

**A REFLECTION ON THE NATURE OF INTERGROUP
– RELATIONS IN LOKOJA-NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

The establishment of Lokoja as the Headquarters of the protectorate of Northern Nigeria in 1900 was the height of European imperialism in Nigeria. This culminated into the creation of a cantonment for both Europeans and civilian non – indigene settlers, thereby engendering cluster of settlements otherwise called ‘Angwas’ (Quarters). The interactions and cooperation amongst the various inter – groups in Lokoja made the town a multi - ethnic one with features like conflict, hostility, domination of migrant groups, indigeneship and citizenship. This paper therefore reflects on the nature of inter-group relations highlighting the various nationalities, their potentials and ability to harness these endowments for cohesion and sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

Lokoja is located on the Latitude 6° 44' E and longitude 7° 49' N on the Nigerian map. It is a town located on a slope of mountain called PATTI. As a town located on the confluence of the Niger is bounded in the North and East by the River Niger and the West by the wooded height of mount Patti¹. The environment of Lokoja is rocky consisting of igneous, metamorphic and sedimentary rocks of cretaceous and recent ages; with undulating and dissected geomorphology. The resources of this environment include: minerals, vegetal, wild life, water and agricultural land¹.

The story of Lokoja is shrouded in myths. An early account narrated by a Sierra Leonean missionary which appeared most acceptable indicated that the town, Lokoja was founded by Chief Oki of Okpoto descent². Oki was a wanderer – farmer who came in search of farmland, met a small village near the water and that village was called Panda named after Shrubs that grew plentifully. The arrival of Oki in the town in 1825 led to the creation of Olokoja (The Strong) from where the present town derived its name.

Gradually the town began to expand as a result of different migratory movements. For example, in 1855, Lokoja was inhabited massively by the Europeans who were on various expeditions in the Niger. In 1859, there were arrivals of liberated Africans who settled in a place called Oganaja (Ganaja as it is correctly known). Thereafter was the coming of three Hausa families, Musa Migari, Abiga and Muhammad whose ancestors were from Katsina and Bornu emirates³. From thenceforth, Lokoja became the home of several ethnic nationalities e.g. the Igala, Kakanda, Oworo, Bassa Nge and Komo, Nupe, Igbira Okene and Koto, Hausa and many others. It was the conglomeration of these various tribes and groups that fostered effective inter-group relations both in the 19th and 20th centuries.

A REFLECTION ON THE GROWTH AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF LOKOJA

Between 1864 and 1899, Lokoja experienced consulate and company rules. By first January, 1900 following the formal establishment of British rule in Northern Nigeria, Lokoja became the capital and was headed by a British High Commissioner, Sir Fredrick Lord Lugard⁴.

Lokoja, a hitherto undeveloped quiet town, now assumed colonial posture with all the attendant impacts of colonialism. For example, the township domiciled by the European took a new look with laid down

developmental programmes aimed at transforming it to reflect a worthy headquarters of Northern Nigeria⁵. Such infrastructure like schools, police, prisons, customs, Army etc emerged. Similarly there was remarkable growth in commerce and industry. Apart from John Holt and several other European companies that existed in the area there were cotton and Ginnery industries established.

Political and economic developments in this town were at par. Politically, with the transfer of headquarter to Lagos from Lokoja, and with the shortage of manpower to man the Europeans' new administrative system, there were mergers and recreation of Native Authorities. Consequently, Lokoja was merged with the Igbira Native Authorities with Attah Igbira as the sole Overlord. This development did not go down well with the people. They resisted and formed various pressure groups e.g. Lokoja Men Progressive Association (LMPA) and Lokoja Indigenous Union (LIU)⁶. Indeed, their attempt to resist the rule of Attah Igbirra did not succeed, however, between 1946 and 1952 an amicable arrangement was made which culminated into the enthronement of a new traditional leader, MAIGARI, in Lokoja.

On the economic front, Lokoja began to interact very cordially with various ethnic groups of various entrepreneurial skills. More groups were attracted into this area because of the strategic central location of the town. The establishment of Inland water ways department in 1957 and its consequent relocation from Lagos to Lokoja in 1959 was a demonstration of the economic viability and prosperity of the town. It is important to note that economic activities went on smoothly around this period. Agriculture, spinning, weaving, blacksmithing, pottery, dyeing etc were carried out vigorously by the various ethnic groups of Lokoja.

In retrospect, Lokoja witnessed tremendous changes from pre – colonial through the colonial periods. The nature of inter – group relationship that existed during this time was a potent factor in the development of the area. There were various initiatives taken by the people to enhance sustainable development. These initiatives were taken towards enriching the life of the people and the society materially and spiritually. To this end, the following development strategies were pursued vigorously by both government and individuals: empowerment, building beneficiary capacity, cost sharing, improving projects efficiency and effectiveness. It is important to stress that despite these measures, sustainable

development has been grossly inhibited as a result of illiteracy, poverty, tradition and the Nigerian factor.

THE NATURE OF INTER – GROUP RELATIONS

Apart from the ‘Batures’ (Whitemen) and the Hausas that inhabited Lokoja town, there were other ethnic groups that contributed significantly in the dynamics of inter – group relationship not only in Lokoja but also in the confluence region. This segment shall look at some of these ethnic groups with a view to identifying their various roles and contributions in the inter – group relations that occurred within the area.

The Hausa ethnic group as explained earlier were of Katsina and Borno extractions sojourned in the area of confluence region as itinerant merchants and found Lokoja suitable for habitation. Their economic activities in Lokoja and its environs have veered them into the politics of the area thereby consolidating them as the paramount ruler of Lokoja. This group of people were mainly domiciled in Angua Hausa, Angua Kura, Angua Yashi and Angua Rimi⁷.

The Igala were basically of the left bank of the Benue and Niger. Some extractions of the Igala speaking lived around the Niger opposite Itobe. Because of their entrepreneurship some group moved leftwards and settled in a new model farm established by the europeans⁸. Having stayed away from their original home, they were now different. They became acculturated and assimilated into the life of the people. Their involvement in the economic activities in the area earned them distinct area of settlement within the city of Lokoja. Their main Angua was Kporoka⁹.

The Kakanda were group of people living in the riverine area along the Niger river. This group of people having broke away early in the 19th C, found autonomous status in the town. They were skillful fishermen, blacksmiths and canoe builders. Their commitment and skilled nature earned them distinct place in Kabawa¹⁰.

The Igbira Okene and Koto found their ways into Lokoja having experienced wars of raiding particularly that of Masaba (Emir of Bida). Baikie and his British colleagues protected these groups and settled them in Angua Patankoto and Felele¹¹.

The Oworo inhabited the Agbaja Plateau of the former Kabba Province. They were mostly farmers, fishermen and hunters. Their settlements were principally behind mount Patti. Baikie induced them to move down to the new settlement of Lokoja. They moved down and found their Angua called Angua *Salama- leikun*¹² or Karaworo quarters.

The Bassa Nges settlement in Lokoja was as a result of slave raid carried out by the Emir of Bida around the 1840s and 1850s. the Bassa Nges fled their homes found a new land in Gbobe from there they spread to Mozum, consequently as migration continued they moved into a village called Ganaja from where some of them moved to Lokoja heartland. They were the people that lived in Adankolo and Lokongoma in Lokoja.

The Nupe speaking people lived around the confluence of Kaduna and Gbako rivers. They also lived in Lafiagi, Tsonga, Pategi etc. due to expansion and spread they settled in Kupa district. The Nupes were terrible slave raiders and so they terrorized the vicinity of mount Patti. With the creation of Lokoja, some of them gave up their raiding activities and settled down to an orderly livelihood. The Nupes, when they finally settled in Lokoja, had their Angwas¹³ at Nupawa and Cantonment.

There were however, infiltration of foreigners from Sierra Leone, Liberia, Gambia, and Gold Coast who also settled in Lokoja. These group of people served as missionaries, company constabulary clerks etc.

The nature of inter – group relations that existed in Lokoja was that where all the component groups that converged were so closely knitted together in terms of socio – political and economic activities.

MIGRATIONS, TRADES, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL RELATIONS

Lokoja as it were was a home of multi – ethnic groups where there were convergence of different nationalities whose interests were based on economic opportunities prevalent in the area. It is important to stress that the economic opportunities inherent in this region were premised on the rivers Niger and Benue. Apart from the economic opportunities, some migrants according to Travellers' accounts¹⁴ dispersed into the town of Lokoja as a result of the activities of the Masaba and his allies, yet others for

what the various mountains could provide in terms of games and protection. In this circumstance, migration was a *sine qua non* in the formation and development of Lokoja.

As the people lived together, interacted, shared similar beliefs and social relations, trades were encouraged as small scale industries developed for example, the cotton and Ginnery industries. Indeed, the presence of European companies, for instance, UAC, UTC, RNC, etc further strengthened the existing trade relations between these different nationalities. It is worthy to note that trade especially in kola nuts, livestock, pepper, groundnut, cotton etc were carried out on an organized trading network among the different nationalities within Lokoja and the confluence region¹⁵, thereby engendering diffusion of ideas, cultures and social relations between the Hausas, Nupes, Kakandas, Igalas, Oworos, Igbirras, Bassas, and even foreign settlers.¹⁶

Political relationship between the various ethnic groups in Lokoja, particularly with the coming of the Europeans was acrimonious. The presence of the Masaba from Bida who have taken over trade opportunities in Lokoja also dominated the politics of the area. The other existing ethnic groups e.g. the Igbirra Koto, Igala, Bassa and so on became embittered particularly with the preference given to the Hausa Masaba. The need to fight common enemies became imminent, consequently their social relations strengthened.

Realizing the coherence between the various ethnic groups against the Europeans and the Masaba, various punitive measures were meted to the groups whose recalcitrance was described by consul Fell as 'baseless'¹⁷. This consequently led to immediate subjugation of Lokoja and the sovereignty of her rulers.

As a consequent of district creation and readjustment, Lokoja was carved into Igbira Native Authority system. This implies that the traditional and local government in Lokoja was under the supervision of the Atta Igbirra. This was unpopular with the people. They viewed this as pure "neo – colonialisms"¹⁸. They considered the Atta's rule as draconian as he was ultimately carrying out the dictates of the Europeans.

Protests were organized by the people of Lokoja (including the various nationalities in the area). This was an opportunity for the people to push their internal division and ethnicism to the background and 'disguised' to be united against a common enemy. The activities of the Lokoja men Progressive

Association (LMPA) and Lokoja Indigenous Union (LIU) tremendously assisted the people in their anti – colonial struggle. Consequently, an acceptable traditional institution of MAIGARI was installed¹⁹.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is evident that Lokoja, a once quiet small village near water called Panda (named after Shrub) has through the intervention of the Europeans transformed into a cosmopolitan setting thereby assuming a meeting point for the various ethnic groups around the Niger – Benue confluence Area. The interactions of these various nationalities in the areas of Trades, Politics and socio – religion created better living condition that enhanced sustainable development which fostered cohesion and unity that existed amongst the people. Thus far unequivocally therefore, it can be said that inter – group relationship existed in Lokoja over the years.

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- Chief Aduka, an Oworo Chief who came to settle at the foot of mount Patti in Lokoja was a Muslim convert whose regular greeting mode was Salamaleikun (peace be upon this home). So his settlement area became known and called Angwa Salamaleikun. See NAK/Loko Prob/30. See also Panaki, C.N. "Lokoja: "The Formation..." ibid
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16. There were many Sierra Leoneans, Gambians, Ghanaians, and so on that lived in Lokoja assimilated the cultures of the people wholistically. Their offsprings are today indigenes of Lokoja and they enjoyed no discrimination.
17. Ohiare, J.A. The Kingdom of Igu and Opanda C1700 – 1939; A Case Study of Inter – Group Relations” Ph.D Thesis, ABU Zaria, 1988. See also Abdullahi, M. Y. Migration as A factor...
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18. Atta’s supervisory role in Lokoja was considered by the people as a new form of colonialism. This was probably attributed to what they considered as Atta Igbirra high handedness in governance.
19. MAIGARI an Hausa word meaning the owner of the town. The installation of this monarch marked the end of Atta’s Wokili (Representative) in Lokoja. It was like the end of a tyrant.