

Departure of Europeans from Africa: What Impacts on the Cityscapes?

Extended Abstract

Background

This study is based on the city of Kano, northern Nigeria. Kano was the leading and most prosperous commercial city in the sub Saharan Africa during the pre-colonial period. The city's trade and commercial antecedents drew number of Europeans of different nationalities long before its colonisation in the early 20th century. When Nigeria attained independence Kano emerged as mega province and commercial hub of northern Nigeria. Kano maintains abiding links with Europe from ancient through modern times. Commercial articles like textiles made in Manchester (UK), and papers, glasses and cutleries made in Solingen and Nuremberg (Germany) were being imported to Kano market around 17th and 18th century. Similarly, clothes woven and dyed at Kano were exported to Europe. Europeans from Greek, Cyprus, Croatia and Germany were known to have stayed in Kano in such periods. The city of Kano unlike many others in northern Nigeria maintained and emboldened its link with Europe through the railway which connected the landlocked city to the Trans Atlantic trade. The city is also connected to European metropolises via air routes. Kano's link with Europe was also bold during the Second World War when it served as one of the bases or convenient places for the allied forces. Kano is also one of the cities that are well studied by European scholars. It also received in its palace several European heads of states and governments from across the Europe.

The arrival of British colonial rule effected permanent changes on the spatial organisation of Kano city. The Europeans established their settlement at Nassarawa few kilometres out of the ancient walled city. The new settlement meant for Europeans was planned with facilities, infrastructure and institutions based on the European town lifestyles. The Nassarawa Government Reserve Area (GRA) became the habitat of colonial government officers and captains of the European trans-

national corporations. Conservative estimate of the number of Europeans at Kano during the independence at 1960 was put at around five hundred. This number however leapt to over one thousand in the late 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s. These decades corresponded with period of rapid development witnessed by Kano city. European manpower was needed in various sectors of the economy and for running key public offices that need skilled manpower. Europeans were actively involved in the business sector through the multinational corporations and businesses like G.B.Ollivant (UK), Petterson Zacchonis (Greek), Lever Brothers (UK), CFAO (France), Royal Niger Company (UK), Ambrosine (Italy/France), Barclays Bank (UK), Standard Bank (UK) etc. The European staffers of the said organisations resided at Nassarawa GRA. Nigeria's economic boom of the 1970s sowed the seeds of industrialisation which led to emergence of manufacturing industries around Kano. The industries located at Bompai, Sharada, Challawa industrial zones also drew significant number of skilled and diverse European manpower. Such manpower was needed in the construction industry which drew a number of Germans and Italians; while Spanish, Dutch, French were in ternaries and ginneries, soft drinks, car assembly, steel rolling and warehousing. Other Europeans stay in the city as cultural and diplomatic attaches to various European cultural and diplomatic institutions like the British Council, Alliance Francaise, etc. University and colleges also drew number of British scholars and researchers just as few Russians and other eastern Europeans worked in the various hospitals and cathedrals. The above gives a brief history and ecology of European population in Kano City.

By the mid 1980s European population of the city started to decline sharply. The decline was informed by the economic depression of the period. The depression was caused in the main by the structural adjustment programme adopted by the government under the Bretton Woods institutions (IMF/World Bank). The situation led to indebtedness and subsequent closure of several industries which in turn led to the sharp decline in the number of European skilled persons in the city of Kano.

Aim and objectives

The goal of the study examines the nature of European population decline and the associated physical and socioeconomic implications on the city of Kano; while the objectives include the following:

- ✓ To map out the impacts of the European departure on the physical environment of Kano city.
- ✓ To ascertain the nationalities, jobs and primary reasons for departure of the Europeans.
- ✓ To highlight the current patterns of European accommodation in the city.

Data and Methods

Respondents interviewed were drawn from a randomly selected sample of former colleagues of the Europeans. Interview was also conducted for the few Europeans that remain in Kano city. Field investigations carried out at the Kano GRA examined some exceptional untouched structures that serve as control points. The investigations are aided by in depth analysis of old and new imageries of the study area.

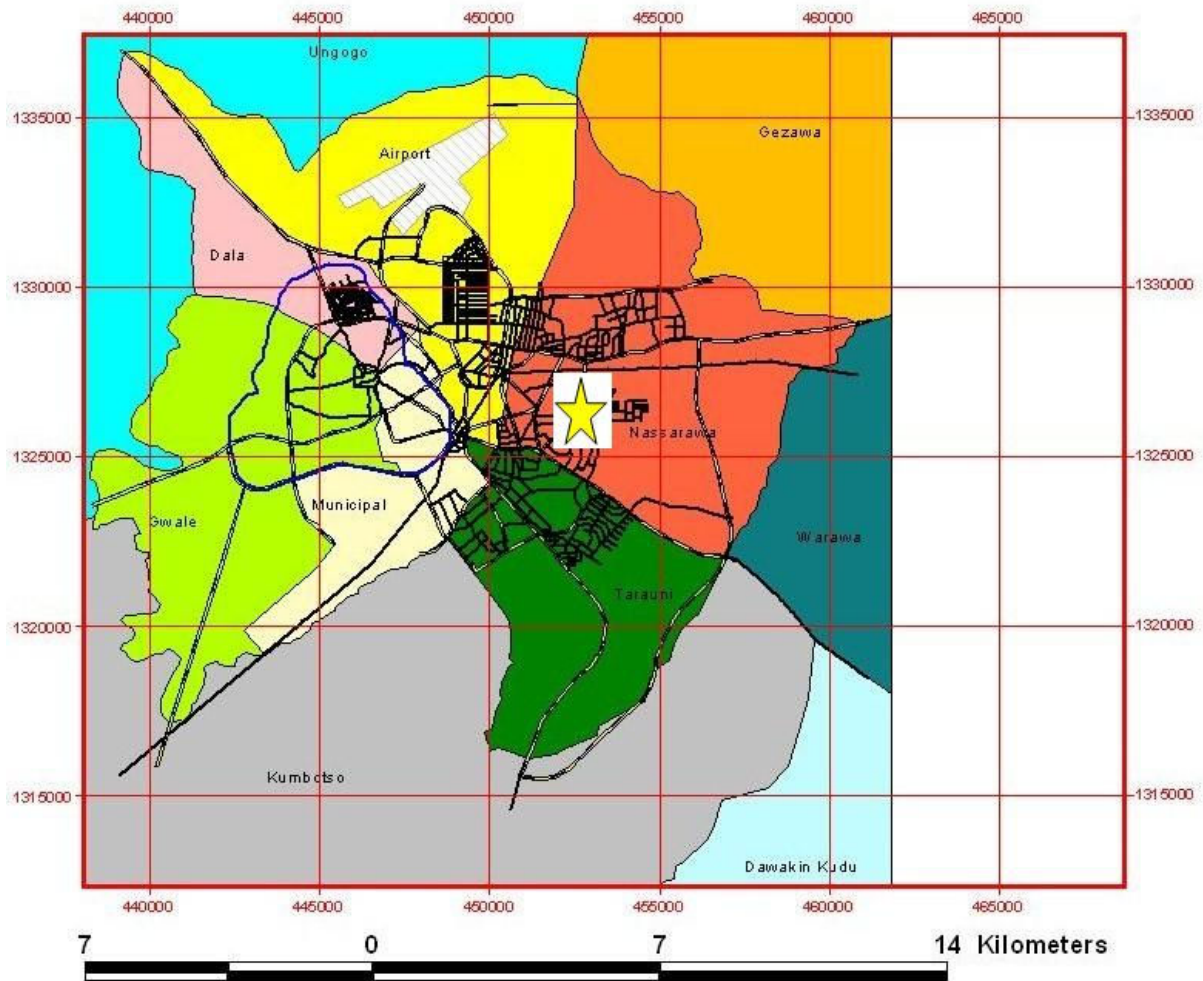
Results and Discussions

Results indicate that the physical environment has declined in its aesthetic value, calmness and even the perceived microclimate associated with former European quarters. Standard European housing system is also changed. Some recreational spots have declined in activities and importance; ornamental plantations and trees located in the former European shelters are also defaced. Densification of the built up areas is the new phenomenon in this formerly low density area of the city.

The study blames planning agencies and private property business for doctoring and scrambling the planned European settlements. The sharp decline in the number of Europeans also shrinks the once vibrant aviation industry at Kano. It also hints that while the decline

of Europeans was induced by growth of indigenous professionals and economic depression that set in Nigeria from mid-1980s, but cultural differences and corruption in the public sector are instrumental for the negative changes registered.

The paper finds that Europeans that come to Kano for periodic jobs like roads construction and other technical services now stay in hotels located within the GRA and which are very expensive. Whether such Europeans pay for their accommodation or it is paid by their business partners the expenses are high. Changes witnessed at the Kano GRA which is marked by densification, indigenisation of the housing system which deprive visiting Europeans of access to hitherto cheap and secured guest houses. However, there are still fewer Europeans mostly diplomats that stay at the GRA but their number is quite insignificant to make impact of their stay felt in the wider space. It is also observed that most of the European houses that remain intact are occupied by section of Lebanese business community in Kano.



GIS derived map of Kano showing Nassarawa GRA marked by star