interacted, resisted and fought were the Bete, Yakoro, Yache, Utugwan, and Egedde. Dewar reports that the Bete in particular lived with the Tiv for a very long time on the Obudu hills as neighbours together with the Ugee before they eventually migrated westerly to their present habitat and abode on the southern border of Tivland.[25] The reason responsible for the drift or migration has not been known but it is probable that they left after the decline of the Kwararafa political and military confederacy as did the Tiv. This line of argument is taken into consideration due to the influence of the Jukun in the area who even had a very important trade route that ran through the Udam country to Calabar.[26] Adiele Afigbo painted the picture clearer when he observed that:

> ...the Jukun raids into Hausaland are believed to have yielded rich harvests of slaves, most of whom they are believed to have sold to customers on the Cross River for onward transmission to the new world. The slave trade as migration and as a factor of contact between the Cross-River people and their neighbours was without doubt very important while it lasted.[27]

Thus, the Jukun raids in the Benue region was an important factor in the various population movements in the upper and middle Cross River areas and consequently, a stimulant to the emergence and development of trade relations between the Benue region and the Cross-River Basin even before 1600. These relations in turn, led to conflicts and even the prosecution of wars. The Tiv lineages that engaged Udam in warfare were the Tiv of Jechira extraction, namely, Kunav, Gaav and Shangev-Tiv whose migrations could have been before the 18th Century and in the second half of the 19th Century. The Tiv lineage of Kunav migrated directly to the South of Ngokugh hill where they encountered and engaged the Udam in warfare. It was a difficult terrain for them as the Udam were already familiar with the physical and social

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[23] Sargent, *The Tiv-Hausa Wars,* 125-126.

[24] Sargent, *The Tiv-Hausa Wars,* 126-128. See again R. A. Sargent, "The Northern Tiv: Migration, War and Societal Transformation," *Benue Valley Project Papers No.9,* (Department of History, University of Dalhousie, September, 1975), 1-29.

[25] Adiele E. Afigbo, "External Contacts and Relations: An Overview" in *A History of the Cross-River Region of Nigeria*, M. B. Abasiatta ed. (Enugu: Harris Publishers, 1990), 132.

[26] See Dorward, "A Political and Social History of the Tiv People of Northern Nigeria, 1900-1939," 132; Philip D. Curtin and Jan Vansina, "Sources of the Nineteenth Century Atlantic Slave Trade" *Journal of African History*, V, 2, (1964): 190; and David Northrup, *Trade without Rulers: Pre-Colonial Economic Development in South-eastern Nigeria,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 14-15, 64, and 79.

[27] Afigbo, "External Contacts and Relations: An Overview," 132.

environment. As the Udam moved as a result of the invasion from the Tiv, the Tiv on the other hand moved in swiftly to occupy the land left behind by the former. This push continued even at the wake of the establishment of British colonial rule in the opening years of the 20th Century.[28]

Being more socially organised and militarily stronger than their neighbours of the Upper Cross River Basin, the Southern Tiv forcefully expanded farmlands and the homestead within the area as flourishing agriculture and food production made possible a population explosion on their side. It must be acknowledged that although the Tiv gained the military ascendancy over their neighbours in the area, the people remained stateless and no actual political ruler-ship was imposed upon this society throughout the pre-colonial period.[29] Noted scholar and expert of this region, Emmanuel C. Ayangaor, has located this factor to a "lack of political sophistication" on the part of the Tiv during the period of the 19th century.[30] It must be noted that social vagaries of life existed and brought conflict of interests in the relations among these people. These social vagaries included the mutual capture and trade in slaves by both sides in their areas and head-hunting through the practice of a form of guerrilla warfare that was termed *ogirinya*.[31]

This practice of killing and beheading some isolated Tiv was originally developed as a direct response of the Upper Cross River Basin people for the Southern Tiv's encroachment on their land and seizure of their most fertile areas for expanded farmlands and settlements. But it was not long before the Southern Tiv groups also turned the heat upon their Upper Cross River Basin counterparts in a bloody orgy of mutual head-hunting in which a large number of their people including chiefs were heavily involved. With head-hunting, both sides acquired 'articles of prestige' such as human heads to bury their reputable and most honoured and respected members of their societies. But war had not diminished the appeal of common humanity and the age-old need for interdependence.[32] Beginning from the latter half of the 19th century, the Tiv and the Benue region entered world history with the British imperialist invasion.

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[28] S. Ademola Ajayi, "Nigeria and the Search for National Integration: Tapping from the Pre-Colonial Inter-Group Relations," in *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, Vol. 16,* (2005-2006): 98; Isichei, *A History of African Societies to 1870*, 247-251. See also O. Temple, *Notes on the Tribes, Provinces, Emirates and States of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria,* (2nd edition), (London: Frank Cass, 1965), 97-200.

[29] See the Preface to Bem J. Audu, *Wars and Changing Patterns of Inter-Group Relations*

 in the Middle Benue Valley of Nigeria, c.1300-1900, (Kaduna: Nigeria Defence Academy

 Publishers, 2018), viii-x

[30] Instructive here is Makar, *The History of Political Change among the Tiv in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, 149-154. Compare also Audu, *Wars and Changing Patterns of Inter-Group Relations*, 115-116.

[31] Ayangaor, *The Tiv and their Southern Neighbours, 1890-1990,* 108-109.

[32] Ayangaor, *The Tiv and their Southern Neighbours, 1890-1990,* 129-143.

The Tiv Military System and Resistance to British Colonial Conquest, 1900-1907

The Tiv military system although without a ready standing army, supported resistance to external aggression and invasion including the advent of British imperialism and colonisation of the region. In the Tiv political and military system, there had been the steady rise of *mbahemen tyav* or war leaders who formed the structure of the *tor agbande*, or the drum chieftaincy, and who became instrumental to resistance through the planning and execution of skirmishes and violent confrontations against the British imperialists.[33] Godwin Hembe has recorded that the British imperial penetration of the region coincided with these Tiv war leaders' desire to establish expansive leadership systems throughout Tivland as they began with the setting up of private armies and militias. Prominent among these war leaders was Chia Chile Tali of Mbagen who fought his way throughout Mbagen where he ruled as a dictator and exerted himself strenuously to incorporate the Iwanev under his authority. Another prominent war leader was Abuul Benga who carried out similar military and territorial expansion adventures among the Ukan. This development was intensified from 1880-1885. In 1885, the Tiv anti-imperial resistance carried out attacks against Europeans in Agasha, Tiga, Arufu and Abinsi, the latter executed in alliance with the Mbagwen people.[34]

It must be remembered that the Tiv resistance groups against British imperialism had attacked and looted the trading stations established in their territory by the Royal Niger Company (RNC) in 1885 and again in 1886. The punitive expeditions embarked upon by the British imperial forces further resulted to reprisal attacks by the Tiv who killed 3 constabulary soldiers and wounded 11 others.[35] By 1897 and at the turn of the century, the British imperial invasion was carried out under the military might of the West African Frontier Force, (WAFF). Also, by 1900, British supremacy in the southern Nigeria area over the other European imperial powers was more or less assured and secured. Lugard then declared a protectorate over Northern Nigeria on 1st January, 1900 at Lokoja which he made the capital of Northern Nigeria given its strategic location. The non-Muslim entities of the central Nigeria area such as the Tiv then had to be necessarily subdued and incorporated into the colonial administrative structure of Northern Nigeria.[36] Tiv mobilisation for warfare and resistance against this new imperial order began at the level of the *ya* or compound. This structure in the social, political and military system of the Tiv was headed by the *orya* the head of the compound, who mediated several

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[33] See Godwin N. Hembe, *J.S. Tarka: The Dilemma of Ethnic Minority Politics in Nigeria,* Makurdi: Aboki Publishers Limited, 2003), 71-72.

[34] Hembe, *J.S. Tarka* 74.

[35] Audu, *Wars and Changing Patterns of Inter-Group Relations*, 139

[36] Sam C. Ukpabi, *The Origins of the Nigerian Army: A History of the West African Frontier Force, 1897-1914,* (Zaria: Gaskiya Corporation, 1987), 27-28. *See also* Daily Times Report, *Nigeria Yearbook 1985,* (Lagos: Daily Times Press, 1986), 84.

domestic disputes among neighbours and served as a major source of mobilisation and recruitment for defence and security.[37]

The structure of the *ashagbaior*, the men of resource and wealth, who found their position threatened under British overrule, also formed the central core of resistance against this alien order. Various other groups in the Tiv country such as farmers, the growing peasantry and traders' groups mobilised against British imperialism as they felt deprived and dispossessed and helmed in by enemy entities and forces on all sides of the Benue region. These early Tiv traders especially were particularly afraid to lose their trading rights to the British and other foreign imperialist powers.[38] In this critical period of the Tiv society's need for defence and security, the age grades' group, *mbakwav* were also challenged to rise to the occasion and to protect the Tiv country and nationality within the Benue region against the British invaders. Under the direction of the corporate agnate, *ityo* and the Tiv elders, *mbavesen,* the age grades had to fulfil their role as able bodied young men mobilised as soldiers for the defence and protection of Tivland in the absence of a ready and standing military force.[39]

History shows that the first violent encounter between British imperialist forces and the Tiv resistance fighters took place at the turn of the century in 1900. This was as a consequence of British colonial administrators' decision to cross the territory of the Tiv and to extend the construction of a telegraph line to Ibi in the Upper Benue basin. This was after a foothold had been gained in Abinsi which became the capital of the southern section of Tivland. The British and the Tiv resistance warriors clashed first in 1900 with significant number of casualties on both sides. Further reprisal attacks through punitive expeditions recorded huge numbers of the war dead on the side of the Tiv. But in the first clash, the Tiv killed 3 soldiers while the commanding officer Captain Easton was wounded along with 10 others.[40]

In this first encounter, the Tiv mastery of the vast savannah terrain and deployment of large numbers of armed men with throwing spears, poisoned arrows, and the javelin, and adoption of the element of surprise, proved effective against the British imperial force that was sent in. But the regrouping of the British forces ensured that the decisive battle against the Tiv which lasted from 4th January to 9th March, 1900 went the way of imperialist Britain. For in the later attempts to an annexation of Tiv territory, the armed British rank and file numbered 306, 26 officers, 2 medics, 13 NCOs, with 5 maxim guns, 1 rocket tube, and 642 other ranks and file, 850 carriers, with additional 4 maxim guns. This force ultimately commanded by Colonel Hasler, who was appointed as the Acting Commandant, Northern Nigeria Regiment of the West African Frontier Force (WAFF), was later recalled in the event of the 1905-1906 Satiru revolt in the Sokoto area. Thus, British arms under the WAFF were enlarged and

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[37] Hembe, *J.S. Tarka: The Dilemma of Ethnic Minority Politics in Nigeria,* 56-58.
[38] Chinedu N. Ubah, *Colonial Army and Society in Northern Nigeria*, (Kaduna: Baraka Press

  and Publishers, 1998), 64-65
[39] Tseayo, *Conflict and Incorporation: The Integration of the Tiv in Nigeria,* 29-30.
[40] Audu, *Wars and Changing Patterns of Inter-group Relations,* 138

expanded in the period of operations for the military conquest of the Tiv area which was devastated, crushed and destroyed.[41]

The colonial report regarding the outcome of these expeditions against the Tiv showed that large numbers of 'savages' were slain, whole villages burnt down together with food stores that had been preserved. The report also indicated that the Tiv resistance warriors had attacked colonial officials and sabotaged the British effort to navigate the Benue River for the expansion of the colonial enterprise across Tiv territory especially through the construction of the telegraph line. Several colonial officials lost their lives while boats and canoes were capsized and at a point 600 of their human contents drowned in the process of this resistance. The 1901 punitive expedition was embarked upon Tiv territory from May and June of the same year. Captain Eckersley with his Lieutenant Wilkin, along with two sergeants and 150 rank and file, massacred the inhabitants of each area encountered, burned villages, cattle and food crops.[42] In the period from 1902-1907, as a result of a clash of interests between Lugard, other colonial officials and the Colonial Office in London over the efficacy of military action against the Tiv, secret military expeditions were executed against the Tiv areas without recourse to or approval by the Secretary of State for the Colonies. The Tiv were estimated to have lost 50 of their men, while 1 officer and 1 Other Rank were wounded on the side of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). But as the Tiv resistance persisted, and as the goal of colonial administrative control remained elusive, it occurred to the British colonial official mind that military action was inadequate for a complete colonial domination of the region.[43] Chinedu Ubah has recorded that the policy of peaceful penetration of Tivland long advocated by the Colonial Office was now given greater impetus. For by 1906, the war policy against the Tiv revived by Acting High Commissioner of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria, William Wallace was turned down.[44]

The Establishment of Pax Britannica among the Tiv, 1907-1915

The Tiv and their society were not wholly conquered by force of arms after series of fatal attacks and violent resistance unleashed against British imperial officials, but which were decidedly crushed by British arms of the West African Frontier Force, (WAFF). Later from 1907, and with the capitulation of the Tiv not been fully assured as the resistance war of 1909 in Abinsi would show, generally peaceful and coercive means and methods were used as standard policy in their 'pacification' under *Pax Britannica*.[45] The adaptation of this colonial policy in the Tiv area was supported and implemented by what Charles

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[41] Ukpabi, *The Origins of the Nigerian Army: A History of the West African Frontier Force,*
 1897-1914, 271-273; Ubah, *Colonial Army and Society in Northern Nigeria*, 66-67. See also Audu, *Wars and Changing Patterns of Inter-group Relations*, 143.

[42] Audu, *Wars and Changing Patterns of Inter-group Relations*, 138-141

[43] Ubah, *Colonial Army and Society in Northern Nigeria*, 64-65

[44] Ubah, *Colonial Army and Society in Northern Nigeria*, 67.

[45] This refers to the extension of British peace, law and order over a particular people and society. Hembe, *J.S. Tarka: The Dilemma of Ethnic Minority Politics in Nigeria,* 43.

C. Jacobs called the 'Tiv School' represented by Captain Ruxton, Captain Gordon, Captain Rowe and Mr McKay. The Tiv School at this point, advocated for 'peaceful penetration' into Tivland. This policy combined peaceful means of penetration into Tivland with an admixture of force wherever necessary. For Ruxton and Gordon, this behoved on them to visit the districts assigned to them and explain to the Tiv people the essence for the establishment of British colonial authority over their territory.[46]

In this task, the British officers stood upon the Tiv social structure of the *ya*, or compound of a prominent *orya*, head of compound, which then served as the base for peaceful deliberations and interactions. Thus, it was at Kyado's compound at Mbaterem in Ukum that made Ukum the first District to be brought under the policy of *Pax Britannica*, or the British pacification of Tivland. Gordon then moved to Katsina-Ala where he established his headquarters and cultivated the friendship of another prominent Tiv leader and *orya*, Agahyande. With the putting down of the resistance at Abinsi in 1909, another colonial base was established at Abinsi and together with Katsina-Ala the two stations became the major assemblage headquarters for the organisation of patrols into all other parts of Tivland. This then led to the successful subjection of the people in the western districts of Tivland including the Katsina-Ala area which was completed from 1907-1910. Ruxton on the other hand, enlisted the assistance and support of a famous Tiv war leader Chia Chile Tali, to penetrate the south-eastern and central parts of Tivland, a task that was completed by 1912 and 1915. The military and diplomatic aspects of the conquest of Tivland had been accomplished by the British colonisers. Thus, according to Hembe, "the British now set about the establishment of the necessary administrative machinery to govern the people."[47]

Conclusion

This paper described the Tiv pre-colonial military organisation and warfare in the Benue region and the Upper Cross River Basin and demonstrated how the Tiv used warfare for expansion and acquisition of living space for their growing population. Their spread in significant numbers throughout the Benue region and formidable and militant resistance to British imperialism and colonial conquest has been a remarkable historical development in 19th and 20th century Nigeria. Thus, the Tiv have continued to remain a major factor in the content of the population in states such as Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau, Taraba and Cross River in the contemporary period. So, the period about 1500-1915 was crucial to the reconstruction of the pre-colonial, imperial and colonial military history of the Tiv in those territories of the Nigeria area. But the Tiv had missed the opportunity for the establishment of a pre-colonial kingdom and their own imperial dominance over the two regions for lack of political sophistication within their culture and society. The paper has noted the highly militarised nature of Tiv resistance against British imperialism and colonialism within the

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[46] Charles C. Jacobs, "British Colonial Administrative Policies with Reference to Wukari and their Effects on Tiv-Jukun Relations, 1900-1960" in *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria,* Vol. 1, No.1, (October 2004): 89. Hembe, *J.S. Tarka: The Dilemma of Ethnic Minority Politics in Nigeria,* 75-77.

[47] Hembe, *J.S. Tarka: The Dilemma of Ethnic Minority Politics in Nigeria,* 76-77.

Benue region of Nigeria. It therefore takes the position that although not greatly standardised and highly organised as a result of internal factors in Tiv society, the Tiv militant resistance against British imperialist and colonial conquest was ultimately a study in the culture shock of conflict, war and cooperation which merits further research and interrogation. Thus, this development in colonial Nigerian military affairs and diplomacy has acquired its historical relevance and vitality and therefore the need for constant recognition of its pride of place in modern African history.

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