

# **Segregation in the City: The Historical Sociology of Segregation in Metropolitan Kano**

By

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## **Extended Abstract**

Kano, the city-capital of Kano State, Northeastern Nigeria, is a very ancient city founded around the 7<sup>th</sup> Century AD as a settlement of some animist blacksmiths. Kano, a traditionally centralised locality, was the most advanced city in pre-colonial northern Nigeria and the largest urban centre in Sudanic West Africa in the 19th century. It was also an important medieval trans-Saharan caravan terminal and metropolis in the region and one of the oldest cities in today's Nigeria. Islam was introduced to the city in the 14th century and became a state religion by the 15th century, and with it came the division of the city into two – the *Birni* (walled, traditional, sometimes called “holy city”) and the *Waje* (the outside city). Apparently, this was done for certain social and religious reasons. But a later reinforcement of the division among the city's residents came in the colonial era when, for some selfish agenda, the colonialist enacted the 1904 *Sabon-Gari* policy.

This paper critically examines the history, nature, politics and social dynamics of the two waves of segregation laws and their implementation in Kano city and the diverse reasons why such laws were put in place. Furthermore, the effect of the two segregatory laws on immigrations into the city is equally investigated for a proper understanding. Furthermore, the socio-cultural implications of the segregatory practices in Kano city are examined with a view to understanding the diverse ways in which the city's segregation has affected the human relations, urban development, and other structures in the city.

Due to the trans-disciplinary nature of this study, an eclectic (multi-disciplinary) framework was employed in the sourcing of its data. Basically, research data were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. These include twenty-five in-person (in-depth) interviews with key-informants (community leaders, political elites of, and migrants and the ‘ordinary man on the street’ from different ethnic and religious groups) in the city. These in-person interviews helped to determine the history and nature of, as well as the basis for the two waves of segregatory laws in the city. Its impact on the city was also interrogated with this group of interviewees. Similarly, six Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were also held to determine collective perceptions, agreements and/or disagreements on the concerns of the study. These investigated issues bordering on the socio-cultural backgrounds and contexts of segregation in Kano city and its impact on and implications for the human relations and democratic development in the city. Furthermore, archival documents and extant literature (published and un-published) germane to the subject of the study were consulted and used for the purposes of this study.

### **Findings:**

The paper reveals that due to the segregation in Kano city, the residents are so violently divided across both ethnic and religious lines, since the segregation is also along those lines. This “we” versus “them” is well played out in the phenomenal “indigene – settler dichotomy” and has been the singular most important reason that explains the violent ethno-religious eruptions that take place in the city so often that it has almost become an annual ritual. Due to the sharp division accentuated by the segregation witnessed in the city, there is an intensification of the ethnic union phenomenon which is found in most Nigerian urban social spaces and which is explainable by the exigencies of migration, urban life and the need for some form of personal and social security among newly arrived migrants in the city. The paper notes that with these trends and developments, there is an intensification of unhealthy

competition and the xenophobic tendencies on the part of the host community/indigenes. This, of course, increases the chances of pogrom against the migrant populace (“settlers”) in the event of an outbreak of ethnic or religious riots, since the settlers are well segregated away from the hosts/indigenes.

The paper also identifies the difficulty in integration by the migrants as yet another consequence of segregation in the city. Indeed, as a cosmopolitan urban milieu in the age of multiculturalism, one would have expected the fusing of cultures, ideas, classes, religions, genders and other notable variables/identities akin to a multicultural world, but this is not the case in Kano due to the overriding effects of segregation. Due to the trends in segregatory laws in Kano, the city has been witnessing uneven urban and social development. This is due to the fact that the *Birni* is desired by the natives to still be ‘traditional’ in outlook, that is, without unnecessary Western-style influences that could corrupt their indigenous systems. However, in the outskirts of the city (*Waje*), the rate of urban transformation and development is rather rapid, remarkable and ‘Western’ in nature. In terms of social development, the living standards in the two wards are significantly different, including the nature and modes of dressing of their respective inhabitants.

The paper also notes remarkable positive trends in the city, despite the hindrances being put in place by segregated neighbourhoods. Firstly, there has been a continued immigration into the city notwithstanding the innate segregations in place. In other words, the city poses an interesting puzzle of never witnessing a lull in immigrations regardless of the negative developments associated with its segregations. Secondly, in recent times, Kano city is also witnessing new forms of identity formation and shift occasioned by the coming together, especially through marriages, of a new crop of ‘Nigerian citizens’ who are willing to embrace “the other” against all odds and structural impediments put in place by segregation. Thus, more than ever, the city is witnessing greater trends in inter-ethnic and inter-religious unions among its youth and young residents.