



An Appraisal of Economic Status of the Multi-Ethnic Groups in Kano City for National Integration

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Abstract

Crises tensed in the northern part of the Federal Republic of Nigeria between 2008 and 2015. From 2016 to 2018 the government asserted different approaches to stricken out the menace. Nigerians, especially those from outside the crises theatre and the international communities are nursing different interpretations against the Northerners of Nigeria. They raised tensions, psychic trauma, insecurity and loss of hope about the sustenance of Nigerian unity. Only a few individuals care to delve into the past relations of the northerners and other Nigerians to provide a manipulative strategy against the crises. However, this study examines the economic relations of the Kanawa (the people of Kano) and a few linguistic groups of Nigeria, as a panacea to adjust the feelings of people who are losing interest in the unity of Nigeria as a nation-state. The study adopted historical methodology, by making use of primary and secondary sources of information. The work covers the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods of relations among the ethnic groups in Kano. The paper concludes that the adjustment of the mental attitude of individuals toward change and sustenance of the country is germane to the historical assessment of issues and events.

Keywords: Economic Relation, National Integration, Adjustment

Introduction

Building a harmonious nation is a major concern for patriotic citizens of every country. It is imperative to note that common among the nations of the world are those formed by multi-ethnic groups. The existence of a given country is a design of nature, and culture has been a strong factor that distinguishes one group from the other. Considering the Emirate of Kano as an illustration, this paper examines the merit inherent in the community ethnic groups for national integration. It would emphasise the fact that the survival and well-being of Nigeria depend largely on standard administration. Importantly, the paper implores the nations of Nigeria to properly manage and sustain the idea/heritage of the cosmopolitan states of Nigeria to sustain peaceful co-existence.

Prelude to the British amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914, the ethnic groups in the geographical areas of the Niger area have been interacting based on economy, society, politics and religion. The effective occupation and establishment of the colonial administration was just, based on an identical feature of relations among the people of the area. The survival of the features of the Trans-Saharan; the success of the European trading companies before the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorate of the Niger area; the effective occupation and establishment



of colonial administration; the independence and post-independent era of Nigeria are solely dependent on the pre-existing homogenous cultural, traditional, social, economic and political interaction of the populace of the territory that was later named Nigeria. The formation of the Northern, Western and Eastern regions by the Republic of Nigeria was not contrary to coalescence but a coherent step of administration needed to foster unity among ethnic groups of Nigeria. Although, the creation of the first state by the federal government of Nigeria in 1967 was borne out of abhorrent civil war, yet, the creation of the state was historically recognized as a strategy to abort the menace of war. Philosophically, one cannot rule out the existence of conflicting interests among the executive, legislative, judiciary, elites and masses of a given country as logical intricacies of the paraphernalia needed for building and sustaining a reputable State.

The interruption of the second republic was designed by the successful coup d'état of Major General Muhammadu Buhari and Brigadier Babatunde Idiagbon. The military regime goes on a tactical hijack of the administration by Major Gen. Ibrahim Gbadamosi Babangida. Part of the brilliant success recorded by the administration of Babangida was the introduction and establishment of the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria, and the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria is a major constitutional division in Nigeria, created during the regime of President Ibrahim Gbadamosi Babangida¹. Nigerian economic, political and educational resources are often shared across the zone. It is imperative to affirm that the zoning practice is essential because Nigeria is made up of approximately 400 ethnic groups and 450 languages. Thus, there was a need for the government to merge similar groups for the effective allocation of resources. Equally important is the fact that the creation of the zones broadening the concept of mutual interactions within the economic and socio-cultural milieu of Nigeria.

The nomenclatures of the geopolitical zones are as follows:

- North Central (Nigeria): loosely known as Middle Belt: includes Benue State, Kogi State, Kwara State, Nasarawa State, Niger State, Federal Capital Territory and Plateau State.
- North East (Nigeria): Adamawa State, Bauchi state, Bornu State, Taraba State and Yobe State.
- North West (Nigeria): Jigawa State, Kaduna State, **Kano State**, Katsina State, Kebbi State, Sokoto State and Zamfara State.
- South East (Nigeria): loosely known as the former East-Central State of Abia State, Anambra State, Ebonyi State, Enugu State and Imo State.
- South-South (Nigeria): loosely known as the former South-Eastern state of Akwa-Ibom State and Cross-River State: former River State of Bayelsa State and River State: and former Mid-Western Region, Nigeria of Delta State and Edo State.
- South West (Nigeria): includes Ekiti State, Lagos State, Ogun State, Ondo State, Osun State, and Oyo State.

It should not be overemphasised that the defunct Northern, Western and Eastern Regions of Nigeria were consolidated into the current geopolitical zones of Nigeria. It should be recalled that the outbreak of the Nigeria civil war of 15, January 1966 – November 1970 borne the creation of the first 12 states of Nigeria. However, the historical relevance of

¹ <http://www.punching.com/news/constitution.six.geopolitical.zones.divid.north-south/>



economic relations of the cosmopolitan Emirate of Kano is looked into to justify a need for continuity and national integration.

ABrief History of the Cosmopolitan State of Kano

Kano is one of the ancient towns of the central Sudanic States. The history of the origin of the town revolves around the traditional legends of Bayagida. Historical activities surrounding the township of Kano apparently suggest that the city has been in existence right from the 10th A.D.

However, a source acclaimed that the exact date for the founding of the city is unknown but sources put the probable date of its foundation at the end of the 9th century.² Kano had gained prominence as far back as the European medieval period. Trans-Saharan activities of the 14th century could not be disregarded as a factor that sustained and maintained the connection of the city of Kano with other ethnic groups of the Niger area. The ethnic groups include the Taureg, the Fulani, the Wangara, the Kanuri, the Arab and the Nupe. In the 14th century, the Wangarawa from Mali were the most popular ethnic that propelled the spread of Islam around the corridor of Kano. Distance, environmental and economic forces invariably held a sizeable number of the Wangara to acculturate Kano. The earliest people who inhabited the place were said to be the Hausa who traced their immigrant movement from the Central East. Agriculture was the main occupation, prior to further exposure to the aspect of traditional artistries and industries. Of course, within the confines of what was later known as Hausa land, the Kano partook in ancient wandering activities,

Ethnic Pluralism in Kano

Earlier in the pre-Colonial period, interactions between Kano and other ethnic groups of the Niger area were perpetual. The westward of Kano to the Yoruba up to Port Novo in the present republic of Bini was having common economic interest with Kano. Careful hindsight must be adopted to appraise the ancient Kano-Ilorin-Yoruba land caravan trader routes that terminated at Aldah in port Novo to buttress our point. The main trader routes (caravan) from Kano going to the South and crossing the Niger at Eggan, Lafiagi, Ogudu and Jebba, converged with:

- i. Ogbomosho-Ekiti-Akoko;
- ii. Ogbomosho-Ibadan-Abeokuta-Lagos
- iii. Ibadan-Ijaye-Fiditi-Oyo.

The Igbos, the Ijaws, the Itsherikis, and the Urhobos to mention but a few among the east-southern groups had littoral contact with Kano before the advent of the Europeans. Great emphasis should be much more importantly laid on the fact that the Yorubas, especially the Ilorins were among the first immigrants to Kano. However, it is generally understood that Kano recorded its greatest pre-colonial influx of immigrants between the establishment of the Fulani Emirate (1806) and the reign of Emir Ibrahim Dabo (1817-1846). The Emir considerably encourages Yoruba and other migrant groups to settle in Kano.³

² Dokaji, A.A., Kano Ta Dabo Cigari, Zaria: Borthem Nigeria Publishing company, 1978, Pg.5.

³ Interview by Usman, A.F. and Bako A., with Abdullahi S. Olowo, Business-man Yoruba leader, Sabon-Geri, Kano, 04/03/2000, Age 70. (Ibert, I.O., Ethnic in Kano Relations in a Nigeria city: A Historical Perspective of the Hausa-Igbo Conflict 1953-1991 Ibadan: IFRA, 1993, to pg. 3, and NAK/Kano Prof. 5820, Sabon Geri Affairs, NAK/Kano Prof. 5826, Sabon-Gari



In history, mention was made of a time when there was animosity among the nations of the Yoruba Empire before its final collapse on the eve of the second decade of the 19th century. The collapse of the Old Oyo Empire brought about internecine war, which made many people flee to different locations where they could embrace peace. Having retained the brotherhood relations with the *Kanawa*, it was quite comfortable for several Yoruba to migrate to Kano. A particular mention should be made of the fact that states- Ilorin, Ibadan, Ogbomosho, Abeokuta, and Ijaye-emerged as political and commercial centres of Yoruba land as a result of the demise of the Oyo Empire. It could be understood that the sustenance of the cosmopolitan city of Kano right from the early 19th century is important the fact that it served as a hideout for a sizable number of Yoruba against the loss of lives. As the Yoruba settlers came to Kano in large numbers during this period, they founded the famous settlement of Yoruba in Kano i.e. *Unguwar Ayagi*. This could be regarded as an important development in the History of Yoruba settlement in Kano. As in the case of the Arabs from the Middle East and *Wangarawa* from Mali, the long stay of Yoruba in Kano coupled with their involvement in many activities with *Kanawa* led quite a lot of them to be hausanized.

Several authors agreed that the construction of the railway system between 1896 and 1911 engendered mass movement of not only the Yoruba but other groups across the Niger area to Kano. The line was opened to traffic on 1st April 1912. Hence, the activities of the Royal Niger Company were metamorphosed. In the early twentieth century, the London and Kano trading company was established. It was the first imperialist firm to operate in the city. It should be remembered that the native spinning industry of Kano has been shouldering the responsibilities of exporting yarn to Yorubaland. By and large, the European Trading Company later arrived and established in Kano to hijack the traditional industries based on modern terms.

Establishment of Sabon-Gari

As part of measures to cater for the interest of migrant communities in Kano, Sabon-Geri was established in 1918. It attracted diverse ethnic groups into Kano, 'to provide services as servants, clerk and artisan'⁴ and a number of the road network was opened. More Yoruba migrants were attracted to Kano during the 1920s because of increasing economic opportunities. In 1912, there were in Kano 1,478 Yorubas most of them were traders engaged in either groundnut buying or bringing kola nuts, oil, salt, fruits and Yoruba cloths in exchange for potash, skins and livestock, especially cattle from Kano.⁵ The population estimate of Kano Township in 1937 indicated 1,547 Yoruba residents, 2,100 in 1942 and 2,148 in 1943.⁶ The numbers continue to increase in the 1940s and 50s. In 1954 Yoruba were the second largest immigrant group in Kano with a total of 5,174 persons.⁷ The 1940s witnessed an upright development among the Yoruba immigrant in Kano. Several associations sprang up among the ethnic groups include Egba Mutual Association, Ijebu Young Men Association, Owu National Society, Lagos Colony Union and Ekiti Progressive Union. They all performed the statutory function of placement agencies for newcomers in gaining employment and acculturation. In 1942 the entire Yoruba ethnic associations merged and formed

⁴ Affairs: Petition from inhabitants .

⁵ Bako, A.A., Socio-Economic History of Sabon-Gari, Kano, pg. 108 NAK/Kano Prof. 3530, Kano Local Authority, 115A.

⁶ Ibid., Ethnic Relations in a colonial setting: The settlement of Sabon-Gari, Kano, FAIs Journal of Humanities BUX, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2000, pg. 62.

⁷ NAK/Kano Prof. 3530, Population Statistics Kano Township Europeans, Syrians Arabs, Native Foreigner and Natives, 1935-54



the Yoruba Center Welfare Association, which became the main organ for promoting unity.

A host of ethnic groups such as Urhobo, Itsekiri, Ijaw, and Edo felt their ways to Kano, at the inception of the railway in 1912. Some members of these groups engaged in merchandise, while several were gaining employment with the European Company. Those who reside permanently served as a mentor for new immigrants that trooped in after the Second World War. It should however be noted that most of these were identified with Igbos, especially by the Hausa, whose perception was that every Christian is an Igbo. Opportunity for trade and employment as well as social consideration is noticed among the factors that motivated the Igbos to Kano. Aiding factors for the mass movement of the Igbo include: the invention of railway and the opening of network road. The Lagos-Kano railway line (704 miles) was completed in 1911, while the Port Harcourt-Kano line (600 miles) was completed in 1926. Coupled with the development of Ports in Lagos and Port Harcourt links, Kano created nerves of commercial and administrative centres across Kaduna, Jos, Ibadan, Abeokuta, Enugu and Lokoja. In various capacities, roads were expanded as feeders to the railway between 1917 and 1925. Development of telephone and telegraph industries; and postal agencies propelled the objectives of National Economic Integration; hence; there was a mass migration to the North (Kano). Paden, (1970: 258) attests that's:

From inception, Sabon-Geri has been largely inhibited by Southern Nigerians, primarily the Yoruba and Igbo. Initially, the Yoruba were the dominant groups: by 1912 of 2,000 inhabitants, 1,478 were Yoruba. But following the mass movements occasioned by the Second World War, the Igbo moved in large numbers, and soon overtook the Yoruba as the dominant group. In the mid-1950s, 59% of Sabon-Geri population was Igbo, while the Yoruba were only 24%.⁸

Marriage Contract and Union

The South eastern settlers of Kano were not all socially isolated from having marriage contact with Hausas. Several numbers of Igbo women married from the Hausa, the Yoruba or even other ethnic groups, while it's not uncommon to have Yoruba women or Hausa married from Igbo.⁹ Some of the couples have even gone far to embrace one another's religion. Yoruba settlers many of them coming from Kwara/ Kogi states have mixed and integrated more with the host Hausa community than the Igbo.¹⁰ Many of their women have Hausa husbands, while some of the older settlers have relocated from Sabon Geri to areas like Tudun Wada, Brigade and Gyedi Gyedi, with a few even living in the holy city.¹¹ Departmentalization, rather than segregation broadened the interaction among the ethnic groups. It is exemplified by the Nupe at Tudun Nafawa, the Wangara in Sharifai, the Tuaregs in Agadasawa and the Arabs in Durimin-Turawa. The dignitaries and acculturation of settlers reflected, to some extent in the naming of the streets in accordance with the origin or culture of the ethnic groups dwelling in Sabon Geri. Thus, we have Warri, Urhobo, Benin, Abeokuta, Yoruba, Aba, Nnewi Road, etc. Furthermore, the formation of unions enhances the basis of freedom and association by virtue of having the Yoruba Welfare Centre Association, Igbo Central Union Benin Union, Ijaw Tribal Union, Urhobo Progressive Union, Itsekiri National Society, and the Country Wide Gold Coast League. Prominent above all is the indigenes Consultative Committee, which was formed in the 1980s to protect the lives and properties of Sabon Gari dwellers. The

⁸ Eghosa E.O., Trends in Migrant Political Organization in Nigeria: The Igbo in Kano, IFRA, University of Ibadan, P.O.Box 21540. Ibadan Nigeria pg. 33.

⁹ Interview with Madam Ada Abdullahi, Food vendor, Brigade, Kano 20/9/15. Age 51.

¹⁰ The Free Encyclopedia (Wikipedia)

¹¹ Ibid.



existence of Christian dominations at Sabon Gari could be a portrait of relative freedom of religion. The Anglican, Catholic, Baptist, Methodist and other Pentecostal and “native African Churches like the Cherubim and Seraphim and Celestial sects”¹² are bannered with ethnic and cultural affinities.

Economic Importance of the Cosmopolitan City of Kano

The interrelationship between the Yoruba and *Kanawa* started about 500 years ago as a matter of trans-Saharan trade. The slave and other essential domestic articles such as horses, cloths ostrich feathers, skin, medicinal ornaments as well as fetch to mention but a few were subjected to transactions. As early as the 17th century, Yoruba traders linked Kano commercially with the middle Niger confluence as well as regions in Southern Nigeria.¹³

Yoruba traders in the 17th century were also introduced to Kano articles such as *atare* (alligator pepper) *eru* (Ethiopian pepper), *iyere* (West African pepper), *obi obidun* and other materials to sell.¹⁴ Up till the present, specific pepper known as *ata josi* (Jos pepper) are imported to Yoruba land. Kano waxes are imported to Yoruba land while the cloths and textile materials are directly imported to Kano from Lagos. This trend of interaction between these nations is a product of long-time connections and associations. In addition, at the eve of the 17th century, the Yoruba encouraged the development as well as spreading of technical skills in various kinds of trade and vocations such as weaving on the horizontal loom (found in Oyo), wood carving, blacksmithing, tailoring, dyeing, embroidery, skin tanning, ornamental leather works, shoe making, carpentry and building. It should be emphasised that there was the presence of such industries in Kano but added skills were brought about by the contact with the Yorubas. Of major importance, weaving material exported to Yoruba land through the Yoruba who had earlier settled in Kano were *owu kambu* or *kambu* (hand-spin cotton yard) produced in Kano. Ewu kore cloth woven in Kano and dyed into shining black gown was having a ready market at Ilorin. In the realm of the industrial sector, the *Kanawa* women were not lagging behind. They magnanimously engaged in spinning, though in *purdah*, yet they were assisted by the Yoruba women (the immigrants) who served the role of middlemen between the Hausa and the Yorubas.

The fact that Yoruba migrants to Kano during the 20th century were greatly confined in the Ayagi ward meant that they had limited interaction with their host in Kano city, although some sizeable number of Yoruba could be found in the Sabon- Geri but the majority of Yoruba living in Ayagi ward are *Ara Ilorin* (people of Ilorin).¹⁵ At this juncture, it should be emphasised that “Gidan Mallam Shehu and Gidan Ladun were founded by *Agbaji* man and *Okelele* man from Ilorin” respectively.¹⁶ Between 1823 and the first decade of the 20th century, a Muslim, irrespective of his or her origin from Yoruba land was virtually identified with Ilorin, and in some cases a native of Ilorin or *Ara Ilorin*. In consonance with the above statement is the fact that people that were pin-pointedly referred to as *Ara Ilorin* are a mix of Yoruba from different settlements or villages of Yoruba land. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, the Yoruba in Kano developed various local industries which included bead making, textiles, pottery, leather

¹² Adamu, M., The Hausa and their Neighbours in the Central Sudan, In General History of Africa, pp. 285-86.

¹³ Arisele, R.F.O., The Religious Institution of the Yoruba Muslims in Kano, B.A. Project, ATC/ABU, Kano, 1972, pg.4

¹⁴ Sanmbo Z.Y. Consolidating the Pre-Colonial Diaspora: The Ara Ilorin in Kano, in Northern Nigeria: A Century of Transformation, 1903-2003, Arewa House: Kaduna, 2005, pg. 481

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 490



works and blacksmithing. The production of such items fascinated both local and export trade. The South easterners were the major merchants who exported pottery, for instance, to Edo, Bini and part of Ijaw land. The Urhobo, Itshekiri and Ilaje were prominent in the export of pottery. Igbo merchants were mainly responsible for the export of the Kano pottery to Onitsha, Orlu and some of the interior of Igbo land. Meanwhile, the Igbo were found of importing coal to Kano whenever they returned from every trip.

The growth and availability of raw materials such as cotton and indigo, supported by cheap labour aided the manufacturing industries of cloths in Kano in the nineteenth century. Ilorin was traditionally occupied with the production of *Aso-Oke* or *Aso-Ofi* which needed the supplies of its material from Kano. Just as the case may be, the gloss and soft spackled cloths such as *Sanyan* or *riga tisamy* (silkgown), *Aso-Kajipa* or *rigargw gwado*, *Aso-etu* or *rigar saki* (guinea fowl gown), *Aso-akenke* or *rigar Sakakke* and *Aso-Panpata* or *rigar kwakwata*-were gaining commercial acceptance in Kano, South East and South West of what is known as present Nigeria through merchandize of multi ethnic groups.

The Ilorin weavers specialized in the production of *Gwado* or *Aso kijipa* and *sakakke* cloth or *Aso-sakakke*, while the Igbomina towns of Omu-Aran, Oro, Omupo and their neighbouring villages were unique in the exportation to Kano and Benin Republic. The *Gwado* gown was a very thick cloth popular for its use as blanket among the Kano people while the *Sakakke* was worn by Kano women as wrapper since it came in different colours. Also produced in Ilorin was the guinea fowl cloth or *Aso-etu*. The cloth was in popular demand because it was used to make the then fashionable *hular Saki* or *Saki* caps, which the *kanawa* valued a lot.

Akoko-Edo, produced beads (*Ileke/bebe* or *jigida*) that the Yoruba merchants exported to Kano. The actual place of the production from Akoko-Edo people was Sabongida, Ora. It was named so because of the Hausa immigrants that settled there before the amalgamation of the twentieth century. *Ileke/bebe* is a big type of common beads used by women and ladies to adorn the shape of their waist. It was highly in vogue among the Yoruba, Hausa and Nupe up to the time when their perception of modern civilization begins to creep upon their minds, against it.

Other articles of trade which the ethnic merchants engaged in, were *eha*, *lyere* or *kalwa* (locust beans), *ose dudu* (black soap), *adi* or *alayyadi* (skin jelly). *Eha* production is rooted in the traditional economic of the Hausa-*kanawa*. It involves tanning the skins of animals and exposing to high intensity of sun for preservation. It is an accompanying stuff of common food among the Hausa, Yoruba and near ethnic groups. On the other hand, *lyere* is the raw material for producing *iru* or *dadawa* among the Yoruba and Hausa groups respectively. It is very rich in protein and of sound flavour as seasoning for human consumption. *Ose-dudu* is essential for bathing as well medicinal when mixed with other ingredients among various ethnic groups in Africa. Apart from being directly used as body cream or pomade, *Adi* is regarded as input for many local industrial production and medicine across African traditional industries. As far as the cosmopolitan city of Kano is concerned, ideas and techniques on uses of items or articles of trade varied, meanwhile, the groups interrelated to share ideas and techniques. In other words, ideas, techniques, talents etc. were cross culturing among the ethnic groups.

From the sixteenth century, kola nuts imported into Kano were brought from Gwanja, through the popular Gwanja route that ran south-wards from Kano, until the 1880s when the



trade gradually shifted to the Lagos-Ilorin-Kano route.¹⁷

The economic depression of the 1930s adversely hampered the importation of Gwanja kola nuts.¹⁸ On a historical basis, the existence of kola nuts trees in Yoruba land is as old as the heritage of the Yoruba in the land. Also, there has been its exportation to other parts of African countries through the trans-Saharan trade, but increased rate of rapour and interrelations among the Hausa and Yoruba. Also, the Krios and Saros from Sierra Leone exposed the Yoruba to commercial production and exportation to Hausa land and beyond. Gwanja kola nuts must have been dialectically modified by Yoruba to *Obi-gbanja* or *gbanja*, since the discovery of the best of its type formally imported from Gwanja and exported from Yoruba land. The Yoruba also produced *Obi-abata* (kola nut of swamp savannah) and white kola nuts, which the Hausa known as *farin goro*. Of the varieties of kola nuts locally imported from Yoruba land (by the settled Yoruba at Kano) from 1930s, *gazari*, *ibi* and *goriya* and *abidun* or *hannunruwa* types are prominent. Meanwhile, the Ilorin merchants dealt mainly in the *abidun*, *hannunruwa* type. This particular variety was valued for its red colour and it was highly demanded by Kano women who substituted it for *Kumbari*.

Conclusion

Migration of people to a specific destination depends on structural, familiar and accidental basis. A structural cosmopolitan state endears its people to form different types of associations or unions to meet up with the challenge of the host or dominant group. A cosmopolitan state that evolved on a familiar basis subjects its group to assimilate irrespective of the cultural setting or affiliation. Conversely, an accidental cosmopolitan town/city emanates as a result of the migration of people to a destination irrespective of having ties of association with the host group. Most cosmopolitan states that emanated in the pre-colonial era are characterized by detribalization by virtue of assimilating the host culture. Those cosmopolitan states, that cropped up during the colonial era, are charged with the feature of migration of unskilled labour. Whereas, the post-colonial emerged cosmopolitan states are mostly structured once, in the sense that migration of labour, both skilled and unskilled stand as the basis for the emergence of the cosmopolitan states. Whichever kind of migration, brought about the existence of a cosmopolitan state, adequate and elaborate attention is needed not only for the survival of heterogeneous states to exist but to keep performing its statutory role as a primary source of national integration. A careful study of the heterogeneous community of Kano was carried out as a sample. The paper anticipates that the government and masses (stakeholders, historians, legal practitioners, students etc.) shall be of great advantage if proper attention is shifted towards the well-being of the Nation.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.