

An Analysis of the Nature of Colonial Conquest in Northern Nigeria and its Implication on Small Scale Societies: A Case of the Bwazzas of Numan Division, 1900-1960

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Abstract

The British colonial enterprise in Nigeria, no doubt is the most studied aspect of the country's History. The subject had attracted both national and international scholars and has been studied from different approach and perspectives. Nonetheless, much attention has not been given to the implication arising from the incorporation of Northern Nigeria into the global capitalist economy on Small Scale Societies. It is against this backdrop that the paper attempts a study on the socio-political implication on Bwazza Society after the creation of the Native Authority System. Using both primary and secondary sources the study finds, that Bwazza Chieftdom was reduced to a village and the people reduced to 'minority' as a result of creation of the Native Authority System in Numan Division.

Introduction

Colonial enterprise was a systematic, strategic and carefully crafted system of exploitation, powered by chauvinistic ideology, consisting of several structures with well-defined functions, conditioned to facilitate the domination of the colonised. For effective exploitation, the colonisers altered existing structures to meet their agenda. In Northern Nigeria for instance, the Native Authority was one of such structures, consisting of Native Court, Native Treasury, Native Police, and Native Prison among other functionaries imposed to collect taxes, recruit forced labour, promotion of cultivation of cash crops and the use of British Currency. It should be known that, the transformation of these functionaries into British tool of exploitation bequeathed a far reaching consequence on Small Scale Societies in Northern Nigeria.

It is against the foregoing that the paper examines the issues relating to the incorporation of Northern Nigeria and subsequently the Numan area into the world capitalist economy which brought about the break-up and reorganization of the pre-existing economy. In precise term, the paper deals with issues regarding the creation, development and administration of the area under colonial period which was characterised by the domination and exploitation of the people of the area

under review, to serve the interest of British industrialist and their internal collaborators.

Colonization of Small-Scale Societies: An Overview

Much has been written on colonialism in Africa and in Nigeria in particular. However, it has

been observed that most of this works focus on large-scale societies or centralized political unit like the Sokoto Caliphate and its Emirates which made up the federation. Nevertheless, very few researches have been dedicated to small-scale societies in the North. The few researches carried out on such areas have generated so many controversies and more insights in the understanding of colonial administration in Northern Nigeria. For instance, Mahmud Modibbo Tukur¹ in his work, describes these societies as 'Homologous', and argues that, for the British to adapt the pre-existing political structure, the colonialists had to alter some political structures which involved the subordination of some chiefs and societies to others with which they previously had equal status with, which now meant a large scale withdrawal of recognition and independence of the chiefs which was aimed at facilitating the economic exploitation of the areas.²

In the same way, Yusufu Turaki³ writing three years after went deeper on the subject. In his work he argues that, the British colonial administration institutionalized inferior status on the non-Muslim group (NMG) as well as the pattern of relationships between Muslim and NMG. He maintained that, after the conquest of Northern Nigeria in the early 1900s, Britain placed the NMG under the Hausa-Fulani rule and political control. To drive home his point, he brought out the fact that the administrative structure at the top was the British administrators, followed by the Muslim rulers and Muslim political elites...and lastly at the bottom was the NMG who did not have any political participation or any genuine political representation in the colonial northern system.⁴

Writing more recently, Moses Ochonu's⁵ paper argues that Colonial administrative project of politico-cultural uniformity unwittingly or wittingly sought to make the Middle Belt more like Caliphate sector; which was deemed more suitable for the British policy of indirect rule, was not aimed at achieving cultural sameness for its sake but as a vehicle of strengthening the indirect rule in Northern Nigeria. He, however, stresses that, ethnic differentiation and centralized system of rule was the criterion for indirect rule, the later which was absent in the Middle Belt, necessitated the creation of ethnic differentiation and politico-cultural sameness across Northern Nigeria. Using the caliphate model as reference for the Middle Belt as it possessed the desired ethnic difference but lacked the centralized political and administrative institutions crucial to the indirect rule.⁶ No doubt, the outcome of this process influenced his conclusion describing the arrangement as "Colonialism within Colonialism".

This process was engineered by European racial chauvinism informed by their psychological disposition and world view, which regarded the Fulani as "natural rulers" thus, given them the political and administrative responsibilities over the non-Fulani or non-Muslim societies which no doubt was an extension of the Hamitic

hypothesis. The outcome of this marriage of convenience was not without friction, misunderstanding and oppression. A situation that has been conceptualized as 'Divide and Rule' because it reinforced ethnic difference and created arbitrary boundaries that restricted the development of national consciousness within Northern Nigeria; which has overlapped into post-colonial period and has undermined National unity.

Meanwhile, between 1903 and 1904 there were two opposing colonial theories as to how the system of indirect rule was to be executed in Northern Nigeria? Some colonial officials were of the view that the Fulani rule be extended to the hitherto independent non-Muslim communities, because the Fulani was a "ruling caste" and far more able administratively than the indigenous peoples. On the other hand, the second view was to re-establish the autonomy of these non-Muslim communities under direct British administration because some of them were independent from the emirate and will continue to fight in defence of their liberty even under the British and it will be an injustice to place them under the emirate by the aid of the maxim guns. It was also pointed out that even if they tend to pretend to carry out British orders under pressure of force, they will always resent the curtailment of their rule: and that it was impossible for the British to prevent a secret oppression which the Fulani will always inflict on the non-Muslim⁷. In spite of this valid observation, the British went ahead to implement the former, that is the extension of the emirate system to the non-Muslim areas because it fitted in their exploitative arrangement on the one hand, and on the other, it sustained their racial chauvinist assumption that the Fulani were 'ruling caste'.

Thus, between 1907 and 1908 the administrative arrangement of Sokoto and Kano was imposed on the rest of the Northern Province. And the full system of district heads and village heads were forced on the places quite unsuitable for.⁸ The result of this was that a veneer of Muslim administration system was forced down on a great part of Northern Provinces and the phenomenon of local government through their own men was destroyed.

Consequently, by 1912 the independent non-Muslim communities of the Gongola valley were partitioned and reorganized. Non-emirate chiefdoms in the area were reduced into districts to make up the non-emirate division of Adamawa Province- later Numan Division- namely; Bachama, Batta, Mbula, Kanakuru and Lunguda under their various chiefs who were under the Lamido of Yola in the new arrangement and this was what brought these areas that were formally independent of the emirate under it. The implication for Bwazza chiefdom was that part of the chiefdom was partitioned and merged with three different districts. For instance, villages like Lazang, Boberi, and Shewa were annexed to Kanakuru district while Billachi was annexed to Mbula district and Bare which comprised of several villages was annexed to Bachama district. In this way, the Bwazza chief was reduced as a mere village head, losing the authority and influence enjoyed in the pre-colonial arrangement. Hence forth, these Bwazza villages came to be reduced to isolation under the district they were incorporated into.

The Conquest of Numan Area

The scramble for territories in the 1890s among the various European powers along the Niger Benue valley led to the proclamation of the protectorate over Northern Nigeria in January 1900. In Adamawa emirate, the struggle was between Britain, Germany and France. Britain however, had advantage over France and Germany. British claim was based on the treaties signed between the United Africa Company and sultan of Sokoto in 1885 and 1890, as well as the Anglo-French convention of 5th August, 1889, which laid the Say-Barua line dividing French and British spheres of influence to the North and South of the line. The British argued that the treaties with Sokoto applied to Adamawa.⁹

Scholars have generally agreed that, the reasons for the scramble, claims and counter claims on the African continent and subsequently Northern Nigeria was for economic gains, even though there were other reasons. For instance, according to Alahira, this economic reason could be divided into remote and immediate causes. The remote being the changing economic conditions resulting from the internal contradiction of capitalism, which led to the expansion of industrial capitalism, and forced the capitalist countries out in search of colonies as source of raw materials and market resulting from industrial and scientific revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries. This propelled Britain to acquire more colonies to satisfy the economic demands of her industrialists and capitalists in Britain. For the immediate cause, three factors were identified; first, British optimism of the economic importance of the hinterland, second, the bid to divert the trans-Saharan trade linking Borno and Hausa land to the South and lastly, a bid to stop German and French penetration and to control the economy of the hinterland.¹⁰

As early as the middle of the 19th century the potentials of the hinterland were well known to the British; the result of long exploration of African continent by European explorers who had pointed strongly to the economic benefit to be derived from the interior of Africa. For example, Mc queen's reports gave a vivid description of the African continent, its potentials, natural and human resources which exceeded that of America.¹¹ The report identified the suitability of the soil in cultivating the two needed crops at that time-cotton and oil palm as well as groundnut which was essential for the second Industrial Revolution. Cotton was needed by textile industries while palm oil and groundnut oil were needed as engine lubricant and for the making of soap and margarine¹². This influenced British legitimate commerce with West Africa.

Again, the declaration of America independence in 1776 forced Britain to look desperately for alternative source for the supply of cotton. America had been the major supplier of cotton to Britain in the early Eighteenth century, but with her independence a gloomy picture of cotton supply from there was painted as early as 1830s. Thus, by the late 1880s the hinterland of Northern Nigeria acquired new economic significance for the British government; this forced the British to accelerate the pace of colonial expansion into the interior of Northern Nigeria; a penetration which was not devoid of military brutality. Thus, within a short period of three years, in spite of the resistance by various rulers the expansion was accomplished with the help of maxim guns.

As soon as Lugard took over the administration of Northern Nigeria from the Royal Niger Company on 1st January, 1900; he soon divided the Northern protectorate into three civil provinces comprising of Kano, Middle Niger and Benue, with two military provinces of Borno and Borgu. Under this reorganization, the company's sphere of influence in the Benue was split into upper and lower Benue. Yola figured among the four additional provinces that Lugard planned to take control of as early as possible. It should be noted that despite Lugard's proclamation and claims, most societies of the Northern Nigeria specifically the Numan Area were yet to be brought under the British control. It was on this note that Lugard wrote to Mr Chamberlain the then Secretary of State for colonies, stating the importance and strategic significance of opening the Eastern territories of Bauchi, Yola and Muri to the British colonial interest. The quotation below adapted from the proposal succinctly captures and exposes British intention of the conquest of our area of study:

...mainly on grounds of their supposed salubrity and mineral wealth. The necessity of checking the rapid depopulation by organized slave raiding, and of dealing with problems offered by the advent of the French on the Lake Chad and the arrival of Fad-el-Allah (Rabeh's son) in the British territory are additional reasons. Though these provinces are far distant from Lake Chad, they will afford a base from which we can, to some extent, keep in touch with events in the North.¹³

From the above, it is clear that the British were afraid of competition and are bent on monopolizing the commercial activities in the areas. Thus, Lugard demanded for and justified the need for the formation of local authorities to cover this vital line of communication provided by the Rivers Benue and Gongola and the caravan routes to Chad which was central to British commercial interest in the region.

Another reason given was the hostilities of Lamido Zubairu and his un-welcome attitude towards the RNC and the British colonial interest as reported by William Wallace to the Secretary of State, describing his attitude towards the RNC accordingly:

Yola defies the government and recently sent a messenger through the Niger Company's agent; he has ordered the RNC to vacate their stations but it is to allow them to trade on a hulk if they close. They have had to haul their lag down and pay the emir 5% on all produce bought. The Lamido bitterly opposed to the opening of trade routes to Borno and will do all in his power to keep them closed.¹⁴

It can be observed that the Lamido was bent on administering his territory as of old by given the company his terms of their operation but unknown to him the situation has changed with the declaration made by Lugard on 1st of January 1900. On the other hand, the tone of the letter exposes British demagoguism and chauvinistic monopolistic determination.

Consequently, on the 21st August, 1901, Wallace revealed to the commandant of the West Africa Frontier Force the approval from the Secretary of State the first military expedition in the Yola emirate. The Yola expedition was therefore, fixed for 26th August 1901. Wallace, Lugard's deputy with 13 officers, 2 medical personnel, 7 British NCOs, 365 rank and file, four 75 mm guns and four maxim guns. Colonel Morland the commandant and his men sailed on board the liberty and Nkissi steamers. After rifle fire between the British and Yola troops saw the conquest and occupation of Yola, during which Lamido Zubairu fled through the Western gate of the palace.¹⁵ Soon after these, Dr Cargil was made the first temporary Resident of Yola and a detachment of 100 strong men from the 'F' company of the second Northern Nigeria Regiment was stationed on a hill to the North-West of Yola under the command of captain Baker, while Deputy Superintendent of police; Godwin was in charge of the police.¹⁶

Despite the conquest of Yola, it was soon realized that British colonial interest in Adamawa still suffer set back as the non-Muslim areas along the trade routes and water ways in the Gongola valley were yet to be under the stronghold of the British control. It was not until 1911 that the British were able to subjugate the area and with series of military expedition backed with series of patrols.¹⁷ It should be noted that, by 1904 the first phase of British occupation of Yola was over but Military patrols continued to ensure compliance to the new situation.

After the fall of Yola, the first concern of the British government was to re-open the Yola trade route. Meanwhile, the societies on the trade route tried to protect their independence with the news of the fall of Yola. The colonialist on their part claimed that the societies on the trade route were engaged in high way robbery as a justification for the violence and destructiveness as Mahmud Tukur described it "opening of trade route."

The determination to re-open the trade route in the Gongola valley saw the establishment of a military post at Wamdeo from where military patrols were sent to deal with recalcitrant groups. For this single reason, the conquest of the Numan area and Bwazza in particular took a cruel and coercive dimension which resulted in the burning and destruction of villages, farmlands and properties. This aspect was downplayed by the British as they tend to use expedition, pacification and patrols as smokescreen to obscure the people's initiative and effort to protect their sovereignty¹⁸. As Alahira observed, pacification and patrol in practice meant almost total annihilation of the people; this was a military tactics adopted by the British to deal decisively with the 'Native' in order to 'teach' neighbouring towns and villages not to resist British subjugation. But such lessons were learnt in fewer instances, as the general pattern of reaction was against British conquest. For instance, it was reported by Lieutenant Moran in January 1904 that the "Gongola Pagans" merited severe punishment for murdering and plundering of traders, and for effective control on the area it was suggested that the Gujba, Bauchi and Yola garrisons be used for the operation of "teaching" the people lessons¹⁹ which indicated the stiff resistance of the people to colonial influence.

Despite these lessons, military expeditions and patrols, the People of Bwazza still fought to protect their independence. As contained in 1917 progress report on the Gongola valley as quoted below;

“Two sections of this village had been concerned recently in the murder of a messenger of the village head, and had shot arrows at the village head, besides assaulting the District chief. They had been summoned to Numan several times without effect. On arrival at Bare they were again summoned on the 24th, as they had not come in, the patrol visited the place and found both sections deserted. The compounds were destroyed. The guilty parties have fled to Gwamba”.²⁰

From the quotation above, it is clear that despite the imposition of colonial machinery like the NA, some of the Bwazza people still resisted. The killing of the messenger of the village head and the assaulting of the district head suggested that the people were aware of the fact that they were appointees of the British and tried their best to resist.

Development of Native Administration (Indirect Rule)

Various reasons have been advanced for the adoption of Indirect Rule system. The dominant views were that which related to the lack of personnel and resources. For instance, in 1906, there was only one British officer for about 2900 square miles of territory to administer and 52 European officials to administer the whole of Northern protectorate with population of about twenty million people.²¹ Not to mention the high level of ignorance of the areas by the Europeans which the local rulers were well familiar with. Again, the well-established pre-existing political structure was that which could not be supplanted but fitted into the colonial administrative arrangement. Thus this gave rise to a marriage of convenience; a sort of alliance, so to say, between the colonialist and the emirate ruling class. The myth of this arrangement within the colonial formation was the assumption that the British ruled through the traditional rulers. This was, however, contrary to available evidence, which suggested only the use of the traditional institutions rather than the rulers, as most rulers were deposed and replaced with British stooges who were their employees since they received orders from the colonialist and could be replaced at will by the colonial officials, a situation which was in contrast to the pre-colonial period.

As earlier noted, the emirate administrative arrangement was extended to non-emirate areas like our area of study, for the areas to fit in the indirect rule administrative arrangement. As a result series of re-organization were carried out between the period 1902 and 1955 to organize the areas into province, divisions and districts. To this end, Yola province was created in 1904 which was later re-named Adamawa province. These changes nonetheless affected the pre-colonial vassal states under the emirate of Yola and the non-emirate chiefdoms independent of Yola's authority. A new administrative hierarchy was the outcome of these series of re-organization. At the top was colonial officials made up of Resident at the provincial level while,

Divisional Officer (DO) at the divisional level and District Officer at the district level. On the other hand, the Native Administration was headed by the Lamido of Adamawa at the Provincial level and at the divisional level there were about five districts each headed by a chief in the Numan area as noted earlier. District heads were also appointed, followed by village heads whose responsibilities were to maintain law and order, arrest criminals, prevent crimes and collect taxes as directed by colonial administrators with the assistance of N.A. Police. In our opinion, the Native Authority was the 'engine room' used to exploit the resources of the area.

Therefore, Yola/Adamawa emirate by 1926 was extended and became known as Adamawa province; divided into five Divisions, which include; the South Benue with headquarters at Yola, North Benue with headquarters in Song; Emirate "pagans" division with headquarters at Pella; Gongola division with headquarters at Numan and Chukkol division with headquarters at Chukkol.

Meanwhile, between 1911 and 1922, the Gongola division was reshuffled twice and was later renamed Numan division. By 1926, Numan division had the following district: Kiri, Shelleng, Bata, Bachama and Mbula district. These districts were in turn subdivided into villages each under a village head. Villages also were further divided into hamlet.²² With this, the administrative arrangement of the division was effected with mutually independent chiefs each of which directly responsible to the Divisional Officer. By 1936, the chiefs in the division combined to form a loose federation where each of the chiefs retained its local autonomy, and by 1951 a single Native Authority was constituted for the Division called the Council of the Numan Federation. The council consisted of four chiefs, with the office of the president of the federation rotated monthly among the chiefs.²³ And by 1952 an outer or advisory council was created with officials and elected members when the N.A. was remodelled to include village head of Bare (Bwaza Chief), Kiri, Guyuk and Lunguda.

It is worthy to mention, that Bwazza chiefdom suffered a far reaching consequences as a result of these organization and re-organization; the chiefdom was reduced to a mere village within the colonial arrangement. For instance, parts of the chiefdom were annexed to other districts²⁴ and Bare the capital which consisted of several villages was regarded as a village and was incorporated to the Bachama District for administrative convenience, like in most part of the North, colonial administrative structures were established in the area. As it is well known the British imperialism was a well-organized and systematized, which involved not just conquest but also the establishment of a workable structure of ensuring effective exploitation of the economy and people of the area. Thus, after the conquest of the area the British colonialist were confronted with the confusion on how best to administer the area as pointed out earlier. Even though, at last the colonial officials settled on adopting the emirate like structure in administering the non-emirate areas like the Numan area and the native authority system (Indirect Rule) which was effective machinery employed to execute colonial policies as it suited the colonial agenda. It must be pointed out that, colonial administrative policies played a major role in shaping the nature of a wide range of the sector of the society as well as social relations.

Conclusion

From the foregoing the paper argues that, small scale societies suffered a far reaching consequence in the process of the incorporation of Northern Nigeria into the world capitalist system- the most enduring legacy of the colonial enterprise which has not been given the needed attention.

Using Bwazza Chiefdom as a case, the paper showed how the chiefdom was reduced to a village through its annexation into three districts on one hand, and the chief reduced to a village head on the other hand. It is this situation that has been the source of discord between the District heads of Bare (since it was created in 1992) and the chief of Bwazza in the post-colonial era. Most importantly, the Bwazzas were made 'minority' in the colonial arrangement.

The paper equally examines the implication of the conquest of Yola and Numan on other towns and villages around them as well as the nature of resistance of the coloniser by the colonised.

Footnotes

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