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## LUGARD AND THE CREATION OF PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION IN NORTHERN NIGERIA 1900-1918<sup>(1)</sup>

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**ABSTRACT** This paper discusses the roles played by Lord Frederick Lugard in the creation of provincial administration in Northern Nigeria. During his tenure as the High Commissioner from 1900 to 1906, the provinces he created were more or less "paper" provinces. This was so as the British colonial government had just been established in Northern Nigeria and thus exercised little or no control over most of the provinces. As the creation of the provinces was not preceded by a thorough study, and understanding of the customs and the indigenous administrative system of the people, Lugard's policies created serious problems. For instance, some ethnic groups were placed in provinces where they should not be. This provoked reactions from the people. Some colonial officials also reacted unfavourably to the creation of the provincial administration because of the huge expenditure involved.

During his period as Governor-General of Nigeria, 1912-1918, Lugard embarked on the amalgamation of some provinces in Northern Nigeria. Like his previous efforts, this failed to materialize. The failure could be blamed on the character of Lugard and the style of his administration, as well as the peculiar circumstances of the governed. In spite of these problems, the provincial structure created by Frederick Lugard formed the bedrock of the British administration in Northern Nigeria in particular, and Nigeria in general.

**Key Words:** Lugard; Provincial administration; Peoples' reactions; Northern Nigeria.

### INTRODUCTION: THE ANTECEDENTS

As he was the first High Commissioner of Northern Nigeria, one could easily make the mistake of alluding every administrative innovation in the region to Frederick Lugard. One such problem where wrong allusion is made is the indirect rule system. Lugard is often referred to as the architect of the system (Crowther, 1978). Robert Hannah has shown that the introduction of indirect rule actually pre-dated Lugard (Hannah, 1969). It cannot, however, be denied that it was under Lugard's leadership that indirect rule became a dominant colonial philosophy in Nigeria.

Similarly, Lugard could not claim the entire credit for the introduction of the idea of the provincial system in Northern Nigeria. For instance, in July 1898, the Marguess of Salisbury set up the Niger Committee under the chairmanship of the Earl of Selborne to look into the best form of British administration in the Nigerian area (Foreign Office Records, 1898). The Committee recommended the division of the Nigerian area into two broad provinces, namely, "Soudan" and "Maritime." The "Soudan" province comprised Northern Nigeria, while the "Maritime" included the entire Southern Nigeria. The ninth degree parallel was

adopted as the dividing line between the two provinces. The committee also recommended that the administration of the Nigerian area be conducted through the medium of provincial governors "under the direct superintendence of the colonial office" (Foreign Office Records, 1898:79). It is therefore clear that Lugard was not the originator of the idea of provincial administration. Nevertheless, when he assumed the mantle of leadership of Northern Protectorate in 1900, Lugard became the most articulate and persistent exponent of the provincial system.

## LUGARD: THE MAN AND HIS LEADERSHIP ROLE IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that any discussion on the colonial history of Northern Nigeria will not be complete without reference to Lugard. By the Order-in-Council of 1899, Colonel Frederick John Dealtry Lugard was appointed High Commissioner of Northern Nigeria (Colonial Office Record 1899a). Prior to this appointment, Lugard had an impressive military career. He enlisted in the British imperial army at the age of 20. He served in the Afghanistan War of 1879–1880, the Sudan campaign of 1885, the Burma field force in 1886–1887, and the British East Africa and Royal Niger Company, as commandant in 1888 and 1890–1898 respectively (Lugard, 1898). Lugard's experience before he became High Commissioner had been entirely military. Therefore, he saw his appointment in Northern Nigeria as essentially a military assignment to be executed with military precision.

Unlike his Southern counterpart, William Macgregor, Frederick Lugard lacked tact and sympathetic understanding of the subject people. He was also a man who would not brook any criticism of his administrative measures. Indeed Joyce Carry (Muffett, 1964:95) described Lugard as, "a mean man and spiteful man. He will take a great deal of trouble to put an enemy or a critic out of trouble." Lugard also developed enormous appetite for details and had the habit of doing everything himself (Lugard, 1968). All orders flowed from him downwards and he desired that all matters however minute be referred to him.

When Frederick Lugard was appointed High Commissioner, some concerns were expressed in some quarters. In the first place, Lugard preferred the title of Governor to High Commissioner as the latter title looked to him a shade lower than the former. The High Commissioner could only issue proclamations whereas a governor could make ordinances. Furthermore, Lugard saw his new administrative assignment as a through-going concern, a notion which made Reginald Antrobus (Hannah, 1969:172) express concern. He stated, "I am afraid that Colonel Lugard has gotten it into his head that we are going to set up a regular colonial administration in Nigeria...what we really want to establish is a kind of diplomatic administration."

Frederick Lugard's military background had schooled him to act swiftly and with military precision in any official task assigned to him. It was obvious even before sailing to Nigeria in 1900, that he was prepared to force rapid administrative development in the Northern Protectorate. In late 1899, he submitted an administrative master plan to Joseph Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for the Col-

onies, which contained among other things, the staff strength required for the initial take-off and housing arrangements. He budgeted for his plan, the sum of 139,000 pounds. Out of this sum, 18,155 pounds was allocated as emoluments for the staff in the Political Department (Colonial Office Record, 1899b). It was Lugard's intention to establish a Resident Administration within the framework of provincial structure. According to him, "Resident" implies duty of political or advisory nature, and served as a link in the chain of responsibility downwards. This system was essentially suitable in Northern Nigeria where emirate system had been established. The colonial office was shocked by his ambitious plan. The official reactions show clearly that the plan was not well received. For instance, W. A. Mercer did not "see how a commencement on so large a scale can be held to be either necessary or prudent" (Colonial Office Record, 1899b:4). He further argued that a "Resident Administration" at that stage was expensive and hence should be shelved. In its place, he advocated the employment of Traveling Commissioner as was the case in Southern Nigeria. He thought that method would be cheap to run. In his reaction, Edward Wingfield described Lugard's administrative plan as "much too exalted and contemplate a more complete administration than is possible for some time to come" (Colonial Office Record, 1899b:6). Joseph Chamberlain also expressed much concern at the pace Lugard was pushing matters. He remarked, "I am a little afraid, that he (Lugard) wants to go too quickly" (Colonial Office Record, 1899b:7).

Following several unfavourable comments on Lugard's administrative plan, he was advised to review it. He submitted a revised estimate of 84,000 pounds but warned against a reduction of the political staff as they were crucial in the new administration and in the opening-up of the country. He also upheld his plan to introduce a Resident Administration. In contrast, "Commissioner" connotes function of direct administrative nature which was applicable to the less advanced regions of Southern Nigeria (Kirk-Greene, 1965). His revised estimate was officially approved and the stage was set for Lugard to create the provincial units.

## CREATION OF PROVINCIAL UNITS

On January 1, 1900, Frederick Lugard announced to the people gathered on the parade ground at Lokoja that he had taken over the administration of Northern Protectorate. What he really took over was a restricted territory of Kabba and Ilorin, "together with a strip on either side of the river Niger and Benue" (Kirk-Greene, 1965:23). The remaining parts of the Northern Protectorate were outside British control. It was this restricted zone where the British had some influence which formed the core area of the initial provincial units created by Lugard.

Though the Niger Committee of 1898 recommended the grouping of Northern Nigeria under "Sudan Province," Lugard ignored this recommendation and went ahead to divide the Northern Protectorate into five provinces, namely, Middle Niger, Benue, and Kano which were described as the "civil provinces," and the rest, Borgu and Borno. There were called the "military provinces" (Colonial Office Record, 1900b). The "civil provinces" were assumed to be areas where the British

had some form of control which made it possible for a regular administration to be introduced in the provinces. In reality, the British presence was only felt in few areas in Middle Niger and Benue. The former included Kabba and Ilorin, and the latter comprised the Middle Benue region. The Fulani emirates of Sokoto, Gwandu, Zaria, Kano, and Katsina were classified as within Kano Province. These emirates were still powerful and British control was yet to be established over them.

For the smooth take-off of the newly created provinces, Frederick Lugard required capable and experienced men. In consultation with George Goldie, men like William Wallace, Watts, and H. P. Hewby were requested to transfer their services to the new administration. These men had wide and varied experiences, having served in various capacities under the defunct Royal Niger Company (RNC) (Foreign Office Record, 1887). For instance, William Wallace had put in over 22 years in the service of the company and rose through the ranks to become the Agent General (Flint, 1960). He and Hewby transferred their services to the new administration, while Watts chose to remain with the company which assumed a new name: Niger Company.

The Colonial Office also assisted in recruiting staff, and in 1900, nine administrative officers were employed. Three of them hardly reported for duty before they were re-posted to South Africa (Colonial Office Record, 1900a). The following six officers were deployed to the provinces in the following order: William Wallace, who was promoted to the rank of First Class Resident and also made Deputy High Commissioner, headed the Middle Niger Province. He was assisted by two Assistant Residents, namely, H. Cummings, and Dr. D. W. Carnegie. In charge of Benue province were W. P. Hewby, a third-class Resident, and Major A. Burdon. A Lt. Col. G. V. Kemball was assigned to the "military provinces" (Colonial Office Record, 1900a). No officer was assigned to Kano Province as the British influence in the region was weak. In fact, the people in Kano Province acknowledged only the authority of the *caliph*<sup>(2)</sup> of Sokoto as their spiritual overlord. The *caliph* refused to recognize the British Protectorate over Sokoto Caliphate. This fact is contained in the Colonial Report on Northern Nigeria for the period covering January 1, 1900 to March 31, 1901 (National Archives Ibadan, 1900). In the report, Frederick Lugard noted, "During the past year we can hardly say to have had any relations with Sokoto, Gando (Gwandu) Kano, and Katsena (Katsina). A copy in vernacular of the proclamation announcing the transfer was sent to Sokoto, and my messenger was treated with indignity."

It is significant to note that 50% of the British staff strength in the Northern Protectorate was concentrated in the Middle Niger Province because it was the only province in which the British could boast of any form of control. Lokoja became the headquarters of the province and the capital of Northern Protectorate. Since Ilorin remained hostile to the British administration after its defeat by the RNC troops in 1897 (Colonial Office Record, 1898), Wallace's attention was focused on Lokoja and Kabba. From Lokoja, he made reconnoitering visits to some areas of Kabba, Bunu, and Yagba and submitted regular reports (National Archives Kaduna, 1914a).

A recurrent theme in Wallace's reports was the concern about the vastness of the

province which made effective administration difficult. Lugard also admitted that "each (Resident) has an enormous area to supervise" (Colonial Office Record, 1901:9). It became clear that for an effective administration to be realized, more provinces had to be created. The seven provinces created in August 1900 aimed at achieving this objective. Provinces were made by breaking up the existing Middle Niger and Benue provinces into smaller administrative units, namely, Kabba, Ilorin, Bassa, the Upper and Lower Benue, and Middle Niger. Borgu which at this time ceased to be a military zone, became the seventh province.

At this time, the Northern emirates had not been effectively incorporated into the provincial structure. Between 1901 and 1903, Lugard embarked on a systematic conquest of the emirates which was concluded with the conquest of Sokoto on March 15, 1903 (Muffet, 1964). The capitulation of Sokoto Caliphate led Lugard to create 13 provinces in 1903. The provinces counted 16 in 1904. The additional provinces were Kabba, Ilorin, Bassa, Muri, Adamawa, Masarawa, Nupe, Borgu, Kontagora, Zaria, Gwandu, Sokoto, Kano, Katagun, Bornu, and Bauchi.

Though some selected army officers were chosen as Residents, they were not enough to administer the provinces. Lugard's repeated appeal to the Colonial Office for more staff did not yield positive result and this created problems in the implementation of his administrative plan. It was an effort to maximize the available staff that forced Lugard to reconstitute the 16 provinces into eight "double provinces." This was done merely by merging two contiguous provinces into one (Colonial Office Record, 1906). For instance, Kabba and Ilorin were reorganized as a double province. Each double province was controlled by a Senior Resident. Lugard hoped that this arrangement would lead to increased efficiency.

On the contrary, the double provincial system led to inefficiency, as a result of its unmanageable size and the poor communications. For example, the territorial extent of the combined provinces of Kabba and Ilorin was about 73,416 km<sup>2</sup> with virtually no motorable road linking the two (Colonial Office Record, 1905). In addition, the administrative work at the headquarters increased tremendously which made it difficult for the District Officers to tour the outlying districts. These factors led to the abolition of the double provincial system in 1906. In its place, 14 provinces were established. This was the situation before Lugard's resignation in 1906 (Anjorin, 1966). Summing up Lugard's administrative achievement, Captain C.W.J. Orr stated, "He (Lugard) left to his successor a country well organized, divided into provinces each with its separate staff, with garrisons occupying central position (Orr, 1911:179)."

Orr's assessment of Lugard's achievement was not only exaggerated but failed to reflect the reality of the situation in Northern Nigeria. Lugard made no meaningful efforts to understand the people he administered. No study was made of the people's culture and socio-political systems before imposing the provincial administration. Lugard executed his administrative plan of dividing Northern Nigeria into provinces without any long-term objective in mind. He just created them to meet a certain exigent situation. This orientation inevitably led to frequent administrative changes, resulting in constant diminution, expansion, and deletion of some provinces. As a result, the British provincial administration in Northern Nigeria remained consistently in flux (Apata, 1986). One cannot but agree with

Reginald Antrobus, the Permanent Under Secretary of the Colonial Office, when he described Frederick Lugard as "not a prudent or fore-seeing administrator, his schemes are not well thought out" (Colonial Office Record, 1904:10). Furthermore, most of the provinces created by Lugard were nothing but "paper" provinces. The provinces were not provided with secretariats or councils. Lugard was consistently hampered by a shortage of man-power and the provinces were not adequately supervised. In one of his reports (National Archives Ibadan, 1900:15), Frederick Lugard himself admitted that, "insufficiency of the staff has hampered my efforts and thrown upon me personally so much detail work that I have been unable to accomplish as much in other directions as I otherwise might have done."

### PROVINCIAL AMALGAMATION: FAILURE OF EXPERIMENT

The amalgamation of provinces was not entirely Lugard's making. His successor in 1906, Edouard Percy Cranwill Girouard attempted to make the provincial system effective. In 1908, he sanctioned the amalgamation of provinces that were considered enviable. For instance, Bassa Province which was inhabited largely by the Igala and Idoma people had been described as small and unviable (National Archives Kaduna, 1906). It was therefore decided to merge it with Kabba Province. By amalgamating Bassa and Kabba, Girouard aimed at creating a virile administration whereby the few available staff could be judiciously utilized. The amalgamated provinces became known as Lokoja Province. Dr. F. Cargil was appointed as the Resident and ranked second-class. In spite of the amalgamation, each province was allowed to retain a Resident of third-class rank who was answerable to Cargil.

The experiment collapsed in 1909 after only about a year's trial. The failure of the experiment was due to a number of reasons. Firstly, the two provinces were not truly amalgamated as they continued to function as distinct administrative units. The head office at Lokoja merely served as a clearing house. Secondly, the poor communication system and the frequent transfer of staff hampered the proper functioning of the experiment. For these reasons, Percy Girouard declared (National Archives Kaduna, 1909:8), "I have decided that, as the recent amalgamation of Kabba and Bassa has no distinct administrative advantage in its present form, it will be better to revert to independent units." Following the separation of the amalgamated provinces, Captain Byng-Hall was appointed the Resident of Bassa Province, assisted by Woodhouse. Kabba Province had Mr. Lang as Resident, while Mr. Groom was appointed as his assistant.

When Lugard returned to Nigeria in 1912, he ordered the provincial amalgamation of Kabba and Ilorin. The implementation of this order reached an advanced stage in 1914. Lugard ordered the merger for three principal reasons. Firstly, a viable native administration based on the emirate system had evolved in Ilorin Province, while Kabba Province was still regarded as a province without an organised administration. Secondly, there was the need to ensure the optimum utilization of the available human resources. This became imperative following the outbreak of the First World War. Before the war there were only four British administrative

officers for the whole of Kabba Province. These were reduced to two by 1915. Similarly, forty out of the seventy policemen stationed at Lokoja were withdrawn (National Archives Kaduna, 1915b). Hence, it was the view of the British colonial authorities that the merger would "result in certain economies, and better work generally" (National Archives Kaduna, 1914c:622). Thirdly, Yoruba speaking people constituted the dominant group in both provinces and were geographically contiguous. This point was stressed in Lugard's letter to Lewis Harcourt, the Secretary of State for the Colonies (National Archives Kaduna, 1914b).

The merger plan was fully implemented on May 25, 1915. It has been shown that under the double provincial system of 1906, Kabba and Ilorin were brought together under very loose administrative arrangements. The 1915 merger was a marked departure from the 1906 arrangement. It aimed at phasing out Kabba Province by incorporating it completely into Ilorin Province. To this end, Kabba Province was reconstituted as a division of Ilorin Province. Under the new arrangement, the post of a Resident for Kabba was considered redundant. Thus J.A. Ley Greaves, who had been the substantive Resident of the province since 1912, retired following the merger. His place was filled by an officer of much lower rank, D. Cator, a District Officer. H.K.V. Elphinstone became the Resident of the reorganized Ilorin Province with the head-quarters at Ilorin (National Archives Kaduna, 1915a).

Two years after the merger, there were signs that the reorganization was doomed to fail. The skeletal staff left at Kabba could not cope with the mounting administrative work. They were expected to dispatch reports and other official correspondence meant for Zungeru via Ilorin. This process led to long delay and duplication of efforts. At Kabba, the British officers complained of neglect. At Ilorin, they complained of over-work. In the end, the amalgamation experiment collapsed. In a confidential letter to H.S. Goldsmith, the Lt-Governor of the Northern Provinces, Elphinstone declared that the amalgamation has not been a success administratively and economically (National Archives Kaduna, 1917).

## REACTIONS TO THE CREATION OF PROVINCIAL SYSTEM

In both the emirate and non-emirate areas of Northern Nigeria, people reacted against the creation of the provincial system. Three areas of serious opposition to the provincial system could be identified. Firstly, the creation of the provincial administration was seen by the people as an imposition of British rule. This was the case with the people in the Fulani emirates. It was no wonder that the *caliph* of Sokoto was among the first traditional rulers to condemn the British administrative measures.

Another area of opposition was that the provincial system was alien to the people, which inevitably led to an extensive administrative reorganization of Northern Nigeria (Apata, 1986). Since Lugard's provincial system was conceived in classic military and autocratic fashion, the people, especially in the non-emirate areas were organized under sole Native Authority System. Under this system, orders flowed downwards from the District Officers and Residents alike. The provincial



administration also led to the evolution of administrative centralization among the traditionally decentralized societies in Northern Nigeria. Naturally, the people resisted this alien system, and a series of punitive expeditions were dispatched to the areas. These punitive visitations continued in Ebira, Kukuruku (Afemai) and Tiv districts well after the First World War.

The creation of the provincial system brought along with it the need to demarcate the provincial boundaries. This is a point that incited most violent opposition from the people. The provincial boundaries cut through farms and shrines, and people of the same ethnic background were split into two or more different provinces. Among the districts so affected were the independent districts of Awe in Benue Province, Yauri and Dabai in Sokoto; Katsina was merged with Zaria Province; Abinshi, Tiv, and other people of close cultural affinities were divided between Plateau and Benue Provinces. In Kabba Province, the West Yagba people were separated from the rest of Yagbaland and incorporated into the Nupe Province. The Akoko people who ought to have been included in Ondo Province in Southern Nigeria were incorporated into Kabba Province. This unhealthy situation created tensions especially at the provincial boundaries. For instance, the Yagba people in the Western Sector, rioted in 1903, and in 1928–1929, staged the *Mokqobon* movement,<sup>(3)</sup> to press for their separation from the Nupe Province. The Akoko people also resisted their inclusion in Kabba Province and in 1918, they were transferred to Southern Nigeria (National Archives Kaduna, 1914d). Nevertheless, most of the anomalies created by the imposition of provincial structure were not removed until under the governorship of Donald Cameron in 1930–1935 (Gailey, 1974). During this period, a series of administrative reorganizations were carried out to remove some of the administrative defects under the leadership of Frederick Lugard.

## CONCLUSION

This paper highlights essentially the roles which Frederick Lugard played in the creation of the provincial administration in Northern Nigeria. It also corrects the hitherto wrong assumption often made by some scholars who attribute the initial administrative innovations in Northern Nigeria to Lugard. It has been shown that there were some antecedents. One must, however, concede that it was Lugard who laid the solid foundation for the provincial administration.

The paper focused principally on two periods. The first period was 1900–1906, when Lugard served as the High Commissioner. Most of the provinces created in this period were, as Kirk-Greene described, "more of hope than effectiveness" (Kirk-Greene, 1965). This was so as British control of most of the provinces was ineffective. Avoidable mistakes were made following the creation of the provinces. For example, some ethnic groups were wrongly placed in some provinces. This mistake would have been avoided if Lugard had carried out thorough studies on the peoples and societies before creating the provinces. The second period, 1912–1918, was when Lugard was Governor-General. Though the major assignment for Lugard in this period was the amalgamation of the Northern and

Southern Protectorates of Nigeria, the period also witnessed the amalgamation of some provinces in Northern Nigeria. The guiding principle for the amalgamation was generally sound. However the experiment failed due to the unwieldy size of the provinces, inadequate infrastructure, and poor communication system.

The creation of the provinces provoked reactions especially from the governed. They were neither consulted nor involved in the planning and execution of the administrative arrangements. The colonial administrative arrangements did not seem to pay much attention to the interests of the people, and as a result, some of them were grouped into provinces where they should not be. The aggrieved people protested. In spite of the shortcomings and the reactions, the creation of the provinces served as pillars of the British administration in Northern Nigeria in particular, and Nigeria as a whole.

## NOTES

- (1) A revised version of a paper presented at the Conference on "Studies on Northern Nigeria" in Honour of Late Dr. Abel Olorunfemi Anjorin, held at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, Thursday, June 2, 1988.
- (2) Caliph. The title of a muslim leader, the commander of the faith.
- (3) *Mqkqbbn* means, "we reject the Nupe rule." The people referred to as Yagba protested against their inclusion in Nupe Province.

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- 1914d. SNP 17/8/K. 7466, Boundary between Northern and Southern Provinces.
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