BRITISH COLONIAL CONQUEST AND POPULATION MOVEMENT IN NORTHERN NIGERIA 1897– 1903

Umar Zubairu, PhD
Department of History and Diplomatic Studies
Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State
drumarzubairu@fukashere.edu.ng

And

Mohammed Auwalu
College of Education Billiri, Gombe State
Mohammedauwalu1987@gmail.com

And

Adamu Babayo Usman
Department of History and Diplomatic Studies
Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State
adambabayo@gmail.com

Abstract

The panic and fear planted by the British forces in the minds of the people of Northern Nigeria during the conquest and the amount of destruction that took place led to large – scale movements of people. The destructive manner in which towns and villages were shelled and lives were brutally killed, using sophisticated weapons put the innocent population in most unsettled conditions. This uncertainty led to displacement and movement of people in all direction across and beyond the borders of Northern Protectorate. People irrespective of cultural, religious, ethnic or economic backgrounds migrated from their places of "origin" to unknown destinations within and without the region. This development is one of the neglected aspects of social histories of the colonial Northern Nigeria. This does not mean that there was no history of migration in Nigeria and in particular, Northern Nigeria prior to this period. However, the scale and extend of migration during conquest period was a unique one. In most (if not all) cases the migrations were unplanned and without a specific destination. In fact, it is safe to qualify this form of migration as "forced migration". The paper therefore establishes how the British conquest of Northern Nigeria led to cross movements of people in the region and how these movements affected social well-being of the people in the early years of colonial rule. To achieve this, the paper relies heavily on written published and unpublished materials.

Key Words: migration, settlement, population and colonialism

Introduction

Migration which is the movement of people from one place to another is as old as human civilization. Since antiquity down to the present age individuals, families, clans and whole communities have moved from one location to another either temporarily or permanently. The premise of migration in Nigerian history can be viewed from three angles: pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. Migration prior to colonization was caused by many factors such as war, epidemic, trade, adventure etc.[1] Thus the local histories and the traditions of origins of almost all groups in Nigeria involved migration from one place to another. In the 19th Century, Hausaland had developed different kinds of migration which were: plain moving from one place to another (*kaura*), seasonal migration (*cin rani*), long distance trade (*fatauci*), scholarship (*almajiranci*), Pilgrimage (*haji*) flight for personal motives (*dandi*)[2]. The imposition of colonial socio-economic system led to a different trend of migration to colonial urban centres. The trend of colonial

[1] Abdullahi, M. Y. 'Migration as a Factor of Contact and Interaction in the Lokoja Area in the 19th Ccentury' In Olayemi, A. Okpeh, O. and Dogara J. (eds) *Intergroup Relations in Nigeria During the 19yh and 20th centuries* Ibadan, Aboki, 2006, pp858 - 865

[2] Shea, P.J. 'Approaching the Study of Production in Rural Kano' In Bawuro M.B. (ed) *Studies in* . … pp93 - 115

migration was further reinforced after independence by the post-colonial socio-economic structures. The nature and pattern of migration in these periods are fairly studied and documented[3],

Colonialism has always meant conquest and control of the colonized by the colonizers. In doing this, the former had to be subjugated and brought under absolute control of the later. In most cases this might involve violent struggle in the form of conquest and resistance between the two. While the colonizers struggle to occupy, conquer and control, the victims had to defend their land and sovereignty as "no society has willingly accepted foreign domination."[4] British conquest of Northern Nigeria was one example of such violent struggle. The process of the conquest led to mass migration within and across the borders of the region had among others, the effect of causing hunger, famine etc. In addition, abolition of slavery and slave trade by the British also necessitated considerable movement of people in the region during this period. This affects not only the

[3] For more on the pre-colonial migrations in Northern Nigeria see see Adamu M. The Hausa factor in West Africa 1978 and Shea, P. J. 'Approaching the Study of Production in Rural Kano' In Bawuro, M.B. (ed) Studies in the History of Kano Heinemann, 1983 pp93-115

[4] Abdullahi Mahdi (2012) "The Demography and Standard of Living of Colonial Nigeria" in M.A. Mammam et al (eds) Seminar on Nigerian Economy and Society Since the Berlin Conference, Vol. 1. Ahmadu Bello University Press Ltd. Zaria P. 236

slave owners and dealers but also production processes and outcome. This aspect of migration in this period was not adequately studied by scholars. Most studies on colonial and post-colonial migrations in various parts of the country were with the development of colonial urban centres and conflict[5] while migration cause by the British invasion and its effects were neglected. It is against this background that the paper examines large scale movement of people caused by British conquest of Northern Nigeria. Specifically, the examination includes the violent nature of the British conquest, resistance offered and why it failed; thus making it an exercise in futility. Thus, the question of why the British forces, despite their negligible number, were able to overcome and defeated the indigenous population is raised and answered. The paper therefore, consists of six interrelated parts; introduction, location of the study area including its absolute location and relative position, British contact with and conquest of Northern Nigeria, migrations and its social effect on the people and conclusion.

[5] Some recent works on this trend were Olayemi, A., Sati, U.F. and Okpeh, O.O (eds) Historical Perspective on Nigeria's Conflicts (2007) HSN and Toyin, F. and Okpeh, O.O. (eds) Population Movements, Conflicts and Displacements in Nigeria (2008) African Works Press

Northern Nigeria

The area known as Northern Nigeria occupies most part of Nigerian as a country. The region comprises the area between the basins of the Niger and Benue Rivers in the south, and the fourteenth line of latitude in the north. The longitudinal boundaries are roughly the fourth and fourteenth parallels east of the Greenwich. The region thus, falls within the geographical area known as the Central Sudan; that is the area between the Niger River and Lake Chad.[6] Sokoto Caliphate and Borno Empire were the major centralized political entities in the region.[7] This was followed by small non - centralized including the Tivs, Beron, Angas etc. In term of size, the region occupies about 75% of the total landmass of Nigeria.[8] It has over 382,000 square kilometres.[9] Up to 2021, the area comprises of three of the six geo political zones of Nigeria, namely North East, North

[6] C.K. Meek (1925) The Northern Tribes of Nigeria, Oxford University Press, London p.3
[7] Abdu Marafa (1995) Conquest and Resistance in the Muslim Areas of Northern Nigeria, Seminar paper, Bayero university, Kano
[8] S.J Hogben & A.H.M. Kirk – Greene (1966) The Emirates of Northern Nigeria: A Preliminary Survey of their Historical Traditions, Oxford University Press, London, p. 7
[9] A.M. Mohammed (2016) History of the Activities of Royal Niger Company and United African Company in Northern Nigeria and others Essays: A Political Economy Perspective, Ahmadu Bello University Press, Zaria p.22

West and North Central and about nineteenth of the thirty six States of the country including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.



Contact with British

Although European activities in the North started with the visit to Sokoto in 1824 by Clapperton and Denham, nothing came out of it

as Caliph regarded the European as infidels. But these were intensified in the 2nd half of the century when they established a number of trading posts in Lokoja and its environs. The Niger – Benue area had special attraction for European firms. They believed that the control of the area was the key to the immense trade of the Central Sudan. Thus, between 1860 and 1897 many British firms were established in the area among which were Miller Brothers, National African Company etc. Taubman Goldie amalgamated all the British concern companies into one, the United African Company, which later became the National African Company, and again in 1886 metamorphosed into a chartered Company called the Royal Niger Company. Goldie and his men entered into treaties with the Emirs and the local rulers for exclusive control of the area.[10] In 1900 the area declared as Protectorate by British colonialism. This protectorate was later transformed to Northern Region and by 1996 divided in to nineteen States.

Conquest of Northern Nigeria

The British occupation of Northern Nigeria started with the conquest of Bida and Ilorin in 1897. Justification given for the conquest of the

[10] W.M.N. Geary (1965) Nigeria Under British Rule, Frank Cass & Co Ltd. London p. 202

two southerly Emirates of the Sokoto Caliphate according to Goldie was the in ability of the Emirs to recognise and reconcile with the Royal Niger Company order, hence the attack. However, the major reasons for the conquest was that British wanted to prevent France and Germany from occupying Northern Nigeria, thus maintain exclusive trade right in the area. On 1st of January, 1900, the area north of the Niger and Benue was declared Northern Nigerian Protectorate under the British Government with Lugard as High Commissioner.[11] The first area to be conquered was Ilorin to be followed by Bida, Kontagora, Yola (1901), Borno (1902), Bauchi (1903), Gombe (1903), Misau (1903), Kano (1903), and Sokoto (1903). For most of the smaller polities of central Nigeria the conquest continued till 1916. In fact some occupants of hilly areas of Tangale Waja in southern Gombe Emirate were not brought under absolute British control until 1918.[12]

Population Movement

The manner in which the British shelled the town of Bida in January, 1897 leading to the death of many and wounding of 600 –

[11] R.A. Adeleye (1971) Power and Diplomacy in Northern Nigeria, 1804 – 1906, Humanities Press Inc. New York pp. 185 – 209 See also, Abdu Marafa (1995) Conquest and Resistance in the Muslim Areas of Northern Nigeria, A Seminar Paper, Bayero University, Kano P.2

[5] Usaini S.G (1999) Administrative System in Tangale Kingdom Before and Since Colonial Rule, Maiduguri, University of Maiduguri press P.55

1000 people, as well as their conquest of Ilorin in February of the same year, using the same force, had the effect of scoring heavy casualty and dispersing of people in all directions. As the British moved northward they destroyed and in some instances burnt every village and settlements that came their way. On the 21st of June of same year, in spite of absence of any form of resistance, they burnt the town of Lapai and its surrounding villages. Having heard of Lapai incident, the entire town of Pategi was deserted even before the arrival of the British army. Their movement to Kantagora was also brutal against the vulnerable villagers. Although Kontagora was deserted by the time of the arrival of British forces, they as well, had it burnt.[13]

More than anything else in the migration of people as a result of the British conquest of northern Nigeria was, pursuit of Caliph Attahiru after the conquest of Sokoto (refer to as *hijra*). This development led to massive movement of population for a long period of time and distances. To show the extent of the exodus of people across and

[13] Abdullahi Mahdi (2012) "The Demography and Standards of Living of Colonial Nigeria in M.A Mammam et al (ed) Seminar on Nigerian Economy and Society Since the Berlin Conference, Vol. 1. Ahmadu Bello University Press LTD, Zaria. P. 238

even out of Northern Nigeria, a summary of the caliph movement is imperative.

After losing the battle, the Caliph left Sokoto, on the 15th of March, 1903 with a large following. Partly because of the fear and uncertainty arising from the violent nature of the British conquest of the various Emirates of the Caliphate and partly as a result of the loyalty to the Caliph, people from different parts of the Caliphate especially from the areas through which he travelled joint him en mass on his way to the "east" thereby causing further dislocation in the stability of the population. Weeks after the Caliph left Sokoto, the peasants were leaving, still trying to make their way to him. By the time the *Sarkin Musulmi* (Caliph) reached Zaria Emirate, there were about hundreds of horses and footmen and about 2,000 women behind him. In Zaria alone, Caliph joined by hundreds of people, including Emirate officials. Again, in the course of about four days journey, between Babeji and Rogo in Kano Emirate, Caliph Attahiru had double followings. Most of the populations of Kano at that time were in a most unsettled condition. On reaching Katagum Emirate, the people appeared to rise en mass; men, women and children including the halt and the blind. The Caliph was eventually killed at Bormi approximately 40 kilometres northeast of Gombe. Even after

the massacre of the Caliph and his large followers at Bormi, the exodus to the east continued. His son, Muhammad Bello Mai Wurno carried on with the *Hijra* with an estimated 25,000 of followers across Chad and Central Sudan with the aim of crossing to Mecca. However, after three years of trekking, he ended of settling at eastern bank of the Blue Nile in The Republic of Sudan. He established a permanent settlement called Maiwurno in that country.[14]

Like Caliph Attahiru, the movement of Lamido Zubairu, (the Emir of Yola (1890 - 1901) with a large followings to escape British domination led to migration of several people to various parts of Northern Nigeria and across, to French and German controlled territories. After the conquest of Yola in September,1901 Lamido Zubairu escaped to Fufore, Gurin to Sebore with the aim of going to Marwa. He declared in a circular he sent to his people at Yola that I am going to Marwa, I shall return and we will drive out the heathen. If they prove too strong, leave Yola and follow me to a new country. The Qur'an forbids you to sit down with the heathen. What do the mallams think of the burning

[14] Abdullahi Mahdi (2012) The Demography and ……..P.239 and Abu-Manga, A. After Hijra: Colonialism and the Establishment of Immigrant Communities in Sudan' In Yakubu A.M., Jumare, I.M.& Saeed, A.G., *Northern Nigeria: A Century of Transformation, 1903 – 2003* Arewa House Kaduna, 2005 .

of our Mosque? The heathen wish to obtain our kingdom. Have no dealings with them. [15]

The circular was aimed at urging the people to migrate and leave their town for the British colonial forces. As a result of the circular was many people left Yola with the hoped meeting the fugitive Lamido. However, due to the paucity of sources we cannot ascertain the exert number of people that migrated. From Sebore Lamido Zubairu went and settled at Chebowa for a while but was later fled to Marwa when German troops attacked him. When Germans learnt that he was at Marwa they pursued him but he again escaped to Gudu in British adamawa. Having confirmed that Zubairu was in Gudu the Resident of the then Yola Province R. N. Baclay sent his troops. During the British military expedition to capture or even kill Zubairu, the town of Gudu was burnt for hosting him but Zubairu fled to Gaanda. Gudu was ransacked for being suspected of showing signs of friendliness to Zubairu. The action alone led to dismemberment of hundreds of people and resulted in an unplanned movement to unknown destinations. Mass movement of people to

[15] Sketch of the Administrative and History of the Yola Province up to the End of the 1904 by Acting Resident, In Hamid Bobboyi & Alkasim Abba (Eds) Adamawa Emirate 1901 – 1965 A Documentary Source Book, Centre for Regional Integration, Abuja 2009 P.33 – 34

and from British, Germen and French controlled territories had led to development of correspondences between the two colonial powers seeking for information about the where about of the people.

Effects of the Population Movement

One major effect of the British conquest and migration was the breakup of former frontiers of separation. The dissolution of the Caliphate as well as Islamic theocratic rule as a result of the establishment of colonial borders, rule and administration removed the hitherto religious obstacles that had hindered free movement of especially the non-Muslim neighbours of the Caliphate. Frontiers that separated the peoples were both political and religious. In the case of the Sokoto Caliphate, the frontiers overlapped, since the Sokoto Caliphate was a federation of some thirty emirates and sub-emirates under the ideological and spiritual rule of the Caliph in Sokoto. Apart from the kingdom of Borno, the Caliphate defined its neighbours, both within and outside the Caliphate as "unbelievers" as the others were not, per definition, a Muslim or of a Muslim state.[16] The Muslims of the Caliphate had the right and even the duty to wage war against non-Muslims, either to defend the livelihood of

[16] Holger Weis, Migration During the Times of Drought and Famine in Early Colonial Northern Nigeria: Retrieved: https://journal.fi/article/download.4165/10735

the Muslim community or to spread Islam or to get a work force made up of slaves. On this, Sir Chales Orr (1965) remarks: "*the Mohammedan (sic) states (the emirates) were constantly raiding the pagan tribes on their borders, nominally either on religious grounds or to punish them for attacks on traders and others, but really in order to secure captives for the slaves market or of the annual tribute.*"[17]

The remarks further affirm that there was rather limited interaction between the Caliphate and its non-Muslims neighbours during the 19th century. It was the British conquests that removed the barrier and made it possible for former enemies and non-Muslim foreigners to migrate and thus new forms of relationship were established.[18]

British conquest was not the only factor for large scale population movements in Northern Nigeria. There was also mass immigration from French and German conquered territories of Niger and Cameroon. These were specifically informed by the despotic rule of the new rulers installed by the French and the heavy burden of the

[17] Sir Charles Orr (1965) The Making of Northern Nigeria, Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. London. P.179
[18] Holger Weis, Migrations During Times of Drought and Famines in Early Colonial Northern Nigeria..

French and German occupation, or the abuse of the local population by French and German conscripts.[19] However, sources appeared to be silence about the specific number of the people who migrated and settled in Northern Nigeria.

Apart from the colonial conquest, abolition of slavery also led considerable movement of people in Northern Nigeria. A great number of slaves, many of whom had "recently" been captured in war, seized the opportunity to return to their places of origin. Many deserted their masters and took service under the Government, either as soldiers, police, transport carriers, or labourers in Public Works Department.[20]

Many slave owners suffered considerable losses as a result of slave exodus which led to a breakdown of the agricultural estates especially among the royal class. All labours not performed by individuals themselves were affected by slave labour; wealth and property consisted almost entirely in slaves.[21] Equally under stress were the slaves who had left their former masters and were treated either as runaways or vagrants by the British.[22] Paradoxically, the

[19] Holger Weis, Migration During…….
[20] Sir Charles Orr (1965) The Making of Northern……..p. 203
[21] Sir Charles Orr (1965) The Making of ……p. 196
[22] Holger Weis, Migration During……

pagan tribes who were raided the most, during the slavery did not appreciate abolishing the act by the British as warmly as might have been expected. The reasons for this attitude, which in some cases amounted to positive resentment, were curious. In the 19th century, these "pagan" communities had treated crime in their midst by the simple expedient of selling their criminals into slavery to a passing caravans; more important again, they had got rid in the same way of any member of their community suspected of witchcraft and exercising the power of the evil eye, a superstition in which most of the "pagans" profoundly believed.[23]

The inability of farmers to return to their villages due to fear of British forces was considered to be the major cause of famine in 1901/2. In Bauchi town alone, one hundred deaths were reported largely due to consumption of poisonous roots. During the same period, children were sold in large numbers in Muri, Katagum and Nupe emirates. This situation continued to 1908, in which year there was a severe pro harvest famine in Kano and other Provinces of the region. As usual the shadow of the famine years continued to linger on in the years following its occurrence because of shortage of

[23] Sir Charles Orr (1965) The Making of Northern Nigeria…… p.204

seeds.[24] This increased the volume of large scale movement of people across the region. Hills top dwellers were forced to temporarily or permanently come and settled on the surrounding plains looking for jobs due to hunger.

Resistance

The question that is constantly being asked is, how was small British army, operating in the lands which were largely unknown to their commanders, were able to overcome Nigerian armies which were many times their size? From 1885 – 1906, Nigeria people reacted against the British occupation of their territories. The resistance varied from one place to the other but few British Army, armed with sophisticated weapons confronted the indigenous people and defeated them. The factor of superior military technology of British over the local armies was traditionally been given as reason of the victory. This reason which would be true is however insufficient alone to explain the defeat of the Nigerian pr-colonial polities.

The military factor was explained in terms of British Army was better equipped with maxim guns while local armies depended mostly on the use of cutlasses, spears, bows, arrows and charms.

[24] Abdullahi Mahdi (2012) The Demography and …… p.257

Since the guns were manufactured in Europe, the British Army had access to latest models, whereas Nigerian armies could usually only get hold of models that were long out of date in Europe and then only in small quantities.

Even those that had access to the guns like the Nupe and Adamawa Emirates, were hardly put to effective use. Also, when machine guns were invented in Europe, they became available to the British army invading Nigeria and not to the Nigerian armies. The Maxim gun which was used, for instance, in the conquest of Sokoto, could fire eleven shots every second that was 660 a minute. Many of the guns used by the Africans might only fire once a minute. With weapons like the Maxim, the Gatling and heavy artillery, the British invaders did not have to worry that they were outnumbered.[25]

The British were well disciplined and drilled army. It was of no use possessing a gun if you did not know the best way to use it. Not only that, they were permanently employed as standing armies. Nigerian armies were not employ or standing armies. Most of the armies were farmers and artisans and able bodied men who were hurriedly assembled from each village to meet an urgent need. Thus British

[25] Micheal Crowder (1977) *West Africa: An Introduction to its History*, Longman Group Ltd. London, p. 251

Army was trained based on professionalism and war was their full time occupation.[26]

Also, the internal economic, social and political developments within the Nigerian pre-colonial polities made the conquest easy. Most states of Nigeria lacked political unity and in some cases states like Yoruba States, and the Delta States were seriously weakened by internal conflicts and lack of unity to put up an effective resistance against the British penetration, invasion and conquest. It was this lack of unity that enabled the British to take the various emirates of the Sokoto Caliphate one after another. Added to these was the slavery and slave trade which most of the States were involved. It served as impediment to ensure its survival as was done in Ethiopia[27].

There were also a group of runaway slaves who aided the British forces during the conquest exercise. Initially, this small force was used by Glover as governor of Lagos to mount punitive expedition

[26] Robert Heussler (1968) The British in Northern Nigeria, Oxford University Press, London

[27] Ethiopia was the only state in Africa which successfully defeated European invasion due to the fact that it did not allow slavery within their domain. For more see Usman Y. B. 'Nigerian Unity and Nigerian History: Beyond Fairy Tales' paper presented at the 1st Annual Dialogue organized by Citizen Magazine on 20th August. 1992

in the Lagos hinterland and to protect British trade routes around Lagos. In 1865, this small force became a regular force with the name "Hausa Constabulary". Hausa Constabulary is a termed given to a paramilitary force that performed both military and policing functions in Lagos during the latter part of the nineteenth century. The history of the force is linked to 1863 when a small Hausa heavy force was organized by Captain John Glover and then dubbed Glover Hausas and later Hausa militia, the unit was made up of runaway slaves. During the Ashanti expedition of 1873, some members of the Glover Hausas were sent to defend imperial interest in the Gold Coast and were later organized to become the Gold Coast Constabulary in 1879. Also, in 1879, the force was enlarged and called the Hausa Constabulary through an administrative ordinance regularizing the separation between the Gold Coast Constabulary and the Hausa Constabulary the regularized unit was made up of largely Northern constabulary.[28]

[28] Retrieved from: www.nairaland.com

Conclusion

Thus far, we have shown that the British penetration, invasion and conquest of Northern Nigeria between 1897 – 1903 led to migration of the people not only within the country but also across the modern boundaries of Nigeria. The first six years of British conquest of Northern Nigeria was characterized by violent. The conquest which started from about 1897 with Bida and later Ilorin was bloody. Lives were lost and properties, destroyed. This inhuman and inconsiderate nature of the British occupation of Northern Nigeria in particular led to exodus of people across the region. People from diverse backgrounds migrated and settled in places other than place of their "origin". More than anything else in the mass movement of people within and across the boundaries of the region was the pursued of Caliph Attahiru by the British. Like caliph, migration of Lamido Zubairu to escape colonial domination led to dismemberment of his followers and loyalist not only within the region but also across to the German and French controlled territories. Abolition of internal slavery and slave trade by the British intensified migrations and affected production processes and outcome. This in turn contributed to hunger and general famine during the early period of colonial rule. Also, the immigrants, emigrants and migrants contributed

enormously to the sharing of experiences over a vast distance and the spread of Hausa language and culture. However, the conquest of the Nigeria area by the British forces was not without resistance. The resistance differed from one place to another but military superiority, sophisticated weapons and lack of unity among Nigerian states rendered the resistance a futile exercise.

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