

Colonialism and the Transformation of Traditional Institutions: A Study of 'Yandaka District office in Katsina Emirate, Northern Nigeria

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Abstract

Colonialism was the British policy introduced in Nigeria with the main target of ruling the people based on colonial policies and programs. Colonial policy was more pronounced in Nigeria around the 18th century, and the idea was introduced into Northern Nigeria with or without the attention of traditional institutions. In other words, introducing colonial policy led to introducing an indirect rule system of government. The indirect rule implies using traditional institutions and applying colonial policy to extract the available resources to satisfy the British personal interests. However, colonial policies not only in Northern Nigeria but also in the whole country "Nigeria" have both social, economic and political consequences, which still play a vital role on the soil of the country. It is in line with this that the paper traces the transformation of colonial policy in Northern Nigeria, taking into consideration a case study of the Yandakan district and portraying the effort of this institution in rejecting the policy. The methodology used in conducting the research includes primary and secondary sources. The primary sources involve books, journals, articles, and newspapers. However, the secondary sources involve conducting oral interviews and archival materials.

Key words: Colonialism, Transformation, Traditional institutions, Yandaxa District, Katsina Emirate, Northern Nigeria

Introduction

Colonialism is the root of underdevelopment in Northern Nigeria, the country, and the African continent. The word colonialism was derived from the colony. Colonies are the creation of metropolitan political domination, economic exploitation and cultural domination. The fundamental relationships between colonization and colonies were based on the superior and inferior, which the former dictated for the latter. With the imposition of colonial rule in Nigeria in the early 20th century, the British attempted to promote their economic and political interests. In the early part of British rule, the Katsina emirate was under the administration of Kano up to 1926.¹ This paper discusses Colonialism and the Transformation of Traditional Institutions: A Study of *the Yandaka* District office in Katsina Emirate, Northern Nigeria. It starts with an introduction. It then explains the Yandaka District and the position of *the Yandaka* office in Katsina Emirate. The next segment discusses Colonialism and the Transformation of the Yandaka Title and then concludes the study.

The ‘Yandaka District and the position of ‘Yandaka office in Katsina Emirate

‘*Yandaka* is a traditional title holder and one of the kingmakers in the Katsina Emirate Council. Since the precolonial period, other traditional kingmakers in Katsina have included Galadima, Kaura, and Durbi. As a kingmaker, Yandaka plays an essential role in the Katsina Emirate. This can be seen from the ground that, right from the *Jihad* period up to the present, the role of ‘*Yandaka* as a member of the body of electors of a new Emir has been of great relevance. For example, during the colonial period, the British were able to change the ruling dynasty in the Katsina Emirate

to suit their needs and interests. This indicates that the body of electors was then less powerful regarding the mandate.

During the colonial period, British officers relocated the administrative headquarters of 'Yandakawa from *Tsauri* to Dutsin-Ma. Most of the reasons were based on economic and political considerations. For example, *Dutsin-Ma* was prominent in the export of crops. Beyond that, *Dutsin-Ma*, not far from *Karaduwa*, was more accessible for transporting goods and services and for the movement of British colonial officers. It served as an easy link between Katsina and Kaduna. This could have been the main reason for transferring the District's headquarters from *Tsauri* to *Dutsin-Ma* in 1928. In order to promote Western education, the British established an elementary school at Dutsin-Ma in April 1929.² The British also reorganized a series of 'The Yandaka District' for their selfish interest. For example 1940, the British amalgamated the former fifty-one villages of 'The Yandaka territory into twenty-one village units. The areas of jurisdiction of 'Yandaka were reduced due to the political changes in the country in 1976 under the local government reform. The powers of the traditional rulers were restricted. In addition, between 1989 and 1991, more local government areas were created in the country and 'Yandaka lost many territories to the newly created local government areas in the state. Thus, 'Yandaka's leadership was highly restricted to small areas. Apart from being a kingmaker, the office of the 'Yandaka also serves as the District Head of the Dutsin-Ma District in Katsina emirate. The area under the jurisdiction of 'Yandaka was very vast within the Katsina Emirate, namely From 'Yandaka to Dagelawal, Sanawa, 'Yanshantuna, Nasarawa, Mahuta, Rayi, Katanga up to the border with Pawa. It is important to note that the 'Yandaka also played an important role in settling disputes among the people of his territory. In other words, when conflict arose, people saw 'Yandaka as a dependable arbiter who typically intervened and solved the problems.³ The primary function of the

rulers is to settle disputes or conflicts among the people. In fulfilment of this function, Gwadabe (2003) observes thus:

This was in addition to the Emir maintaining his Sovereign control of the land (Qasar Sarki). Under this arrangement, the Emir's position was that of Uban Qasa (master of the land). He was appointed and dismissed at will. He served as the final authority, and his court had the final say on all matters.⁴

Furthermore, Yandaka's office, as one of the senior civil administrators, is involved in the decision-making process in Katsina Emirate.⁵ The appointment of Muhammadu Dikko as the new Emir of Katsina by Acting High Commissioner Wallace on 25 January 1907 served as a new development in the History of the Katsina Emirate. His appointment was met with resistance from the kingmakers as well as the people of Katsina because it went contrary to the traditional procedure of selecting the Emirs.⁶ Therefore, History has shown that the role of kingmakers in appointing a succeeding emir was more apparent than real. There had never been a time when the British assent to their choice. Thus, in 1944, when Emir Muhammadu Dikko died, the same British appointed Usman Nagogo as the new Emir.

After the end of the colonial rule, things continued to be the way they had been. The kingmakers' role in selecting a new emir was different. The government continued to play the same dominant role as the British. Even after the Emir of Katsina, Usman Nagogo's death in 1981, things did not change either. Therefore, right from the Jihad of 1804, the kingmakers in Katsina Emirate that comprised the Kaura, 'Yandaka, Galadima and Durbi existed only in name. A high authority in government performed the function of appointing a succeeding emir. In addition, even with the restructuring of the Katsina Emirate Council in 1999, the issue remains as the kingmakers have continued to exercise little power in selecting the Emir in the Emirate. It is important to note that the electoral body still maintained the role of advisory capacity in the administration

of the Katsina Emirate, the power to appoint the Emir to the Katsina state government. The 'Yandaka office remains as part of the Katsina kingmakers.

Colonialism and the Transformation of 'Yandaka Title

In the Katsina Emirate, from 1905 to 1906, the British created administrative Districts. Among the Districts created was Dutsin–Ma District. In addition to the former territories of the 'Yandaka, the British added the territories of Kurfi, Dan Ali, Rawayau and 'Yantumaki (formerly independent of Katsina's control) to 'Yandaka office. However, 'Yandaka lost the western portion of his territory, which came under the control of the newly created Tsaskiya village. From then on 'Yandaka came to be called District Head.⁷ As the British entered the Katsina Emirate's administrative structure, directives were passed from the Resident to the Village Heads through the Emir and the District Heads.

Therefore, the village re-organization process undertaken by the British reduced the power of the traditional authorities during the pre-colonial political system. It could be observed that emirs and District Heads had to be subservient to the colonial policies or faced deposition. This meant that 'Yandaka, formerly the independent ruler of 'Yandaka territory, was no longer under British colonial authority. In other words, it meant that the power of 'Yandaka had been drastically reduced; the colonial officers were supervising 'Yandaka rulers. On the other hand, the British came to explain the economic activities of the Emirate, and Abba put it thus:

Through the District Heads system, the British were able to collect taxes, subjugate the agricultural economic system of the rural areas of the Emirate to the Western European industrial economic system and destroy the political, traditional system of the countryside.⁸

As far as the British were concerned, tax was the most important thing to them in administering the conquered territories. Therefore, immediately after the conquest of the Emirate, the British

reorganized all the pre-colonial taxes by regarding them as general taxes, usually paid annually after the harvest. In other words, farmers had to pay a certain amount of what they produced to the colonial officers. Equally, there was what was known as cattle tax (*Jangani*), payable to the British colonial officers from the people. In addition, Lugard, in his political memoranda, while explaining his two first internal reforms in the Emirate, mentioned the regulations for the appointment of officers of state and the re-organizations and re-assessment of taxations. The village heads collected the tax assessed while the district heads supervised the collection and paid the sum to the Emir as the Resident had directed.

It is important to note that power was decentralized in the Yandaka District. The District was further subdivided into village units. Each village unit was under a salaried Village Head. Like the District Head, the Village Head replaced the hitherto town with a personal one. In addition, clerks were attached to each Village Head and were given a Western education. This system led to an effective means of collecting taxes and keeping administrative records. Also, in most of Yandaka District, statistics in the collection of tax show that, between 1929 and 1936, there was an increase in the amount of tax collected despite the fall of population in some areas. Indeed, this increase in tax was so, despite the economic depression, that the population was forced to pay more tax. For example, in Karofi village in 1929 and 1930, the total population was five thousand four hundred and thirty-nine (5,439), while the tax amounted to £ 471-10-0. However, between 1935 and 1936, the population went down to four thousand two hundred and seventy (4,270), and the tax rose to £ 513-5-0. This indicates that the British were principally interested in tax collection.

Similarly, between 1929 and 1936, despite the depression in the Emirate, there was an increase in the production of export crops to meet the payment of tax. In addition, families became separate

because they had to move out to where they could produce what the British wanted. Alternatively, many ran away from their respective land and settled in another area.

Notably, 'Yandaka Sada was very helpful to the British administration in the Dutsin-Ma District. Under a so-called indirect rule system, District and Village Heads were concerned with the tax collection and maintenance of peace, law, and order favourable to the British. The District Head 'Yandaka Sada, was found to be very cooperative. One action taken was the issue of dealing with credibly the trained Malam who were to conduct the 1931 census. The A. D. O, during his tour of 'The Yandaka District in 1930, said: "D. H was helpful, especially as regards the training Malams."⁹ The Village Head also contributed positively to attitudes towards the British administration in Dutsin-Ma. During the tour of 'Yandaka District by the Assistant District Officer, C. V. Pegge in 1928, he wrote to the District office, Katsina and said:

"I was favourably impressed with the work of the Village Heads, who appear to know their areas well and do not leave much to Hamlet's heads; all money is collected by them."¹⁰

Nevertheless, in another vein, some discrepancies were recorded by the British officials in collecting the tax by the tax collectors (that is, the District Heads and the Village Heads). Sometimes, the taxpayers receive receipts before they have paid in full, and sometimes, the money exceeds what was shown on the receipts, which signifies that tax has been collected without giving receipts. Nevertheless, the British advised the District Heads to rectify the abnormalities in future times.¹¹

In addition, despite the introduction of registers to check irregularities during tax payments, the irregularities still need to be solved. For example, the A.D.O. in 1932 showed his dissatisfaction with the manner of utilizing the registers and regarded the work of the district *malam*, *M. Mamman*, as "the *Malams*' voucher" as bad. The *Malam* did not try to make "a *Jangali* abstract book," while

his other records were "useless." The A. D. O. even suggested the removal of the *Malam*.¹² This indicates that the British were seriously committed to properly collecting tax and its accountability to sustain their administration.

Conclusion

'Yandaka occupies an essential office in Katsina emirate. The office of Yandaka contributes to selecting Katsina emirs and making decisions. During the colonial period, the institution of Yandaka remained significant in running colonial administrative policies. The institution of 'Yandaka has remained a symbol of the History of the people of the Dutsinma and Katsina emirate. The colonialists utilized the then-traditional institution to achieve the aim of colonialism. The office of 'Yandaka was significant in tax collection, labour mobilization and maintenance of law and order. Therefore, the post-colonial government could learn to effectively utilize the traditional institutions to promote peaceful coexistence in Nigeria.

Endnotes

¹ M G Smith (1977) *Government in Kano: 1350 – 1950*, West view press, U.S.A. Pp. 206 - 207

¹ Oral interview with Mukhtar Balangogo, age 45, civil servant at his office, 22/08/2012.

¹ Oral interview with Ibrahim Umar Dada, age 54, civil servant, at his residence on 26/08/2012.

¹ M. M. Gwadabe (2003), *The Evolution of the District Head System in Kano and the Creation of Kumbotso District 1903 – 1916*. *Kano Studies: A Journal of Savanna and Sudanic Research*, new series 2000 Vol. I, No. 2, (2003), Bayero University Kano. P. 7 – 8.

¹ Oral interview with Alh. Ibrahim Dansani, age 65, farmer, at his residence on 02/08/2012.

¹ T. B. Ingawa (1984) *The Study of the Rural Economic History of the Major Cotton Production Districts in Katsina Emirate during the Colonial Period C. 1900 – 1939*. A ph. D Thesis (History). London: P. 43.

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¹ R. W. Hull (1968) *The Development of the Administration in Katsina Emirate 1887 – 1944*. Op-citP. 125.

¹ I. A. Abbah. “*A Reconsideration of the Indirect Rule System in the Emirate of Northern Nigeria with Particular Reference to the District Head Systems*.”. P.79.

¹ NAK/KATPROF (FED) P.83.

¹ NAK/KATPROF 1932: Tour of ‘Yandaka District. P. 2

¹ NAK/KATPROF 1932: Tour of ‘Yandaka District.....P.3.

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2	Ibrahim Umar Dada	54	Civil Servant	His Resident	26/08/2012
3	Alhaji Ibrahim Dansani	65	Farmer	His Resident	02/08/2012
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