

'WE SHALL PROBABLY CALL THE PLACE ZARIA, AS IT IS SUCH A PRETTY NAME' – MEDICAL DIS- COURSE AND TOWN PLANNING IN NORTHERN NIGERIA, 1899-1914

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Abstract

Early colonial administrations faced multiple challenges in their daily work. In specific areas, administrators reached out to science as a tool to understand and support their decisions. Town planning was an issue that brought together Europeans and Africans, and therefore created common living and working spaces for them. It became an important issue immediately after the conquest of Northern Nigerian territories, especially because a growing number of Europeans started living in the region on a more permanent basis. Town planning often seemed an arbitrary policy, yet, as it is demonstrated in this paper, daily administration reached out to science as helping tool to guide and validate their goals. Segregating Europeans from Africans was a question that very soon became a hotly debated topic, that was supported or rejected by some governors. This contested question shows that colonial policy was not by default racial based, let alone racist.

Keywords

Nigeria, history, colonialism, town planning, malaria, science

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Introduction

Town planning in early 20th century colonial settings was an arbitrary and relatively fast process. More often than not it was influenced by perceived scientific arguments. In Northern Nigeria this approach was based on medical grounds, where anti-malaria policy strongly influenced initial town planning ideas.

The quotation in the title comes from Governor Bell of Northern Nigeria in 1910 and summarises the arbitrary nature of British ideas about town planning and urban development. The year 1910 marked the tenth year of British rule, and Bell was the second governor to live and fall in the shadow of Lugard, the maker of Northern Nigeria.

The period between 1900 and 1910 was a turbulent and eventful chapter in the history of the lands of northern Nigeria. While the early years saw the initial British conquest of the Sokoto caliphate, the years leading up to the eve of the Great War witnessed the construction of the administration of a blueprint colony for British indirect rule, an idea that lay behind the more important territories of the British Empire. Emphasis was made on the participation of, and the reliance on, the native rulers as integral elements of this conservative attitude toward the 'white man's burden'. The person who was behind this philosophy was Frederick Dealtry Lugard, who was among Britain's best-known imperial creators. The cradle of this policy was Nigeria, more specifically, Northern Nigeria where he created his own vision of what Kathryn Tidrick (1990) has called the rediscovery of the Punjab.

Northern Nigeria as medical laboratory

Town planning, who should live where and under what circumstances, was among the more important issues the governors addressed in the first 15 years of British rule in Northern Nigeria. Public hygiene, sanitation, and contemporary medical discourses were frequently utilised and relied upon in the process of creating a new settlement. While this discourse turned into a *tool* of power relations once, it often figured as a political trick in the internal rivalries within the colonial administration. The often arbitrary decisions regarding the separation of Europeans and Africans in the colonial environment expressed and accorded with the idea of indirect rule, and were occasionally more than just the idea of who lives where.

Contemporary colonial discourse attributed great importance to fighting diseases that were considered the single largest obstacle to continuous European presence in the tropics. Endemic malaria was the leading disease in European mortality, especially in West Africa. Following Ronald Ross' discovery of mosquitoes' role in malaria transmission, it seemed possible to prevent the spread of the disease. Immediate action followed in a time period where the actual scientific medical discoveries were changing almost daily. Thus around 1900, malaria control had different facets, namely the use of the medicine quinine – the oldest method; mosquito control; and moving away from the infected hosts; or sanitary segregation. It was soon proved that the latter idea represented a dead-end in malaria prevention. Yet, town planning in Northern Nigeria gained most of its influence from this policy. Helen Tilley (2012)

thoroughly writes about the importance and complex interrelation between science and imperialism.

The future separation of Europeans and Africans in northern Nigeria as well as the seeds of Lugard's indirect rule were already revealed at this time. Co-existence between the British on the coast had been a long tradition, while the northern part of the country had rarely seen any serious European penetration apart from the occasional travellers, until the actual British conquest only a few years before the First World War. The most important figure in shaping the British presence was Frederick Lugard. His ideas and opinions strongly influenced the early administration's health and anti-malaria policies. (Home, 2017) Lokoja, the traditional headquarters of the Royal Niger Company (RNC) on the Niger River, close to the confluence of the Benue and the Niger, was abandoned in central Nigeria after Lugard took over the Company's leadership. He supported his argument by saying that the close proximity of native dwellings presented problems that could not be solved other than moving away from the site. (Kubicek, 1969: 151-152) Lokoja's reputation was ill-famed because of its unhealthy conditions that were based on a complex set of reasons, including irregularly used quinine prophylactic, which led to the prevalence of blackwater fever, a dreaded phenomenon of lonely European station life. Lokoja was described as a "straggling row of bungalows" and as "Blackwater Crescent", referring to the prevalence of re-infected malaria. (Larrimore, 1908: 8-9) The place itself was situated on the Niger River, in the form of a small settlement where public buildings and residential premises lay close together, and where Europeans and Africans lived next to one another. This, of course, reflected the RNC policies where the separation of the two would have been totally against the ideas of trade and commerce. Lugard did not like the appearance of the settlement. One reason was that further upstream, a smaller part of the town populated by Africans, polluted the river water. (PP, 1902: 6) His additional arguments maintained that moving away the native settlement was necessary in order *"to do away with the pollution of the water, and with other evils such as the proximity of a haven for thieves and prostitutes, the infection of mosquitoes with malarial germs, and the unsanitary conditions inevitable around a large native town."* (Ibid.) Further north-west of Lokoja, Zungeru was thought to be the ideal settlement for the British military and the administrative body in northern Nigeria. Lugard initiated, and eventually enacted, legislative measures that provided a basis for his centralised policymaking, utilising the principle of segregation. In 1900, the Cantonment Proclamation was enacted, which reserved the right for the High Commissioner to use land for its administrative cantonments wherever it seemed necessary and to make regulations to prevent the occurrence of diseases. In the proclamation, Lugard also reserved the right to enforce orders on the basis of sanitation. (Northern Nigerian Gazette 1900) An Order of Lugard in 1906 extended the cantonment zone to a half-mile radius around all cantonments. In effect, this meant that no native settlements were allowed to exist within half a mile of administrative centres. This was extended to Lokoja in 1904, Zungeru in 1907, and Ilorin in 1910. (Northern Nigerian Blue Book) Through these legal measures,

sanitation and public hygiene became important political tools that were especially significant in town planning.

In Zungeru, he intended to create an administrative capital for the future northern territory, following his ideas of segregated European and African settlements. Lugard's idea of segregation originated in his Indian experiences. This was already recognised by his contemporaries at the Colonial Office, who commented that segregation is "a novelty altogether in West Africa if not in Africa, and is a result of Col. Lugard's Indian experiences." (Colonial Office (CO), 1899, 446/8. Public Record Office, London) As a temporary solution in Lokoja during the first years, Lugard advocated his all-attentive policy to the construction of houses as well as laying out buildings. In 1900, he ordered the removal of the native town from the vicinity of European bungalows. These (i.e. the European houses), in addition, were to be reconstructed on higher grounds '*with an aspect to catch the prevailing breeze*'. (*Annual Report Northern Nigeria 1900-1901*: 27) The emphasis on the breeze could suggest the survival of the nineteenth-century idea of miasmatic theory of diseases, an idea that faded away very slowly especially in West Africa. (For the slow notion of this fading miasmatic theory, see Máthé-Shires László, 2001. For a later period, in general about malaria, see Worboys, 1994) All these actions were one-time solutions as Lugard intended to select a new capital and move away from the Lokoja site entirely. Surveys were taking place at the time to discover, what was thought to be the most suitable location. The importance of this location, and the selecting of the actual site for the future administrative capital, was among Lugard's most pressing problems. (*Annual Report Northern Nigeria 1900-1901*: 8) It must be remembered that the military campaign was not finished, and his troops were also being tied down in the ongoing Ashanti war.

After some careful observations and surveys, Lugard personally selected a site on the Kaduna River, where the distance from the river '*will ...be great enough to free it from the mosquitoes*'. Although his emphasis was based on sanitary principles, it nevertheless must be recalled that the site was far from any populated place and would have required the construction of a steam railway.

The capital was moved in the summer of 1901 to Zungeru. (Heussler, 1968: 26) In 1902, several buildings were completed at the new station, including a bridge, a government house, a native hospital, a gaol, police and military barracks, and eight houses for European civil officers. (PP 1904 LVII. [Cd. 1768] No. 409. *Annual Report Northern Nigeria 1902*: 86-87) In addition to all of this, a light railway was constructed that led to the settlement from the river. Although not stated in detail, the Public Works Extraordinary expenditure between 1901 and 1902 was over £ 64,000. (Ibid: 113) In 1903, the costs of construction at Zungeru reached £ 78,665. (PP 1905 LII [Cd.2238] No. 437. *Annual Report Northern Nigeria 1903*: 32)

The early administration of the new territories required frequent camping among, and the touring of Europeans that eventually turned many resting stations into temporary administrative settlements most often manned by a few officers. (Heussler, *The British*, 147-169) The northern Nigerian out-station system was in full operation

by 1905, following the principle of segregation as advocated by Lugard's sanitation policy, which included a required 400-yard distance from every native settlement. (PP 1907 LIV [Cd. 32285] No. 526. *Annual Report Northern Nigeria 1905-06*: 96-97) By 1906, the basic outlines for administrative settlements had been laid down which enabled the government to concentrate on '*...the eradication of malaria ... as part of the routine sanitary work.*' (PP 1908 LXIX [Cd. 3729] No. 551. *Annual Report Northern Nigeria 1906-07*)

The relatively tough circumstances of the out-stations, along with neglected cases of malaria, often led to the occurrence of blackwater fever. In 1908, according to the Annual Report, there were a higher number of cases among officials than in the Gold Coast, although the number in the coastal colony was almost three times higher. Malaria prevention, segregation, and the usage of quinine were mentioned, in addition to building some mosquito-proof houses in the cantonment of Lokoja. (PP 1910 LXIV [Cd. 4964] No. 633. *Annual Report Northern Nigeria 1908-1909*: 14-15) It was mostly to these measures that the gradual decrease in European malaria cases was attributed. As the report summarised, the number of European residents increased from 322 in 1904 to 499 in 1908 while the registered malaria cases decreased from 515 to 307. (Ibid: 14) The 'native' problem in endemic malaria and public sanitation were still considered when the report said '*The sanitation of the native towns away from the various provincial headquarters leaves much to be desired, but native habits are difficult to change.*' (Ibid: 15) At the same time, it was admitted that there was no possibility for the assessment of African death rates, except among those who were treated in hospitals, either at Lokoja or Zungeru. Whereas the estimated population of the territory was 7,100,000, the number of cases treated in 1908 were 744 admitted patients and 2,368 outpatients. (Ibid: 10) Small-pox vaccination, a significant element of closeness to Africans' bodies, was in the same year 3,380, and only extended again to government employed Africans. (Ibid: 15) In 1909, a sanitation survey began among the native villages in the close neighbourhood of the out-stations. (PP 1911 LI [Cd. 5467] No. 674. *Annual Report Northern Nigeria 1909*: 17) This programme continued in 1910, when with the help of sanitation officers, new native villages were built. In the same year, a commercial quarter was built at Zungeru, where again, the 400-yard distance from neighbouring native settlements was taken into consideration during its construction. (PP 1912-13, LVIII [Cd. 6007] No. 704. *Annual Report Northern Nigeria 1910-1911*)

While Governor Girouard followed Lugard's footsteps between 1906 and 1909 (due to the fact that he was a railway engineer and was engaged in the construction

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of the railway line), Henry Hesketh Bell, the former head of British administration in Uganda between 1906 and 1909 tended to have somewhat different views. Heussler argues that both of them acted in the shadow of Lugard's, having to option but accept the high degree of autonomy of his residents. (Heussler, *The British*, 38-39) He again tried to relocate the administrative capital of the territory to Zaria. (*Bell Papers Synopses, 1900-1924 (For family)*) Bell arrived in Nigeria in late 1909 and in two months he advocated the removal of the capital. (See comments dated on 18th February 1910. Available at the Royal Commonwealth Society Archives, University Library, Cambridge.) He personally designed a town plan for the new capital in late 1910 that included '*broad avenues, an abundance of open spaces, a uniform size of building plot and easy access to latrine conveniences.*' (Ibid, December 1910) His contemporary letters reveal a higher degree of enthusiasm when he wrote to his auntie that 'You can imagine what a delight it will be to me to lay out all the squares and avenues, and the streets, that will be required, and you may be sure that I will do it on a pretty big scale. (sic)' (Bell to his Auntie, 27th February 1910) Much of the native part of Lokoja was destroyed by a fire in early 1910 that allowed Bell to implement his 'sanitary' ideas in another location as well. (Ibid. Bell to his Auntie, 3rd June 1910) What is important to note about these initiatives is that Bell was aspiring for the amalgamation project of the northern and the southern parts of Nigeria, which was eventually facilitated by Lugard after his return to the country. Town planning was not simply a colonial sphere of power relations, as was the case with Lugard, but here it became a symbol of internal rivalry between different high-ranking politicians. The images of a 'big scale' project suggest that Bell wanted to prove something and leave behind a mark that would differentiate his name from Lugard's. The associations of enormous responsibilities of '*being an absolute ruler of a territory, as big as France, with a population of nearly ten millions*', '*maintaining that 'Such power has never, since, been exercised by any British Colonial Governor'*' all reveal this unique situation, a sort of ultimate 'white man's burden'. (Ibid. Synopses December 1910)

Nigeria, 1912-1914

Frederick Lugard upon returning to Nigeria in 1912, started the amalgamation of the distinctly different northern and southern parts of the country. The different traditions of colonial administration also represented themselves in the region's medical and sanitation policies. Lugard, at the same time, had his own ideas and was intending to implement or at least initiate them. The capital scheme was probably his most grandiose plan where he extensively relied on the principle of segregation. His plan was to remove the capital from the south in Lagos, to the north, where he would have built an administrative cantonment for Europeans. This scheme would have become the ultimate representation of the principle of segregation.

Upon the amalgamation of northern and southern Nigeria, the principle of northern segregation was put forward by Lugard. It was represented in the debate over the future location of the capital of the colony. It is worth following since it provides

an elaborated insight into the ideal representation of segregation, which had been formulated in the earlier years in northern Nigeria. Lugard's capital scheme would have been the administrative formulation of Hill Station, a European urban settlement with its full administrative power, but located as far away from Africans as possible.

During the 1906 amalgamation of the southern protectorate and the colony of Lagos, it was already suggested that the capital should be removed because it had an unhealthy reputation. The time span given for the move was ten to twenty years with no new location being proposed. Lugard however had more precise ideas. The correspondence and Lugard's proposals can be found in the Confidential Print Africa (West), No. 1005. Document No. 3. CO 879/113. On one hand, he proposed that a 'small central capital' should be created by moving the northern administration centre from Zungeru to the future town of Kaduna. The proposal in 1913 represented a very important matter since the northern branch of the railway was not yet complete nor had the plans for the line been completed. Kaduna would have become – as it in fact did – the railway centre of the north. Kaduna was to become the ideal colonial administrative centre where only the British administrators and their trained northern clerks would be working, the latter living at a comfortable distance where they would go to spend their nights. In fact, Lugard went as far as stating that he would be opposed to the establishment of any centre close to densely populated areas. He said that *'It [i.e. the future site of Kaduna, M.L.] is within 50 miles of Zaria, a large native centre and market for supplies, but not too [sic] close to it'*. (Ibid., Enclosure 2) What he meant by "too close" can be estimated by his earlier policies on cantonments and out-stations.

When describing the actual settlement, a site was suggested for European reservation, a separate site for European traders near the railway, and a native settlement quarter for native clerks. On the opposite bank of the river, there was supposed to be a railway settlement probably serving the Europeans who were not officials and the native populations. At the request of the governor, some preliminary surveys were conducted which were aimed at finding a site which was naturally free of insect-causing diseases, especially trypanosomiasis and malaria. Based on these aspects and the type of soil – which was rocky around Zungeru and *'renders gardening and beautifying of the place impossible.'* (Ibid., Enclosure 4) – the other new site was suggested as suitable for the future settlement. Some further observations commenced later in 1913, locating the site at the crossing of the river Kaduna. (Africa (West), No. 1005. Document No. 49) What is interesting about this survey is its actual aim; Lugard was trying to locate the proposed future administrative capital

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of Nigeria with the scheme of removing the centre from the south, especially from Lagos, to the north which was, and for some time, still remained a sort of military garrison.

At the same time, Lugard suggested the removal of the administrative centre from Lagos to an island a few miles south which was later to become present-day Ikoyi. (Africa (West), No. 1005. Document No. 1 and 12) It was argued that the sanitation of Lagos, with a recent outbreak of yellow fever, posed a menace to the European population. He elaborated his view in a secret memo to the CO, stating that the removal of the administrative capital was the opinion of an 'Unofficial Member of Council' (probably the reason for the secrecy of the note) who had been informed that '*the unofficial European community, in consequence of the yellow fever epidemic, are becoming alive to the necessity of segregation, and of living apart from the native community*'. (Africa (West), No. 1005. Document No. 37) Lugard added that this was in conjunction with his plan to buy up the land that was used by Africans and form a segregated area. (Ibid.)

The removal of the capital of Nigeria to Kaduna did not happen, while the plan to form an exclusively European island in Lagos was eventually realised. The role of Lugard in forming the town planning of colonial Nigeria is unquestionable. It is important to note, however, that his argumentation was based on the original principle of sanitary segregation.

He also proposed drastic sanitary measures along the line of segregation in the trading settlements of the Delta, especially Warri, and Forcados. (Lugard to CO, 19th June 1914, Confidential Print Africa No. 1013 Doc. 172., CO 879/114) The long-standing opposition of trading communities was yet again the focus of sanitation, as these places had the highest number of non-officials proportionally in the southeast around this time. Lugard eventually did not succeed in separating the businessmen from their stores and shops but that was partially due to the coming of the war which had a serious impact on future construction. Also, the above-mentioned settlements could be considered as 'old towns' which would have thus limited space for future buildings and an anticipated sanitary corridor. This fact was even recognised by William Simpson who, at the time, was one of the major supporters of segregating Europeans from Africans. (*Minutes of the 71st Meeting of the Advisory Board*, 6th October 1914, Confidential Print Africa No. 1026 Doc. 73., CO 879/115) Lugard announced his views in London also. When the Advisory Board interviewed governors from West Africa, Hugh Clifford, during the same meeting, argued against the application while Lugard argued for it. It was probably the first event when high-ranking officials openly debated the issue and its applicability. (*Minutes of the 68th Meeting of the Advisory Board*, 21st July 1914, Confidential Print Africa No. 1026 Doc. 15., CO 879/115) Clifford's opposition to segregation was to present itself once more, during his governorship in Nigeria following his appointment in 1919. Segregation died away from contemporary colonial discourse in West Africa, as people similar to Hugh Clifford appeared in the administration, thus bringing a new and totally different approach to British colonial presence.

Conclusion

Town planning was an important aspect of early colonial period in Northern Nigeria. The growing number of Europeans living permanently in the region necessitated augmented and nuanced government policies. Governors had strong influence on colonial policies, and more often than not, their decisions – as illustrated by the quote about naming a new settlement by Governor Bell – were arbitrary. Yet, when it came to actual argumentation, the contemporary colonial administrators looked to scientific conclusions supporting their ideas. Even though it seems from aspect an almost openly racist idea, segregating Europeans from Africans had its own scientific argumentation at the time, and thus, seemed to justify arbitrary decisions. Yet, even pro-consuls, like Lugard reached to science to understand the challenges their administration was facing. Therefore, it is hard to argue that they were openly racist in their thinking. ✨

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