

CONFLUENCES AND INFLUENCES

The Emergence of Kano as a City - State



Muhammadu Uba Adamu



Munawwar Books Foundation

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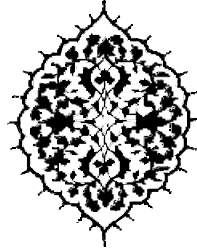
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❖ Dedication ❖

To my grandsons and namesakes,

***Muhammad Munzir bn. Abdalla
and
Muhammad Al-Amin bn. Abdullahi
(both born August 27th 1998)***

Allah Ya Raya ku, Amin



كَمِثْلِكَ أَلْفُ أَجَلِ الْقُرَى

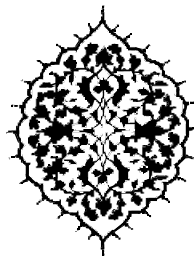
“(Kano!): You are Equal to a Thousand Cities!”

Anon. Tripolitanian Tribute.

In an gina birni dubu talata,
A gabansu Kano ce take shigewa.
Ta fisu a komai har dukiyarsu,
Ta fisu mayaka da jarumawa.
Gungu na zuma sai a nuna yatsa,
In ko ka kusato kana macewa.
Rami da kumurci ba'a shigarsa,
Rago a gidane ya ke karawa.
Kan ya shiga jeji kubar batunsa
Dan ya zama nama sai daddagewa

If three thousand cities be built,
Kano is surely the star of them all.
It surpasses them in everything,
including their wealth, army and warriors,
A swarm of bees can only be pointed at from afar,
if you dare approach it is an instant death.
It is foolhardy to disturb the lair of the snake,
And a coward, like a ram, fights his battles at home
For once he dares to enter the jungle,
then he becomes an instant mincemeat

Dr. Muhammadu Uba Adamu, *Wa}ar Jihadin Kano* (Song of the Kano Jihad). Unpublished, 1972



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Dr. Muhammadu Uba Adamu
School of Management Studies
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April 1999

Foreword

Kano is a paradox. It is multiethnic and multicultural. Yet it is homogenous. This is a status that has been developed for well over one thousand years, painting a picture of a truly tolerant society in development. This book explains, albeit exploratively rather than comprehensively, this development. It draws antecedents from well published and empirical sources and thus effectively weaves together diverse sources of information into a singular perspective that provides a fascinating insight into the primary stages of the cultural evolution of a society.

While Kano has always been famous as the “center of commerce”, this book brings forward forcefully the evolution of this commercial tradition of Kano, and ties it convincingly to migratory patterns of diverse peoples from all over the Western Sudan and the Maghrib in a process stretching back to antiquity. What subsequently emerged was a tolerant society based on mutual respect and desire to contribute to self-development through trade and scholarship: traits that Kano contemporaneously retains. Thus we read accounts of how the Agalawa, Tripolitanian Arabs, Adarawa (Nigeriène), Agadès Tuareg (Nigeriène), Azben (Air Tuareg), Wangarawa, Malians, Yemenite Arabs, Lebanese from outside the Nigerian geopolitical orbit came to Kano, settled down and largely (with the exception of the Lebanese), became integrated as Kano Hausawa, both ethnically, culturally and linguistically. Nearby Bornuans, Katsinawa, Daurawa, Kwararafa and Jukunawa, Gobirawa, and massive influx of Fulani pastoralists and scholars contributed to the cultural mix, thus enriching { *asar Kano* not only culturally and commercially, but also scholastically.

Of course all these years of cultural evolution have not been without occasional flashpoints of social upheaval in Kano. Yet significantly, these were motivated by outside political forces. For instance, the Kano Civil war of early 1890s was caused by the imposition of an unpopular *Amir* on Kano by the Sakkwato Caliphate. This led to a palace revolt which ended after the ascension to the throne by the more favored choice *Amir*. Similarly the riots of 1953 and 1966 were as a result of uncertainties of the political future of the Nigerian nation and had their sources *outside* Kano. Even the “religious” riots of the early 1980s (the Maitatsine phenomena) were essentially

reflections of disenfranchisement of a segment of the society which simply reflects ineffective and faulty social policies of poverty alleviation. None of these upheavals seemed to be culturally motivated (e.g. Azben against Yemenite, Bornuan against Fulani etc). All migrant groups have accepted their present status as indistinguishable *Kano Hausa*. And I think it is this area that this book makes a significant contribution to a theoretical understanding of peace studies: how all diverse groups tended to be smoothly assimilated into one cultural entity on settling in Kano. There are lessons here for multicultural societies, especially in developing countries.

This book will therefore find a captivating audience among students, aid agency workers coming to Nigeria for the first time and general populace interested in knowing more on the mechanism of contemporary urban cultural ecology. It is a contribution to the growing literature on Kano studies that is gaining widespread interest among Hausa readers. So far most of the Kano studies books were written in the Hausa language, a practice that is quite commendable considering the growing inculcation of reading habits among Hausa youth, especially in the vernacular literature. By writing this book in English, the non-native speaker of Hausa language with interest in Kano studies is brought into the picture, as it were, and given the opportunity to share in the unique development of Kano over the last millennia and a half.

Preface

Studies on the history of Kano are such a legion that it would seem pointless to go over this well trodden path. Indeed this was noted with some exasperation by H. C. Hall as far back as 1923 who commented that

Kano has been much written about, so it would be superfluous to give any lengthy description on it...but I might say that some writers coloured their views beyond forgiveness.¹

And yet the phenomenon that is Kano continues to provide endless fascination in all aspects of development; from ethnology to urban studies to arts and crafts and, of course, the biggest fascination of all, mercantile capitalism. A few of the diarists who provided vivid written impressions of Kano (or "Cano" according to one of them) spanning hundreds of years included Leo Africanus (1513-1515), author of *History of Africa and the Memorable Things Contained Therein*, London (1600), Captain Hugh Clapperton (1824, and who wrote *Narrative of Travels and Discoveries in the North and Central Africa*, London 1826), Heinrich Barth (1851 and 1854, author *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa*, London, 1890), Paul Staudinger (1885, *Im Herzen der Haussalander*, Berlin 1889, published as *In the Land of the Hausa*, London 1968).

Thus because Kano was such a powerful emporium for centuries, it has provided researchers with endless opportunities for theory formation on virtually all aspects of its development. Subsequently, for most of the 1960s to early 1980s series of studies were carried out all over the world on the history, development and economy of Kano. The studies provide different perspectives and no doubt enriched the quality of information about the emirate.

¹ H. C. ("Johnny") Hall, *Barrack and Bush in Northern Nigeria*, London, 1923, as quoted in H. L. Moody, "The Walls and Gates of Kano City — Historical and Documentary References: Preliminary Review" *Kano Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1967, pp. 12-26.

Suddenly, however, by mid-1980s, the studies seemed to have stopped. This came about either because it was felt that all that could be done had been done. Or Kano has lost its appeal as an area of study. Both these arguments are implausible. In the first instance, there is no end to knowledge; so a lot needs to be done in any field. And it cannot be that Kano has lost its appeal; if anything, it has continued to emerge as powerful emporium as ever, as well as being a nexus in any political configuration of Nigeria.

It is in the spirit of “more needs to be done” that this book is written. At the same time, it brings Kano back into a sharp focus and into mainstream of academic discourse. It is my hope that it will stimulate further debates on the history of Kano and the continued role Kano will play in contemporary Nigerian social, economic and political development.

The inspiration for the book was borne out of a paper I wrote in 1967 while a final year History student at Abdullahi Bayero College, Ahmadu Bello University, ABC/ABU (now Bayero University, Kano). My original paper was *Notes on the influence of North African Traders on Kano* which was published in *Kano Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1968. The appearance of that paper in the same issue with M. Al-Hajj's seminal textual analysis of *Waraqa maktuba fiha asl al-Wanqariyin al-muntasibin* which details the coming of the Wangarawa clerics to Kano during Sarki Rumfa's reign, ensured, for me at least, a wide coverage! I must record again my appreciation to my teacher and mentor, the late Professor John Lavers, who not only encouraged me to write the original paper, but also helped me with its footnotes.

Years after the paper was written, it became one of the most quoted references in a study of multicultural Kano. On numerous occasions people kept asking me to explain or expand one or two points in the paper. Others engaged me in fruitful debates about structural weakness and needs for updating the paper to expand it. I pointed out that the paper was written for a specific publication, and there was limit to the information that could be given. Further, its methodology was based on folkloric and anecdotal incidences which were recorded by the Tripolitanian Arabs themselves. I happened to grow up literally in their midst in the late 1930s and early 1940s and thus absorbed as much information as I could.

Nevertheless I started systematically collecting and indexing bits and pieces of information along the lines of multiculturalism of Kano whenever the opportunity availed itself. In this way, I was able to obtain information about manuscripts written from other sources (especially Tripolitanian) on the history of Kano — written by the trans-Saharan caravan traders who recorded the pieces of folklore they collected or heard about from their own communities about the history of Kano. An example of this document was *Al-athar al-Kanawiyya* (The Legacy of Kano) by Adamu Na'maaji of Alfindiki. Direct contact with the descendents of the North African traders provides more information about the cultural structure of the group, and thus sheds insight into the acculturation process of the group into Kano mainstream. Other Arab groups that integrated with the cultural milieu of Kano, the Yemenite Arabs, also provided a huge pool of friends as well as resources about the acculturation process. City contacts with descendents of Agalawa, Tokarawa, Beriberi traders; and Fulani clansmen all contributed to heightening my interest in the emergence of Kano as a multicultural society.

In 1998 — exactly thirty years after the original paper was published — an opportunity to present updated version of the paper was presented at the *International Conference on Cultural Interaction and Integration Between North and Sub-Saharan Africa* organized jointly by Bayero University, Kano and the World Islamic Call Society of Libya between 4th to 6th March 1998. As did the original, the updated paper seemed to generate interest, especially among the younger members of the audience who were acquainted with the origins of some of their cultural practices for the first time. Back in the late 1960s and early to mid 1970s, my official duties also put me in the position of a primary participant in the re-organization of the Kano emirate — thus further enriching my awareness of migrant participation in the development of Kano.

These experiences, as well as the cold trail that seems to be developing in studies on the history of Kano² prompted me to go

² The fire, however, has been rekindled with the appearance of Late (1993) Professor M.G. Smith's seminal study of the evolution of the political culture of Kano, *Government in Kano, 1350-1950*, published by Westview (Boulder,

over the paths that have been trodden with the intention of bringing out specific migrant settlement patterns which I wish to argue made Kano culturally unique.

The analytical framework adopted (and which did not appear until right at the very end) was the urban cultural ecology. The analytical choice is informed by the fact that research on urban cultures naturally focuses on their defining institution, the city, and the life ways, or cultural forms, that grow up within cities. Urban scholarship has steadily progressed toward a conception of cities and urban cultures that is free of ethnocentrism, with broad cross-cultural and historical validity.

The main limitation I set out in the book is direct focus on *Kano city*. This was because of my main analytical concern with the emergence of urban cultural ecosystems. Thus significant information about migrant settlement and behavior in the rural areas of { *asar Kano* is not covered. I have also avoided discussing other constituent components of the kingdom of Kano as well as the political intrigues that characterize the relationship between Kano and these outer territories (e.g. Ha]eja, Kazaure, Rano, Dutse etc). This is because such developments were clearly outside the scope of my central analytical framework.

Further, by being exploratory rather than comprehensive, and thus deliberately keeping my discussions brief, I had hoped to provide opportunities for further and more empirical studies on the

Colorado) in 1997. According to the Foreword to the book by Murray Last, the book was the third in a set of five studies on the processes of political change in northern Nigeria. The first two, *Government in Zazzau* (Oxford University Press, 1960), and *The Affairs of Daura* (University of California Press, 1978) having already been published. The remaining two studies on Katsina and Sokoto, though written as far back as 1968 have remained as yet unpublished.

emergence of the *State* (as concatenated with the city or city-state) within a broader context. This should give us a clear idea of the place of Kano in the next millennium.

