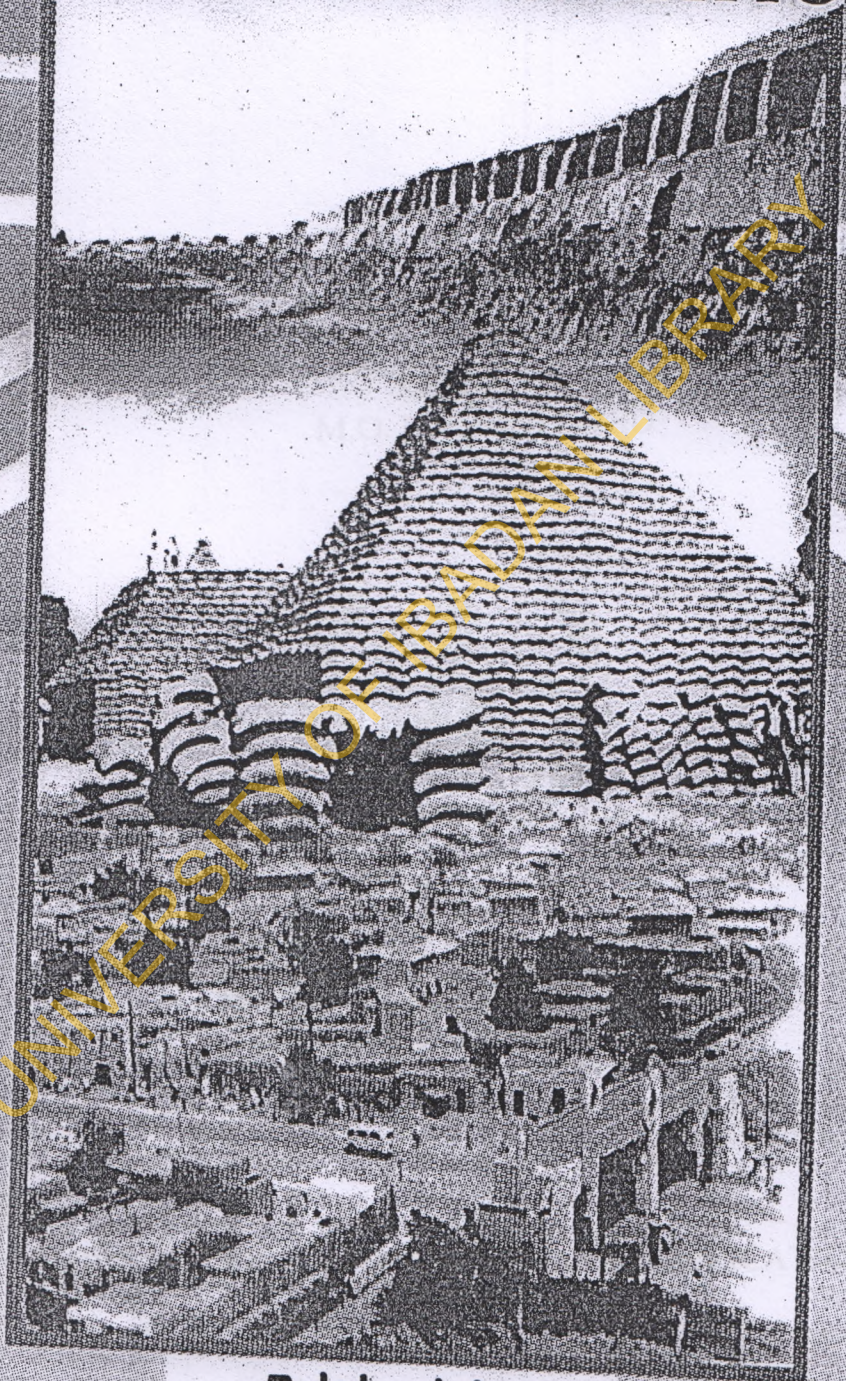


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PERSPECTIVES ON KANO-BRITISH RELATIONS



Edited by
M.O. Hambolu

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Preface

When we took the decision at Gidan Makama Museum, Kano to commemorate the Centenary of the British conquest of Kano, we knew that indeed we had set for ourselves an uphill task. The challenges were multiple, not least was how the project would be perceived and received by the public. That these problems were surmountable became apparent when we started contacting eminent personalities in both *Town and Gown*. There was a consensus that a major phenomenon like the commencement of British colonial rule was worth commemorating with a view to deriving useful lessons in our march into the future.

This book is a collection of essays mainly from the *Gown*, reflecting diverse views and perspectives on the phenomenon of British rule of Kano. The choice of title "**Perspectives on Kano-British Relations**" reflect maturation of hours of reflection on how to appropriately perceive and present the phenomenon of British rule of Kano.

This collection of essays is one of three books targeted at different audiences. This particular one has as its target audience University students and Researchers who are interested in in-depth analysis and discussions of various ways in which the colonial rule affected Kano. No attempt was made to forge a consensus among contributors, thus views expressed are those of the respective authors. We were certainly unable to get all shades of opinion reflected in this book, thus for those interested, the companion volume entitled "**Legacies of British Colonial rule of Kano**" provides interesting insight from the perspectives of the *Town*.

We would be gratified if this attempt at presenting a significant era in Kano history would stimulate further research and programmes in which the value of our Yesterday is appreciated in our Today and Tomorrow.

M.O. Hambolu PhD
Kano.

Gidan Makama Museum,
April 24, 2003

NATIONALIST MOVEMENT IN A MULTI-ETHNIC COMMUNITY OF SABONGARI KANO

Rasheed Olaniyi

Introduction

Colonialism was not about nation building, or about creating oneness among the colonised, it was a law and order premised on an economic strategy for solvency and balancing the government's budget. In Kano, British rule enforced living in ethnic compartments, a corollary of colonial praxis arising from the dogma of European supremacy and the need to keep the colonised at bay. Throughout the colonial period, the British pursued policies that were not meant to unify the colonised but to maintain the status quo, to preserve and if possible entrench the ethno-cultural differences and distinctions in the country. ¹ The establishment of the Sabongari system was a central thrust of the British *divide de impera* constructed to make colonial rule flourish on ethnic divisions, the creation and recreation of identities and enforcement of segregation. Nevertheless, in terms of relations between diverse cultural groups, colonial rule was something of a paradox. Through its socio-economic and political institutions, it brought peoples together in new ways and for new agenda, thereby providing new integrating forces. In its transformation, Sabongari Kano developed into a cosmopolitan entity incorporating both the migrant and host elements. From the 1940s, Sabongari became the seething base and political fortress of the nationalist movement. It was indeed the terminus of collaboration between the northern and southern Nigerian elite of radical persuasion. The driven forces were the working class agitation and mass movements of the subalterns that were united against the exploitative colonial rule.

Though a longitudinal study has been offered on the processes of nationalist movement and the establishment of Sabongari system but only passing references have been made to reconstruct the binary intercession between the two. This apparent lacuna forms the hub of the paper.

British Rule and Intercommunal Relations in Kano

Under British rule, inter-communal relations in Kano were enforced within the political and economic framework of colonialism. The colonial state imposed boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in the polity through the process of social closure. Rules of citizenship were selectively applied according to individual roles in the productive labour of the colonial economy, thereby providing distinct civil, political and economic rights.

The British policy of exclusion created a dichotomy between the migrants who were British citizens (custodians of Western values) and natives, British subjects (bearers of traditional culture), mainly the host community. In essence, the colonial state recognised two types of political identities: civic and ethnic.² The rights of the citizens (largely European employees irrespective of ethnic background but largely represented by immigrants) were written into civil law and were enforced directly by the British. The population of subjects (natives) was excluded from this regime of rights. Natives (host community) were confined to an ethnic space. For the natives, rights and obligations were defined and enforced by the native authority. The politics of citizenship was meant to keep communities apart physically, culturally and psychologically. British administrative policy emphasised the cultural differences and exaggerated mutual hostilities between the hosts and the immigrant communities. With the establishment of Native Courts and Native Authority (N.A.), the British adopted a policy of making the jurisdiction of immigrants ambiguous depending on the choice of the 'non-native' and the specific consent of a British official.³ While European commercial firms tended to maintain that their native employees were beyond the jurisdiction of the N.A. and courts, British administrative officers used to equivocate that the N.A. had judicial power over all including 'non-native' Africans. This implies that while the 'non-native' Africans could avail themselves of the Native Courts for civil cases even when they were Christians, nonetheless, they were never arrested by the N.A. police without the consent of the British Resident. Indeed, this privileged position was exclusively extended to the natives and non-native elements in the European employment. Consequently, criminal cases against the civic citizens were practically dealt with in provincial courts.

The dichotomy in the realm of culture and rights was completed with spatial division, the segregation of the two social groups (hosts and immigrants) in different areas of the city. It was within the contradiction of this duality that vibrant political culture developed. In 1913, Sabongari was

established as a non-European Reservation within the Township Area specifically for Southern Nigerian migrants composed of the British Army (veterans of West African Frontier Force) and African employees in European firms and administration. The earliest settlers in Sabongari, Kano were Yoruba and Nupe. Prior to the British conquest of Kano in 1903, generations of Nupe and Yoruba immigrants had formed communities (Tudun Nupawa and Anguwar Ayagi) within the Kano city walls. Between 1913 and 1918, approximately 320 plots were carved out and developed to accommodate immigrant groups.⁴ Sabongari was chiefly administered to the requirements of the European community. By 1917, Sabongari was constituted under the Township Ordinance into the second-class Township of Kano, that is second to the Government Reservation Area and not to the Kano city which it superseded within the British arrangement.⁵ Simultaneously, the Township Area comprising Europeans and non natives was severed from the Kano Divisional Administration and placed under an officer who discharged functions analogous to those of cantonment magistrate and who was directly responsible to the Resident. Sabongari was therefore granted autonomy in the Emirate system apparently for tax and fiscal purposes. Taxes paid by Sabongari residents and or European employees of the British directly went to the colonial treasury rather than the N.A.

Meanwhile, the British agenda of racial segregation could not be principally enforced based on the culture of inter-ethnic /communal relations in the pre-colonial Kano and the discriminatory provision of facilities for the colonial economy. For example, it became difficult for the British despite various legislations to demarcate boundaries of interaction between the host community and Yoruba or Nupe Muslim migrants. This was largely informed by the historical interaction between the two groups that spanned over four centuries before the British conquest. In this way, some Yoruba and Nupe continued to live in Kano City, an indication that when Sabongari was established, living there was based on the preference of Yoruba or Nupe particularly the Muslim elements. Apparently, the British were not comfortable with some 'non-natives' that opted to live together with the 'natives' population. ⁶ In 1914, the British raised the question of Yoruba living in the Native city rather than in the Native Township with Emir Abbas. The Emir asserted that:

'Yorubas who or whose parents had been born in
Kano and who agreed to submit themselves without

question to Muslim Law and the Emir's executive authority and who agreed to give up the wearing of European clothes are welcome to continue staying in the city'.

The intervention of the Emir provided prospects for the Yoruba who were 'non native' to either live in the city or in Sabongari.

Although the British tried to enforce residential segregation by preventing the 'natives' Hausa-speaking peoples from residing or becoming plot holders in Sabongari, nonetheless the establishment of market in the area attracted the entrepreneurial natives.⁸ In order to restrict the 'natives' from residing in Sabongari, the British imposed a system of 'Permit to Reside'. This law failed to control the 'natives' residency in the area due to the booming economy of Sabongari area and commercial advantages offered by the railway networks. By 1921, Hausa traders, artisans and employees of European firms had numerically dominated Sabongari. The decennial census of 1921 indicates that Hausa population outnumbered any other single Southern Nigerian ethnic group in Sabongari.⁹ The Kano Township population census of 1921 estimated 2,000 non-natives in Sabongari; 1,478 were Yoruba, 505 native foreigners and 220 Nupe. In 1932, the completion of East-North railroad facilitated the massive Igbo immigration into Sabongari, Kano.¹⁰

By 1937, the order of ethnic composition of Sabongari radically changed. Therefore, a connection was obvious between the Nigerianisation of the area and the emergence of educated elite that increased the process of nation -building. The population statistics of the Township in 1937 estimated 1,903 Hausa residents in Sabongari as against 1,547 Yoruba and 1,529 Igbo.¹¹ By 1938, there were 2,040 Hausa (26 per cent); 4,737 (62 per cent) other Nigerians and 842 (11 per cent) non-Nigerians .¹²

The Process of Community Formation and Nationalist Movement in Sabongari

Sabongari Kano presents a quintessential example of communal identity and mobilisation shaped in response to colonial state policies of exclusion and exploitation. In 1932, the British created the office of Sarkin (Executive Head) Sabongari, Kano to assist the Station Magistrate in the collection of taxes, regulate cordial relationship between Sabongari, Emirate Council and the British. This policy was apparently introduced in view of

the simmering tension between the immigrant community and the host on one hand and between the Sabongari community and the British. There were demands and agitations for the abolition of colour bar, equality of access to municipal facilities including schools, hospitals and social clubs exclusively provided for the British. Equally, a Mixed Court was established to adjudicate civil and criminal cases among the diverse ethnic communities in Sabongari. The first Executive Head and President of the Sabongari Mixed Court was Mr. G.E. France, a retired clerk from Gold Coast (now Ghana). After his death in 1938, he was succeeded by Mr. T.P. Barlett-Hughes a professional photographer from Sierra Leone. He was assisted by Igbo, Hausa, Nupe and Yoruba ward heads in collecting taxes and administering justice. In a cosmopolitan community, the Mixed Court was indeed a unifying potential and institution for the non-natives.

By early 1940, Sabongari Kano witnessed a major political transformation, which increased the formative process of development and centralised ethnically-based associations. During the Second World War, the British made a major policy shift in the administration of Sabongari Kano in order to expend resources (human and material) on the war effort. Equally, the security lapses in Sabongari had forced the British to compromise the theory that the N.A. should be aloof from administering Sabongari. In April 1940, Sabongari administration was transferred to the Kano N.A. under the control of Wakilin Waje.

The colonial policy shifts and incorporation of Sabongari into the Indirect Rule of the N.A. marked the beginning of the demise of British rule in the area. It set in motion identity reformation and boundary re-definition leading to the fusion of hitherto separate interests. Sabongari residents began to identify themselves as a community in the context of the colonial state. Indeed, the establishment of centralised ethnic/cultural associations were partly expressions of nationalist feelings and resistance against the British Indirect Rule. The challenge of living in an urban arena with a cosmopolitan population increasingly led to the emergence of town, clan and ethnic unions within which immigrants find much of the needed identity. In origin, these unions were meant to serve welfare purposes. In their transformation, these unions became the bedrock of ethnically based political parties in the 1950s.¹³ As a sphere of social communion, Sabongari became a pre-eminent site of re-socialisation processes. To a greater degree, layers of social networks in workplace, neighbourhoods, religious and relaxation centres produced a crosscutting solidarity structure. At the associational level, multi-ethnic civil societies were formed for interest

aggregation, social security and development. The Sabongari Representative Board that had been constituted in 1933 was revived in 1942. The Board had representatives from all communities in Sabongari and served as an advisory body to the N.A. on social and economic development in Sabongari. A multi-ethnic Plot Holders' Association Sabongari, Kano was formed to regulate land purchase, development and estate matters.¹⁴ Trade unions and professional guilds were equally formed to fight for collective rights. Examples of these labour unions include, Liquor Brewers Union and African Civil Service Union. In 1944, ten interest groups in Sabongari formed an horizontal alliance and protest the planned demolition of 'illegal' structures in Sabongari.

The early 1940s equally witnessed the proliferation of centralised ethnic associations in Sabongari. In 1942, the Yoruba Central Welfare Association Kano (Egbe Omo Oduduwa) was founded as a conglomeration of all Yoruba ethnic unions that had existed on the basis of clans, towns and kinship.¹⁵ Igbo State Union was firmly established in 1946/47. Other cultural associations included Benin Union, Ijaw Tribal Union, Itsekiri National Society and Urhobo Progressive Union. The changing roles of these ethnic/hometown associations included community development and provided platform of mobilisation for the nationalist movement. Indeed, the cultural projects of ethnically based associations became political instruments. Ethnic identity turned out to be a strategic phenomenon, linked with territorial, economic specialisation and differential access to state resources. As a consequence, ethnic identity constituted a major stake in the negotiations between the emerging community and the colonial state. The driven forces of these negotiations were subalterns: workers, migrants and the urban poor posing poignant questions about their social, cultural and political place in the colonial state.

Socially constructed identity was based on the experiences of discrimination, segregation and collective consciousness of exploitation. Social movements were driven by economic deprivation and related social grievances that provoked nationalist movement. Indeed, the British *laissez faire* policy was fully practised in Sabongari, no school and hospital was established for the residents. They drew largely on indigenous resources provided by urban diaspora networks and religious centres. Sabongari schools were community-owned and managed by cultural and religious organisations. Thus, the nationalist movement was shaped both by the 'push' of their own internal development and by the 'pull' of a common

target defined by exploitation. The colonial state was challenged and Sabongari became the epicentre of social movements for the subalterns.

The working class movement collectively recognised that economic exploitation of Nigeria was directly beneficial to Britain in terms of employment and economic buoyancy while Nigerians experienced unemployment, economic recession, biting taxation and retarded growth of indigenous entrepreneurs. The imperial government impoverished workers irrespective of their ethnic background and distorted the equilibrium of the economy.¹⁶ The ideologues of these social movements were the radical educated elite especially the Zikists whose orientation were derived from traditional African communalism, Western democracy and socialism.

In Kano, Sabongari became the republican zone of the radical nationalists. The Zikists particularly Raji Abdallah and Osita Agwuna were vanguards of anti-racism, pan-Nigerian nationalism, inter-ethnic unity and cooperation in Sabongari Kano. For example, Agwuna in 1945 founded the African Anti- Colour Bar Movement (AACBM). In 1946, he was Honorary General Secretary of the Coalition of Nigerian Tribal Unions in Kano.¹⁷ In August 1950, a coalition of radical elites of diverse ethnic backgrounds formed the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) with its base in Fagge and Sabongari, Kano. NEPU represented the most vibrant anti-colonial and feudal movement, which equally championed the cause of the working class.¹⁸ In Sabongari, campaign strategies of the radical nationalists included public lectures, press and rallies as forms of political mobilisation. For example, on 19th November 1950, Mallam Aminu Kano, the leader of NEPU delivered a lecture at the Colonial Hotel (now Paradise Hotel), Ogbomoso Avenue Sabongari, Kano on Indirect Rule. He declared that the system had been imposed to facilitate the exploitation of the colonised. Again on 29th November 1950, Mallam Aminu Kano delivered a lecture at the Colonial Hotel. He challenged the British to import More Machinery and Less Whiskey into the country.¹⁹

In many instances, NEPU campaigns mobilised against the British policy of taxation accentuated by the material deprivation of the subalterns. The identification with progressive ideologies harmonised the orientation of the radical political parties - National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), the Action Group (AG) and the NEPU in the quest for the improvement of workers' welfare.²⁰ Workers in Sabongari found such political platforms a basis to agitate for improved working condition and higher wages. In 1951, the Railway Workers Union in Kano embarked on strike action, which prompted price-hikes of foodstuff and increasing cost of living. Indeed,

radical nationalists drew the mass of their supporters from the subalterns, the shopkeepers, small-scale retailers, factory workers, peasantry, artisans and jobless.

NEPU was an ally of Azikiwe's NCNC that controlled the government of the Eastern Region.²¹ From 1952 to 1960 the NCNC-NEPU shared the same headquarter located at No. 16A Warri Road Sabongari, the house was owned by a Sierra Leonian, Barrister Shingle.²² During the self-government campaign tour of Chief S.L. Akintola to Kano in May 1953, his major supporters were the members of A.G, NEPU and NCNC. In the violent riots that ensued, principally between Hausa hosts and Igbo migrants, the NEPU supporters exhibited a high degree of nationalism by remaining calm in the ethnic violence.²³

Sabongari with over 7,000 registered voters was a NEPU - NCNC stronghold and political fortress. In 1954, the parties entered into a formal alliance for finance and campaign strategies. The activities of both parties were promoted by the Daily Comet Newspaper that was transferred from Lagos to Kano in 1949. The Daily Comet served as the NCNC -NEPU campaign outlet.²⁴ Its central pages printed in Hausa was edited by Tanko Yakasai who was then the organiser for the youth wing of NEPU. The AG in 1959 started the printing of Northern Star Newspaper in Kano at No. 40 Church Road (now Awolowo Avenue) Sabongari. The Northern Star was published in both English and Hausa.

Conclusion

In Sabongari Kano, socio-economic deprivation and colonial domination were perceived and resisted within the context of emerging communal identity and solidarity. The common experience of social segregation and economic exploitation formed the basis of mobilisation for working class movement and nationalist agitation. In spite of the Machiavellian machinations of British rule in fragmenting the colonised, the socio-economic crises pushed the Sabongari community to challenge British rule. The nationalist consciousness that developed implies awareness among the subalterns that they share a community of interests and constitute a distinct political community. Sabongari became the 'safe-heaven' of radical nationalists who were terrorised by the colonial state.

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