Land Acquisition in Sabo Communities in Yorubaland, Nigeria (1916 -1960)

Abdulwahab Tijani
Department of General Studies
Ladoke Akintola University of Technology
Ogbomoso, Nigeria

This work is a study of the modalities of land acquisition in Sabo communities in Yorubaland. The work relied largely on data from fieldwork, which consisted largely of oral interviews because, apart from the Sabo in Ibadan and in Sagamu, there were hardly any written records on the other Sabo communities studied in this work. Information from books, journals and archival materials were used for the research work. The study shows that the commercial relationship between the Hausa traders and their Yoruba hosts were more harmonious than conflictual which has resulted the establishment of Sabo communities was its consequence

Key words: Inter-group contact, inter-group relations, trade, segregated settlement

Introduction
Land disputes between migrants and their host communities have been a major factor in violent inter-group conflicts in Nigeria and indeed, Africa. In Nigeria, there had been violent inter-group conflicts between the Tiv and the Jukun, the Ijaws and Itsekiri, the Hausa/Fulani and the Kats in Zangon, Ife and Modakeke etc. In Ghana between Kokomba and Narumba and between Nawuri and Gonja, while in Kenya the Kokoro and Manyatta etc. These conflicts may arise as a result of social, political, and at times, religious differences, yet land matters stand out as a major factor that engenders such violent conflicts.

However, there are many cases of harmonious inter-group relations between the migrant communities and their hosts. Such cases could be found in some Sabo communities in Yorubaland, Nigeria. Sabo communities were established in Yorubaland in the early twentieth century by Hausa migrants. The question is: why should land matters lead to violent inter-group conflicts in some cases and not in others?

This is basically because, inter-group relations (whether integrative or conflictual) are complex and involve historical, political, economic and psychological factors. A study of inter-group relations should give due weight to these and other causes (Cohen, 1974).

Nwabueze (2003) captures the scenario when he describes inter-group relations as:

... the simple or complex, conflicting or accommodating, cooperating, confessing, peaceful or acrimonious, intense, dense or indifferent way that one group is connected or associated with another in the course of their interaction with each other. Inter-group relation as a study focuses essentially on series of methods, strategies or approaches to the understanding of separate group dynamics, of diffusing tension between different groups and creating or building bridges across potential or actual conflict relationships, or directly promoting harmony, it may also be repackage curriculum for conflict management and containment based on scientific understanding of group characteristics and a more accurate capacity to predict pattern of prejudices, preferences and sentiments among and between groups in interaction with one another.
The peculiarities in inter-group relations are due basically to the variance in the nature of competition for scarce resources. This is succinctly captured by Albert (1994):

... where urban opportunities are so scarce as not to be sufficient to go round. The competition for political appointments, landed property, economic opportunities, etc. often results in 'host-stranger' distinction in which indigenes of a particular city want to set themselves as legitimate owners of what the urban environment can offer.

Quoting Shack, Albert notes that it is within this context that the ‘urban-stranger’ becomes labelled as alien, intruder, interloper, foreigner, nova homo, newcomer, immigrant, guest, outsider, outlander, etc. (Shack, 1979). Consequently, ‘the economically successful stranger in this context is simply seen as an exploiter of what belongs to owners’ of the land.

In the same vein, the peculiarity of inter-group relations is also determined by the nature and period of inter-group contact. The content of community involves the development of inter-group contact, as well as mutual respect and understanding. This is especially necessary in multi-ethnic residential segregation and persistence of ethnic identities. The contact hypothesis of inter-ethnic relations advanced by Yehuda (1962) is based on the assumption that inter-group contact reduces inter-group tension and prejudice. Yehuda deduced from his studies that frequent contact in a social setting or between different individuals may produce meaningful communication and therefore facilitate attitudinal or behavioural changes (Yehuda, 1962).

Scholars have also focused on the negative consequences of inter-group co-existence such as violent conflicts, especially in ethnically segregated communities in the urban centres in Nigeria. Little attention has been given to the vast number of ethnic groups that co-exist peacefully. It is therefore necessary to examine the historical factors and processes that promote positive consequences of inter-group co-existence.

Sabo Communities in Yorubaland

The Sabo communities in Yorubaland sprang up mainly due to inter-group trade relations between the Hausa traders and their Yoruba hosts. The land they occupied was acquired in different manners over time.

Land is an important economic asset as a major factor of production. Land also has social psychological significance in terms of attachment which is connected to the history, social existence and ethno-geographical identity of each community. As Ajato avers:

The territory occupied by an ethnic group is perhaps the strongest national identity of the group. It is referred to as the land, country or territory of the ethnic group. Since it sustains the group’s livelihood and represents the arena in which the ethnic group existence may be observed, a major collective function of the group involves maintaining the group’s territorial integrity. The groups becomes attached to its ethnic territory and defends it against intruders. (Madhi, 1994)

All these emotional, economic and political attachments to land are often expressed in proverbs, aphorisms and wise sayings among African ethnic groups. An example is the Yoruba aphorism that says:

‘Gambari ti yoo joye, yo de Sabo’

This general saying among Yoruba people gives some insight into the nature of inter-group relations between the Yoruba people and the Hausa migrants in Yorubaland. In the pre-colonial period, the Hausa people were known as Gambari. The aphorism clearly shows that Sabo quarterers have been ‘legally’ recognized as the territory allocated to Hausa migrants in Yoruba towns. Not only that, they could establish their administration in accordance with their cultural values in Sabo quarters. In other words it indicates the fact that although the Hausa man is

[1] An Hausa man, that aspires for a chieftaincy title in a Yoruba town would limit his aspiration to the Sabo quarters.
accepted, territorially he is confined to an area, for residence.

Secondly, the nature of the aphorism shows that it started after the establishment of Sabo communities. As the first Sabo communities in Yorubaland were that of Ibadan in 1916, Ogbomoso in 1924, Oyo in 1934, Sagamu in 1939, the aphorism is apparently a twentieth century affair. Its political undertones point to a period of political and ethnic rivalry between the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. What is interesting however, is the social, economic and political factors that determined the allocation of land to Hausa migrants in Yoruba towns in the twentieth century, and its implications for inter-group relations. Care should be taken not to over-generalize the nature of inter-ethnic relations between the Hausa and Yoruba groups. This is because, in spite of their homogeneous characteristics inter-group relations have their local peculiarities. In this study, the manner of acquisition of Sabo land has been observed in different parts of Yorubaland. This variation was due to local peculiarities in the inter-group relations between the Hausa traders and their Yoruba hosts, which were due to such factors as the level of economic development and the nature of the economic relationship; the national political terrain, the period of contact, availability of land and the colonial environment.

The understanding of these relations is based on the fact rightly put forward by Sanda (1978) that:

*The structure patterns and interpretation of urban social relations including ethnic relations should be understood in the context of the city itself."

However, these relations are dynamic, they change when other variables that determine the nature of inter-group relations change. For instance, the Sagamu riot of 1999 indicates the dynamic nature of the structure and pattern of inter-groups relations in Sabo communities in Yorubaland (Tijani, 1999).

This research work relied largely on oral interviews because there is a dearth of written information on the subject matter. Older members of the community, the Hausa community leaders, traders, artisans, clergymen and old and recent migrants were interviewed.

However, archival materials assisted in cross-checking the accuracy of the oral information. Secondary sources such as books and journal articles were used. Except for material on Sabo in Ibadan, most of the research was a pioneering effort.

Appraising the historical factors that led to the different methods of land acquisition in Sabo communities in Yorubaland will throw light on the local peculiarities in the inter-group relations between the Hausa traders and their Yoruba hosts. The Yoruba towns selected for the study include; Ibadan in central Yorubaland, Ogbomoso, Oyo and Osogbo in the north and Sagamu, Abeokuta and Ijebu Ode in the southern part of Yorubaland.

**Acquisition of Land by Hausa Traders for Sabo Community in Yorubaland**

The area designated as Sabo in these selected Yoruba towns started as communities comprised of less than fifty homesteads. The extent of Sabo land was generally not more than a radius of two to three kilometres. They were usually virgin lands bordered by streams or some natural phenomena to demarcate them it from neighbouring lands belonging to local chiefs.

The modalities of acquisition of Sabo land differed from one Yoruba town to another. For instance, while land was donated for Hausa traders to establish the Sabo settlements in Ibadan, Oyo, Ogbomoso, Osogbo and Sagamu, it was sold to the Hausa traders in Ijebu-Ode. In Abeokuta, the Hausa people settled on rented land (Tijani, 2003). The variations in the mode of land acquisition can be attributed to local peculiarities in the inter-ethnic relations between the Hausa and their Yoruba hosts.

It is important to note that these Sabo communities sprang up at different periods ranging from 1916 for Ibadan to 1953 for Ijebu-Ode.

The current land acquisition process in Sabo in Ogbomoso, Oyo, Ibadan, and indeed all Sabo communities studied in this work, is largely through purchase from the family or individual landowners. The houses of earlier Hausa settlers in the Sabo communities have become ‘family compounds’. Upon the death of the head of a family, the progeny could
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decide to sell the ‘family house’. Often in such cases, the Sarkin Sabo\(^2\) would be given his share of the proceeds of the sale. There is virtually no more virgin land in any of the Sabo communities.

In discussing the social economic and political factors that determined the allocation of Sabo land in Ibadan, Albert (1993), presented a scenario of conflictual inter-group relations between the Hausa traders in Ibadan and their Yoruba hosts. The questions then is: If the relations between the traders and their Yoruba hosts were conflictual, why were they allotted land to settle? The land was allotted by a Yoruba chief, Baale Irefin (in Ibadan). Considering the fact that land is an economic asset, is it not surprising that the Baale gave it out to a supposed ‘enemy’ group without any financial gain?

In view of the above, it can be argued that the conflict was not fundamental in the relationship between the two trading partners. Rather, economic interests were more important in determining the nature of their inter-group relations.

Simmel (1955) argues that one of the main patterns of inter-group relations between migrants and their hosts is the segregation policy; whereby the two ethnic and cultural groups are kept separate. This is generally a symbiotic relationship whereby each group fulfills a particular need for the other. As trading partners, the two groups are in need of one another.

In the same vein, Cohen (1969) points out the claim to cultural distinctiveness by the Hausa traders was just a political ploy to justify the need for a separate quarter. Culture and ethnicity do not exist in a vacuum, often, they are borne out of economic situations and are often manipulated to foster economic advantage.

Albert (1994) notes that:

> When people of different geographical and ethnic origin are brought together within the competitive urban context, conflict between the groups easily results

In the northern Yoruba towns of Ogbomosho, Oyo and Oshogbo, the process of the establishment of Sabo communities was not characterized by the fierce trade competition that was found in Ibadan. Rather, the main issue in these towns was supposed cultural incompatibilities. The Hausas, who are predominantly Muslims, associate Hausa culture with Islam and non-Hausa ways of life as un-Islamic. The Hausa abhorred the traditional religious practices of the Yoruba, which they witnessed within Yoruba quarters. It would appear, however, that the commercial interests of the Hausa traders were of prime importance because, even in communities that were predominantly Muslim (such as the Chadian towns that were predominated by Chadian Muslims, Arabs and the Kanuri), Hausa traders in diaspora still established separate settlements (John, 1976).

Cohen (1969) observed that trade, culture, ethnicity, and religion were inter-related and interdependent in the establishment of Hausa migrant communities in Yorubaland. Thus, he viewed Hausa culture in Sabo quarters as not just ‘a way of life’ but a political ideology, emphasizing identity as well as exclusiveness.

This is evident in the fact that many years after the establishment of Sabo communities, the Hausa people in Yoruba towns continued to observe Friday prayers in the same mosques with their Yoruba hosts within the host quarters which shows that their primary aim for its establishment is not religion. Secondly, the political identification is evident in the nature of the trade relations, before and after the establishment of Sabo communities. Before the establishment of Sabo communities in Ogbomosho, Oshogbo and Oyo, the cattle market had been established usually on the outskirt of the town. Most of the market officials were Yoruba. There were the ‘parakoyis’ who were the intermediaries in commercial transactions. The ‘parakoyis’ had learned the Hausa language after long years of trading (Tijani, 2003).

There were also the Sarkin Zangos, i.e., the head of the livestock market. In Ogbomosho for instance,

\(^2\) Head of the Hausa administrative authority in that Sabo community
the early Sarkin Zangos were Yoruba indigenes of Ogbomoso. There were also the Iyalajes. These officials collected royalties on trade transactions and remitted part of it to the Yoruba monarchs (Salami, 1996).

In about 1920 in Ogbomoso, Soun Bello Afolabi Oyeuwumi Ajagungbade II moved the cattle market (Zango) in Ogbomoso from Odo-ko to the north-western part of the town to a site in the north-eastern outskirts of the town. It was said that he wanted it located closer to his palace, as it was the practice in those days that markets were located near the palace; the Yoruba have always had ‘Oja Oba’, i.e. the king’s market (Salami, 1996). In 1924, because the Hausa complained of cultural incompatibility with the Yoruba way of life, Soun Bello Afolabi Oyeuwumi Ajagungbade II resettled them to the north of the new Zango and named it Sabo.

Similarly, in Oyo the same reasons were advanced before Sabo was established. In addition, the Yoruba people in Oyo wanted the Hausa to confine their cattle to one place, because of the littering of the street with cattle dung. Hence, Alafin Ladigbolu requested that the Hausa move from their various residences within Oyo town, such as the palace area, Oshimole, Igbo-Owo, Olujio, Ile-Ife Aare-go and Oremejo to Sokale Obada, an area named Sabo by the Alafin. It was located close to the Zango market (Lafiya, 1997).

The situation in Oshogbo was different. In 1935, the Ataoja, Oba Dokun, allocated an area in the north-eastern outskirts of the town to the Hausa for use as farmlands. The area gradually developed into an Hausa settlement. According to the Sarkin Sabo, Lawal Gwanna, and Lamidi Oyedele, a Yoruba kolanut trader and an indigene of Oshogbo, the establishment of Sabo quarters was by peaceful agreement between the host community and the Hausa people. And for a long time, many Hausa people still remained within the town among the Yoruba people (Tijani, 2003).

The process of the establishment of Sabo in Sagamu was similar to that of Oshogbo. The process was peaceful and for a long period of time, many Hausa people remained within the indigenous parts of the town. Also, it developed as a kolanut trade outpost where the Hausa traders met the Yoruba kolanut farmers to purchase kola.

According to Alhaji Umar Ingawa, the Magajin Gari of Sabo Sagamu at the time of this study, the movement to, and settlement in Sabo was gradual. In the mid-1920s, due to the increase in population of Hausa people in Sagamu which was about four hundred in the mid 1920s, Oba Adedoyin, Oba Adedoyin, the then traditional ruler of Sagamu, advised the Hausa people to settle on land allocated to them at Sabo which had been their trade outpost. About fifty people move there first; gradually others moved to Sabo area as was done elsewhere in Yorubaland. Those who had the resources to build their houses were some of the first to move there. In 1939, the then Sarkin Hausawa of Sagamu Alhaji Abdullah Maikano moved to Sabo after the construction of his house (Umar, 1997) and this marked the official establishment of Sabo as the Hausa community in Sagamu.

The establishment of Sabo communities under a harmonious environment in Ogbomoso, Oyo, Oshogbo and Sagamu, indicates that the inter-group relations between the host and the Hausa traders were mutually beneficial.

It became apparent after the establishment of Sabo quarters that the demands for Sabo settlement by Hausa traders, especially in Ibadan, Oyo and Ogbomoso were due to the desire to effectively control trade relations by occupying the post of market officials. This is because immediately Sabo quarters were established and the cattle market moved to Sabo, the Hausa traders were able to edge out the Yoruba market officials. For instance, the Hausa commission agents emerge in the market places to mediate in trade matters between buyers and sellers, they received commission from the cattle buyer called laada in Hausa. This was an Hausa custom. By proving to be more trustworthy than his Yoruba counterpart, the Hausa commission agent gained the

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3 An example is Adetutu Adeunkola (deceased 1931)

4 A female leaders for commercial activities
confidence of his kinsmen in other Sabo markets, thus, the use of ethnicity as an economic advantage.

The movement of the Zango (cattle markets) to Sabo meant that the Yoruba commission agents with whom the Hausa traders and dealers had business were edged out of the control of the inter-regional trade between the Hausa and their Yoruba hosts. The Hausa people began to collect, not only commission (laada) from the cattle trade, but also rent from lodging the Hausa traders as well as fees for keeping cattle within enclosures on their land. In Ibadan, it was officially ordered that all cattle should be kept out of town, close to the Sabo quarters. In other places, the directive came from the local traditional rulers’. In Ibadan, the ‘laada palaver’ led to a lot of conflicts between the Hausa people and their Yoruba hosts.

In Ijebu-Ode and Abeokuta, the factor that led to the establishment of Sabo quarters differed from other parts of Yorubaland. The main issue was neither conflict over the control of trade nor cultural distinctiveness, but psychological feelings of ethnic distrust and hostility that existed at the period between the Hausa and their Yoruba hosts in Ijebu-Ode and Abeokuta. The reasons for these feelings are obvious. First of all, Ijebu and Egba people did not have a long history of direct contact with the Hausa people, when we compare them with the people of northern Yorubaland. This is especially so in Ijebu-Ode where, up till the beginning of the twentieth century, its ‘gate’ was still closed to non-Ijebu (Hausa or non-Hausa alike). Although they maintained trade relations with the Oyo people and others, the contact was infrequent. This was possible because Ijebu-Ode was a provincially self-sustained agricultural community (Gbadamosi, 1978).

Second, the period of the establishment of the Sabo communities in Abeokuta and Ijebu-Ode, i.e. 1948 and 1953 respectively was a period of emergence of ethnic politics in Nigeria, which was mainly between the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria viz: the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo peoples. The Yoruba leader, Obafemi Awolowo, was an Ijebu man. He had his Ijebu people as well as the Egba people of Abeokuta as his primary supporters, against what was perceived as competition with the Ibo and Hausa leaders (Osuntokun, 1984).

This situation worsened in 1953 when the Action Group’s delegates to Kano were met with ethnic political riots directed against the Yoruba people in Sabon-Gari, Kano. The North was protesting against the Action Group’s request for early independence for Nigeria, when the North did not have enough elite to represent her in government after independence. During the riot, many people were killed and many others wounded (Osuntokun, 1984). Therefore, the Hausa people in Abeokuta and Ijebu-Ode at this period had to live with psychological persecution from Ijebu and Egba Yoruba people. The Hausa maintained their stance that as Muslims they would prefer to establish a settlement outside Abeokuta and Ijebu-Ode, as they wanted to avoid contact with Yoruba religious practices which they considered fetish (Tijani, 2003).

Consequently, in 1945 the Hausa elders in Abeokuta led by Mallam Dalhatu Bazamfare, Mallam Dan Kambari and Mallam Wiya Zazzau requested the traditional ruler of Abeokuta, Alake Ademola, to provide them with a place to settle. He kept on promising to give them a place but did not fulfill his promise until he was dethroned by a group led by Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti. The Hausa elders then put their request before Mrs. Kuti who met the families of Lanlope and Tijani and asked them to allow the Hausa to settle on their family land at Ago Oko, which was already emerging as an Hausa trading outpost. A rent of one pound was paid annually on each plot of land in the Sabo area by the Hausa traders. The cattle market (Zango) was moved from the indigenous part of the town at Mokola to the present Sabo (Tijani, 2003).

The situation in Ijebu-Ode was not different except that the Hausa people had to buy plots from the various families that owned them to establish their Sabo community.

On the other hand, in spite of all the factors that led to a strained relationship between the Ijebu and

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5 One of the political parties before Nigeria’s independence and during the First Republic
Hausa people during this period, in Sagamu, which is also an Ijebu town, the Hausa people had much more harmonious relations with the host community. For instance, while the Hausa people had to pay for the plots of land on which Sabo was established in Ijebu-Ode, in Sagamu, the land was allotted to the Hausa people without any financial cost. Also, the Hausa people in Sagamu moved to Sabo gradually, over a period of about fifteen years. The significance of this is that the Hausa people were not eager to leave the indigenous quarters, probably due to the harmonious relations that existed between them and the host communities. The basis of this harmonious relationship could be traced to the nature of the economic relationship between the two major groups (Tijani, 2003).

In the whole of Ijebuland, Sagamu is reported to produce the largest quantity of kolanuts. Therefore, the largest population of Hausa people was found in Sagamu. The people of Sagamu benefited greatly from the patronage of the Hausa kolanut buyers, unlike the Ibadan episode where the Hausa traders competed with the Yoruba people over the control of the kolanut trade by attempting to buy kolanuts directly from the farmers from the village. In Sagamu, the people of Sagamu actually invited the traders to their grooves to buy the nuts (Tijani, 2003). On this, Shack (1979) rightly observed that in Africa, the economic aggression of strangers engenders hostility from their hosts more than any other factors. Albert (1994) concurs with this assessment that:

Where the agglomerated urban groups are mutually relevant to one another’s economic development, they find it easier to work out cordial relationships. But where one of the groups, most especially the immigrant one, has a superordinate economic influence over the resources of the other, hostility easily results. Violence may also result where strangers are perpetually discriminated against.

Thus, in Sagamu, the Akarigbo of Remo (the monarch of Sagamu) provided the Hausa with land to establish their Sabo without any financial benefit. The establishment of Sabo Sagamu, Ijebu-Ode and Abeokuta demonstrates the local peculiarities in inter-group relations, even though each of them had kolanut trading outposts before the establishment of the Sabo communities.

However, the modalities of allocation of Sabo land in Abeokuta and Ijebu-Ode cannot be blamed on the feelings of ethnic distrust alone. When areas which are in the forest region are compared with central and northern Yorubaland, it is obvious that northern Yorubaland, which is largely in the guinea savannah area has more land space, compared to the forest region. That was why the monarchs of Ogbomoso, Ibadan, Oshogbo and Oyo could allocate land for the establishment of Sabo communities. This is in addition to the fact that there had been a long history of contact between the northern and central Yorubaland and the Hausa people, compared to the forest region. Again, the period of allocation of Sabo lands in northern and central Yorubaland did not coincide with the period of national ethnic politics (Tijani, 2003).

Conclusion
An appraisal of the inter-group relations between the Hausa traders and their Yoruba hosts during the periods under study, shows that the historical process that led to the establishment of Sabo communities in Yorubaland have been more harmonious than being conflictual. Three different modes of acquisition of the lands used for the establishment of Sabo areas in Yorubaland are distinguished — allocation, rental and sale. The mode depended on the discretion of the ruler of the area and the relationship that existed between the Hausa traders and their host community. Although one of the reasons given for the establishment of the Sabo communities were cultural incompatibilities, yet these incompatibilities were not strong enough to lead to violent inter-group conflicts. Rather, the mutual benefit derived from the relationships outweighed the disparities, hence, the Sabo communities could be established.

However, it is dangerous to overgeneralize the historical factors that led to the emergence of Sabo communities in Yorubaland. The modalities of land allocation for the establishment of Sabo communities
revealed the local peculiarities in the inter-group relations between the Hausa traders and their Yoruba hosts in various parts of Yorubaland. Such factors such as geographical proximity and period of contact between different parts of Yorubaland and the Hausa traders, the nature of trade relations between the Hausa traders and the Yoruba peoples, the national political terrain etc., all accounted for the various degrees of harmony or conflicts between the Hausa traders and their Yoruba hosts. This in turn determined the modalities of land allocation and land tenure for the Sabo communities in Yorubaland.

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Biographical Note
Abdulwahab Tijani is a senior lecturer in the Department of General Studies, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso. His research interests are social history and inter-group relations in Nigeria.