

THE ROLE OF KANO EMIRATE COUNCIL IN MANAGING ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN KANO STATE-NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Conflict and security scholars have identified ethnic and religious conflicts as one of the main causes of insecurity in Nigeria the African most populous country. One of the states in which these twin conflicts have been occurring is Kano state that incidentally is also the most populous state in the country. Hausa/Fulani ethnic group whose religion is Islam dominates the state that has a current estimated population of over ten million. However, owing to its background as the commercial nerve centre of the northern region, the state has attracted substantially Christian immigrants from the southern parts of the country. Unfortunately, the relationship between the host Muslim Hausa/Fulani and their Christian immigrants especially the Igbos over the years have been characterized by series of conflicts arising from ethnic and religious acrimonies. Against this backdrop, this paper examines the role of Kano Emirate Council in the management of these conflicts. The study is based on a qualitative research method with secondary data obtained through review of related published materials. Finding of the study revealed that, Kano Emirate Council plays significant role in managing ethnic and religious conflicts in the state on informal basis. On the backdrop of this finding, this paper concludes that management of Kano state security which is often threatened by ethno-religious conflicts can be improved with the reintegration of the Emirate Council into the security management framework.

Keywords: Conflict, Ethnic, Emirate Council, Kano, Managing conflict, Religious

INTRODUCTION

According to conflict and security scholars, ethnic and religious conflict is one of the main causes of insecurity challenges in Nigeria. This is because major political and economic issues in the country are usually contested along the ethnic and religious divides. To this extent, most Nigerians appear to prefer identifying their selves by their ethnic or religious affiliations and to some extent along regionalism instead of seeing themselves as Nigerians (Smyth and Robinson 2001). Nigeria with a current population estimated to be close to 200 million is a multi-ethnic and religious country. Although, the country has over 300 different ethnic groupings, the dominant ones are the Hausa/Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba. Majority of the ethnic groups that constitute the population of the country are Muslims and Christians while the rest belong to traditional and other forms of religion. However, in most cases, prominent conflicts occurring in the country has often been between the dominant three ethnic groups or between the Muslims and the Christians. Although Kano is a predominant Hausa/Fulani and by implication Muslim state, it has a substantial Christian immigrants from the southern parts of the country majority of them being the Igbos and Yorubas who are engaged in different commercial activities.

Over the years, the state since its creation in 1967 has witnessed several incidents of conflicts between the dominant Muslim Hausa/ Fulani and minority Christians from the southern parts of the country over business transactions or social interactions. In addition, there have also been conflicts in respond to attacks on Muslims in other parts of the country. Conversely, Kano state is been described as a home of ethnic and religious reprisal attacks. Under the current constitution, responsibility of maintaining peace and stability in the state lays with the government security institutions. However, despite this constitutional provision, relevant literatures indicate that Kano Emirate Council which until 1968 used to be part of the security management has been assisting in the management of these conflicts on informal. Against this backdrop, this article examines the role of Kano Emirate Council and the strategies it employed in managing such conflicts. The article being an ex post facto expository research on the role of the Emirate Council in conflict management relied on secondary data obtained from review of related published materials.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF KANO EMIRATE CONCIL

Kano Emirate Council is situated in the ancient city of Kano which is the capital of Kano state in northwest region of Nigeria. Created in 1967, Kano state which has a population of 9.4 million based on the 2006 National Population Commission (NPC) census result is Nigeria's most populous state. The state which has a total of 44 local government area councils with an area of 20,479.6 square kilometer is also regarded as the biggest commercial centre of the whole northern states (NEITI 2013). Although, English is the official language of conducting government business, the majority of Kano people speak Hausa language as such commercial activities are conducted in Hausa. In addition to English and Hausa languages, Arabic is also spoken in the state as most of the citizens are familiar with Arabic literature due to the influence of Islam. The state also shares borders with Katsina, Jigawa, Bauchi and Kaduna states respectively (KSMH 2009). The location of the emirate which is the city is popularly known as the (*birni*)¹ and populated solely by the aboriginal Hausa Muslims while the outside walls also referred to as (*waje*)² are inhabited by other ethnic and religious communities. Although Kano is generally considered as a strong hold of Hausa Muslims, it still has all the attributes of a diverse city harbouring Christians and Muslims of different ethnic groups.

Moreover, Kano city pride itself on its historical background of providing hospitality to economic migrants (Wakili 1997). Although the emirate council is located in Municipal local government area council, five other local government areas including Gwale, Fagge, Dala, Nassarawa, and Tarauni where the government house is situated surround it.

¹ Hausa words for city

² Hausa term for outskirts of the city.



Figure 1.1: The Map of Kano State and its 44 Local Governments

Source: Mnch2 (2016)

Kano Emirate Council also known as *Ma Sauratar Kano*³ has a history that is said to be spanning more than a millennium. This despite the fact that the larger part of the Emirate's history prior to the sixth century was built on myths (Hogben and Kirk-Greene 1966). The Emir's palace which is the official seat of the emirate council and also known as Gidan Rumfa is one of the most enduring legacies in the history of Kano kinship (Tanko 2014).

³ Hausa term for Kano Emirate Council



Figure 1.2: Main Entrance to Kano Emirate Council

Source: Poi.Api.Hotels (2016)

The current structure of the emirate council according to Blench et al (2006) was established after the defeat of the Hausa ruling dynasty by Sheikh Usman Danfodio between the periods of 1805-1807. The Fulani Jihadists ruled Kano until 1903 when it was also defeated by the British colonialists in 1903. However, before the events of 1805-1807, and 1903, Muhammad Rumfa who ruled the Kingdom between the periods of 1463-1499 under the Hausa ruling dynasty, acting on the advice of a Middle East scholar, Shehu Maghili made attempts to change the administrative pattern of the Kingdom by introducing Islamic constitution in fifteenth century. It is also reported that, the Fulani Jihadists adopted the same constitution that was introduced by King Muhammad Rumfa to consolidate their leadership in the newly established emirate council. Specifically, the Fulani Jihadists re-organized structure of the newly established Emirate Council into districts, villages, and wards with the Emir as the overall head. Each district was headed by an official known as *Hakimi*⁴,

⁴ District Head

while each village and ward were headed by officials designated as *Dagaci*⁵ and *Mai Unguwa*⁶ respectively as shown in figure 1.3 below.

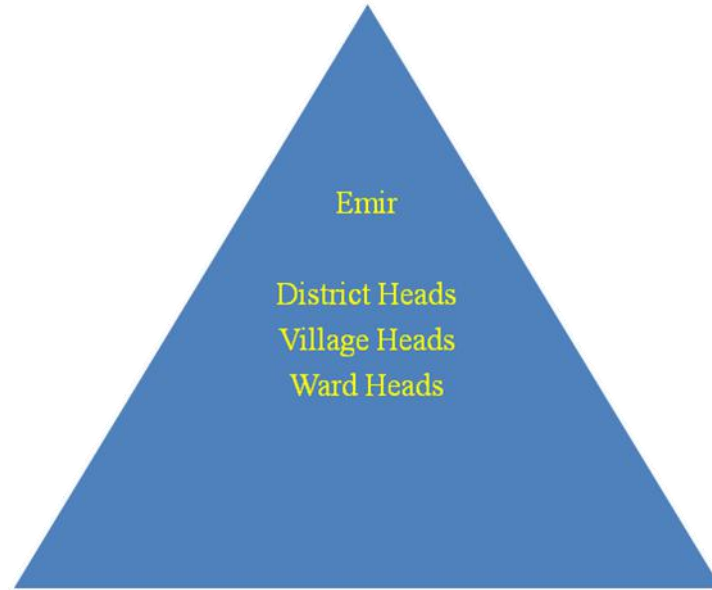


Figure 1.3: Administrative Management Structure of Kano Emirate Council

Source: Author's PhD Fieldwork (2014)

Although Kano Emirate Council like other traditional institutions in Nigeria has witnessed series of political changes over the years, the above administrative structure of the emirate has resisted these changes and therefore remained the same.

HISTORY OF ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN KANO STATE

The concept of ethnicity according to De Vos in Brass (1991:18) refers to a sense of tribal identity which is marked by “subjective, symbolic or emblematic use by a group of people ...of any aspect of culture, in order to differentiate themselves from the other groups”. Therefore, its main features are race, language, religion, and colour. However, the moment these “markers ceased to be a mere means of social distinctions, and become the process of power, ethnic distinctions are transformed into ethnicity” (Kom 2012:56). Unfortunately, in Nigeria, the concepts of ethnic and religious

⁵ Village Head

⁶ Ward Head

identities are simultaneously used not just to distinguish between the over 300 different ethnic groups and their belief system, but as a means of determining who gets what in the realm of politics and distribution of privileges. Thus, the country its independence in 1960 has been characterized by persistent ethnic and religious conflicts. Ethnic and religious conflicts also known as ethno-religious conflicts refers to a situation in which inter-ethnic or religious relationship in a society that has different ethnic groups with different religious affiliations is characterized by animosity, distrust, and to some extent violent clash between one other.

In Kano state especially within the urban city there have been several ethnic conflicts between the dominant *Kanawa*⁷ and other southern Nigerians majority of them being Igbo and the Yoruba ethnic groups. Osaghae et al. (1994) explained that the genesis of animosity between the *Kanawa* and their southern settlers can be understood from the context of divide and rule policies of the British colonialists. One of them being the segregation policy which led to the establishment of a separate settlement called *Sabon Gari*⁸ for the Christian southerners in Kano while the *Kanawa* were kept inside the *Ganuwa* or *Birni*⁹ in 1911. From that time to date, the sub-urban *Sabon Gari* area of Kano has come to be known as a territory for the non-Muslims especially the Igbos of Southeastern Nigerian. This policy explains Albert (1994) was due to the fear that the contact between the two groups might lead to revolt against the British rule. Therefore, scholars such as Osaghae et al. (1994) contend that the policy formed the basis for the contemporary hostility between the *Kanawa* and the Southerners where the former sees the later as *Kafirai* or *Arna*¹⁰.

Thus, in 1953 the first clash occurred between the two groups as a result of bitter pre-independence political bickering between the northern and southern politicians over the issue of appropriate date for Nigeria's independence at the Federal House of Representatives in Lagos. This happened when Action Group (AG) one of the Southern dominated political parties which had opposed the unanimous position of the northern politicians on a delayed independence date came to Kano to campaign for independence in March 1953. Although, the Northern Peoples' Congress

⁷ Indigenous Kano people

⁸ New Settlement

⁹ Old Walled City

¹⁰ Infidels or non-Muslims in Hausa

(NPC) led Native Administration had organized a peaceful protest against the AG's campaign, the youths turned the event into a violent confrontation between the southern immigrants in *Sabon Gari* area (Osaghae et al. 1994). This was followed by another ethnic violence of 1966 over a coup d'état led by Major Nzeogu a southeastern Christian of Igbo ethnic group. Although the coup was not successful, prominent northern leaders including the Prime Minister and Premier of the northern region were killed. As a result of this reason, Major General Agui Ironsi who happened to be from the same Igbo ethnic grouping like Major Nzeogu succeeded Sir Balewa as head of state. Thus, the coup d'état was viewed by the northerners as an Igbo agenda against the northern interest. Therefore, on 29th May 1966 a violent ethnic conflict broke out in Kano against the regime of General Ironsi targeting the Igbo ethnic group in *Sabon Gari* and other places. Since then, the two ethnic groups have been having one clash or the other at any slight provocation (Paden 1973; Tamuno and Ukpabi 1989; Osaghae et al. 1994).

Similarly, apart from the Boko Haram religious insurgency, Kano state has also witnessed many cases of religious conflict since its creation in 1967. Relevant literature shows that between the periods of 1980 to date, the state has been engulfed in religious violence on at least seven different occasions. These include the violent intra religious uprising orchestrated by one Muhammadu Marwa (Maitatsine)¹¹ in 1980 which later extended to Kaduna, Maiduguri, Gombe, and Yola. The leader of Maitatsine Sect was also an immigrant from the neighbouring Cameroonian Republic who later became fully integrated in Kano due to his scholarly background in Islamic knowledge. Unfortunately, Malam *Maitatsine* as he came to be known due to his mode of preaching by cursing anyone who disagree with him, engaged in rituals that were considered as un-Islamic. The worst part is that he declared himself a prophet which was rejected by the majority of Kano Muslims. This led to the conflict between the people of Kano and his Sects. Although, the *Maitatsine* conflict started as an intra-Islamic issue, it latter degenerated into a violent religious conflict that affected everybody (Osaghae et al. 1994).

This was followed by the 1982 riots between the Muslim and the Christians over a dispute on the planned reconstruction of a church that was close to a mosque in Fagge (Ekoko

¹¹ Someone who place Curses on others

and Amali 1989; Albert 1994). Nine years later, another Muslim versus the Christians conflict erupted again in the state over the planned visit of a German evangelist, Reinhard Bonnke for a crusade (Okeke 1992). In addition, there were also religious conflicts among the followers of the two prominent religions in the state between the year 2001, 2004, and 2008 as a response to attacks on Muslims by the Christians in Plateau state (Minchakpu 2001; Harischfeger 2008; Aminu 2008; Adam 2010). The most recent religious conflict in the state is that of Bichi town over a disagreement on a shirt worn by a Christian youth with an inscription that was considered blasphemous to by the Muslims because it insulted the personality of Prophet Muhammad (pbu). As a result of the confrontation that ensued, the Christian youth who is from Igbo ethnic group was mobbed to death leading to a violent conflict between the Muslims and the Christians in the town (Premium Times, November 22, 2012).

THE ROLE OF KANO EMIRATE COUNCIL

Existing literature indicate that Kano Emirate Council has played a dominant role in the management of all the above discussed ethnic and religious conflicts that have occurred in Kano state. Beginning from the pre-independence violent ethnic conflict of 1953, the emirate under the then leadership of late Abdullahi Bayero was instrumental in resolving the conflict in the state and to some extent other parts of northern region. In Kano *Sabon Gari*, where the conflict occurred, the emirate apart from issuing directives to stop the violence also dispatched its *Yan Gadi*¹² to assist the Nigeria Police Force in restoring normalcy in the area (Chiranchi 2007). In the same vein, Muffet (1982) explained that Emir Ado Bayero after a meeting with the Military Governor of the former Northern Provinces, Lt. Col. Hassan Katsina in Kaduna on the anti-Ironsi violence of 1966 came back to Kano and issued a statement urging his subjects to halt the attacks on southern immigrants in his domain. As a result of this intervention by the emir, further violent attacks against the southerners in Kano were immediately halted.

¹² Watchmen

Similarly, the emirate has also been playing an important role in the management of religious conflicts in the state. For instance, during the Maitatsine violence, apart from late Emir Ado Bayero serving as a member of the Federal Government Committee, the late Emir of Sir Muhammadu Sanusi played a significant role in the deportation of Malam Maitatsine to his country of origin Cameroon in the 1960s (Whitaker Jr. 1970; Tamuno 1991). The emir like his predecessor Sir Sanusi refuted the unorthodox interpretations of the Qur'an by Malam Maitatsine which among others forbade Muslims from using anything modern such as wrist watch, cars, bicycles, motorbikes etc (FGN Report 1981). Also, during 2001 religious conflicts that erupted in the state in connection with the Muslims and Christians conflict in Plateau state, the emirate equally refuted the reasons advanced for the reprisal attacks on Christians. The emir condemned the wrong interpretations of the events in Plateau state along the religious perspective in strong terms and urged the people of Kano to stop further violence against the non-Muslims living in the state (Yakubu 2005).

Again, in April 2004, the Emir of Kano made concerted efforts to stop the killing of Christians and the looting of Igbo businesses and others following another conflict in reaction to the killings of Muslims by Christians in Yelwa-Shendam of Plateau State. Thus, in their study report on "*the role of traditional rulers in conflict prevention and mediation in Nigeria*", Blench et al (2006) affirmed the role played by the late Emir of Kano, Alhaji Ado Bayero in resolving the 2004 conflicts between the southerners living in Kano. In addition, the late Emir Alhaji Ado Bayero played a significant role in halting the spread of Boko Haram in the state. Immediately, after the 2012 Boko Haram attacks in Kano city, the emir according to Aliyu et al (2015) took a drastic measure against the insurgents. Specifically, he was said to have instructed:

"All the ward heads across the state to ensure that, identities of new comers into their communities are properly ascertained before they are allowed to settle. In this regards, all local and registered property agents as well as individuals were directed to scrutinize the identities of immigrants especially refugees from the neighboring states before accommodating them" (Aliyu et al 2015:134).

Apart from helping in managing full blown ethno-religious conflicts, the Emirate Council has equally assisted in nipping some intra and inter-ethnic or religious disputes with that can lead to serious violent conflict in the bud. One of them is the recent issue of a southern Christian teenage girl Ese Rita Oruru, alleged to have been abducted in 2015 at Opolo, Yenagoa Local Government Area of Bayelsa by Yunusa (Yellow) a young Kano Muslim boy from Kura local government. A statement from the Emirate Council revealed that when the present Emir, Muhammadu Sanusi II, was first informed of the development in September 2015, he immediately directed the district head of Kura, Hisbah and Shariah Commissions to liaise with the police authority and repatriate the girl back to her parent because she was still a teenager. Therefore, in accordance with the emir's directive, the girl was handed to the police for further investigation and necessary action. Unfortunately, the police authority under the Zonal Command of an Assistant Inspector General (AIG) did not act accordingly. Therefore, the girl was kept in Kano for six months without the knowledge of the emir and against his directive until when the matter became a serious religious problem following the sensational and sectionalized coverage by the media. In order to avert the potential conflict between the Muslims and the Christians, the emir immediately instructed for the girl to be brought to his palace and she was handed to the police authority publicly for onward reunion with her parents (The Vanguard, February 29, 2016).

Strategies Employed by the Emirate Council

Relevant literature indicates that the Emirate Council employs both formal and informal strategies in managing the persistent ethnic and religious conflicts in Kano state. The informal strategy which is considered as the most visible and reliable means of handling the complex ethno-religious conflicts entails the use of its grassroots administrative structures. On the other hand, the formal strategy which is mostly used in certain instances revolves around the involvement of modern security agencies especially the police. With regards to the informal strategy, the Emirate has established three Non-indigenous Community Traditional Leadership Structures (NCTLS) in *Sabon Gari* for managing conflicts between the Muslims and Christians on informal basis. These include, Non-

indigenous Traditional Leaders (NTL); Leaders of the Ethnic Associations (LEA); and the Non-indigene Leadership Association (NLA) which is an umbrella for leaders of all individual ethnic associations. The leaders of these non-aboriginal ethnic groups in the likes of *Eze Igbo*¹³ and the *Oba Yoruba*¹⁴ occupy positions that are created by the emirate similar to the centralized structure of the entire emirate system.

Thus while the *Ezes* and the *Obas* as non-indigenous traditional leaders are responsible for everything relating to their cultural traditions, partial executive mandate to administer the affairs of the communities is given to the respective ethnic associations. The internal functions of non-aboriginal traditional leadership is similar to what is obtained in the Emirate council particularly in terms of prominent ceremonies, rituals, managing ethno-religious tensions and resolving disputes through informal methods. For example, disputes among the same ethnic group are settled by the respective ethnic association. While those that involves inter-ethnic groups are either handled by the NLA especially if all the parties are non-aboriginals or in conjunction with Fagge district head if an aboriginal is involved. Although, each of the ethnic group in *Sabon Gari* has its traditional ruler and association, those of Yoruba and Igbo are the most prominent owing to their population. Therefore, both the non-aboriginal traditional rulers and ethnic associations play important roles in helping the Emirate Council to manage conflicts within their settlements (Ehrhardt 2007).

Like their traditional rulers counterparts, the elders represent defined territorial communities. In addition, like ethnic leaders, they also represent the interest of their people whenever they have problems with others, and manage contentious issues within the community. For example, depending on the nature of the problem, the issue of representing their members can be at the ward level before the Ward head or at the local government authority. On the other hand, the internal conflict management is usually conducted through the process of listening and negotiations on informal basis. After which an amicable mediation or settlement is reached among the parties in conflict. However, if this method proves abortive, the problem or dispute is referred to the ward

¹³ King of Igbo ethnic group

¹⁴ King of Yoruba ethnic group

head. Despite the similarities in the roles of ethnic and community leaders, when it comes to the aspect of authority, they are significantly differentiated. For example, ethnic group leaders such as *Oba* Yoruba and *Eze* Igbo are usually selected based on of their appropriateness as traditional ruler. Like in the case of *Eze* Igbo, the selection is based on age, respectability, income, personal authority and knowledge of cultural traditions. But as for the leaders of ethnic associations, their selection is made through democratic process as such their legitimacy is further strengthened by the public support (Paden 2005).

As for the community leaders, who are not democratic representatives of any ethnic group, their authority is determined by age, social accomplishments, knowledge which makes them to be considered as wise men. Their authority and respect within the community are due to their age knowledge, and experience to address communal and religious conflicts. In addition to the non-indigenous ethnic leadership and associations, the Emirate also uses religious and native community elders. These religious leaders are drawn from both Muslims and Christians religious organizations such as Jama'at Nasr al-Islam (JNI), and Christians Association of Nigeria (CAN). These elderly and religious leaders particularly those that have distinguished themselves or have wide knowledge on religious matter, are given special status and informal power. As a result of this reason, their homes become centres for social interactions, community meetings, prayer, as well as an avenue for solving individual personal problems. As such the Emirate Council maintains a close relationship with them as way of getting to the people during conflict situations. For example, through the active collaborations of the Emirate Council and these ethno-religious leaders, the state was able to prevent any violent attack on Christians in 2006 due to global reaction on re-publication of the offensive Danish cartoons (Osaghae et al 1994; Gwarzo 2003; Larkin and Meyer 2006; Ehrhardt 2007).

CONCLUSION

The foregoing suggests that Kano Emirate Council, despite its lack of recognition by the Nigerian constitution plays an important role in the management of ethnic and religious conflicts which has bedeviled Kano state since its creation in 1967. In addition, it also reveals that there is preference

for informal conflict management by the populace in Kano state. However, the success of the Emirate Council is attributed to its pre-colonial administrative structures and the public trust. This also shows that Kano state populace still has respect for the traditional institution. Therefore, the Emirate Council should be encouraged and enhanced by the government to continue with the task of managing ethno-religious conflicts in the state. One important way of encouraging the Emirate Council is through according it the vital constitutional recognition. This is because apart from giving it legal authority the constitutional recognition will entail more benefits to the Emirate Council thereby encouraging it to perform more effectively. On the backdrop of the above findings, this paper concludes that Kano state and by extension Nigeria at large can improve its domestic security management which is often threatened by ethno-religious conflicts through reintegration of traditional institutions like Kano Emirate Council into its security management framework.

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