

# Traditions for Peace

## Informal Organisations and Horizontal Inequalities in Kano, Nigeria

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### I Introduction

In its most recent report on income inequalities, the International Labour Organisation (2008: 1) writes that “after a long expansionary phase where income inequality was already on the rise in the majority of countries, the ongoing economic slowdown is affecting low-income groups disproportionately”. As the widening of such inter-group (or horizontal) inequalities has been hypothesised to increase the likelihood of inter-group conflict (Stewart 2008), there has been considerable interest in possible ways to redress this trend. The most common response has been to look at ways in which formal policy - developed and implemented by formal state or international organisations - can effectuate these changes (e.g. Stewart 2008: 301-24). At the same time, however, social scientists working in ‘non-Western’ societies are recognising the importance of non-state organisations in vital tasks of governance<sup>1</sup>. This chapter therefore looks at the ways in which these informal social organisations can mitigate the negative consequences of horizontal inequalities on inter-group relations, using three informal organisations in the Nigerian city of Kano as case studies. The central argument will be that although formal institutions have the capacity to address the ‘objective’ inequalities underlying conflict, informal organisations have the authority, position, and institutional links to affect the ways in which people *perceive* the inequalities.

### II Collective Meaning Construction and Informal Social Organisations

As a brief introduction to the case studies, Kano is the major urban centre in the Sudanic region of West-Africa (supporting a population of at least 4 million) with a long-standing reputation as commercial hub in the trans-Saharan and Sahelian trading routes. Kano is built around Kano City (*birni*), the walled part of the city that is inhabited almost exclusively by indigenous Hausa Muslims; neighbourhoods outside the walls (*waje*) also host other ethnic and religious communities. It is a highly diverse city: although generally perceived as a Hausa Muslim stronghold, many neighbourhoods harbour Christians and Muslims of widely divergent ethnic groups living side by side, and the migrant neighbourhood of Sabon Gari is dominated by southern Christian migrants and their families. Moreover, the city prides itself on its history of hospitality towards economic migrants. However, it has also suffered tremendously under the country’s structural adjustment programmes, protracted economic crisis, and the State’s history of recurrent riotous violence (Wakili 1997; 2005).

In this context, there are substantial horizontal inequalities between ‘indigenous’ groups and those whose families have a history of migration (‘settlers’). As a rough sketch (for more details, see Ehrhardt 2007), ‘settlers’ are generally more highly educated and therefore have a higher chance to earn a middle-class income, whilst public employment and access to the state government is almost exclusively limited to the ‘indigenous’ population. This has led to a sense of discrimination

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Zartman (2000), Wardak (2003), Masinde (2004), Buur and Kyed (2006), Jönsson (2006), Ehrhardt (2007) and Wassara (2007).

among the ‘settlers’ and one of economic threat among the ‘indigenes’; but also to the development of a large underclass of uneducated, underemployed young ‘native’ males, who practically live on the streets and are viewed by many as “soldiers”<sup>2</sup> ready to use violence for whoever pays them. In terms of cultural status inequalities, the most salient issue is the Kano State Government’s decision to extend and re-emphasise its implementation of *sharia* law; although it formally only applies to Muslims, issues like the prohibition of the sale and consumption of alcohol within the territory of Kano State<sup>3</sup> have become highly salient symbolic issues between the ‘natives’ and ‘settlers’.

A range of formal actors is - at least nominally - involved in attempts to reduce these structural tensions and prevent the future outbreak of violence. Their strategy is mostly geared towards thwarting attempts at violent mobilisation or redressing ‘objective’ horizontal inequalities. The three case studies in this chapter will show how traditional, religious, and community leaders in Kano - which in a recent perceptions survey<sup>4</sup> were ranked consistently more powerful and trustworthy than the institutions of the state - can influence people’s perceptions of these inequalities as grievances and thus change the dynamics of the conflict they cause. Because as Langer and Ukiwo argue, “collective action depends on how groups *perceive* the world in which they live and act” (2008: 205), rather than directly on the ‘objective’ characteristics of this world. ‘Objective’ characteristics like horizontal inequalities are therefore subject to a process of interpretation, in which they are given meaning and made part of the social world. This is a process, which Kane has referred to as the “interpretative process of meaning construction” (1997: 251), in which people bring together the different components of meaning: the structural conditions around them, their individual and collective memories and experiences, and their *cultural models* - intersubjectively shared moral theories of how the world works (e.g. D’Andrade and Strauss 1992; Shore 1996).

Perceptions are thus the result of an interaction between individual ideas and experiences, and the shared and more collective accounts (or cultural models) of the social world. To understand the links between horizontal inequalities and conflict, this collective level is of central importance - for it is here that ‘objective’ horizontal inequalities are translated into intersubjectively meaningful grievances between groups. At this collective level, cultural models and collective experiences provide narratives to structure and explain the social world in general terms, allowing individuals to “grasp the meaning” of their personal experiences (Putnam 1997). Although a full specification of the mechanisms behind collective meaning construction is beyond the purposes of this chapter, it is safe to argue that it should at least produce some division of society (e.g. into ‘natives’ and ‘settlers’, or different religious groups) and understanding of the relationships between these social units. It is also safe to hold that although these cultural models are by definition shared, they still require constant reproduction and reinterpretation - processes that allow for creative input and change as well as consolidation and routinisation of existing ideas and practices.

This process of collective interpretation is characterised by intense competition between different authoritative actors in society. As Migdal argues, societies are a “mélange of social organisations” (Migdal 1988: 28), of states, clubs, companies, and other social groupings, all of

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Prince Memayetan, journalist and community leader, 16 August 2006, in Kano.

<sup>3</sup> Formal exceptions have been made for Federal Territory within the State, such as the Federal Civil Service Club in Kano, and the migrant neighbourhoods (Sabon Gari); but the supply to these areas remains a hotly contested issue.

<sup>4</sup> This survey was undertaken by the author in 2006 (N=140) and 2008 (N=280), covering four distinct neighbourhoods in Kano’s metropolitan area: the indigene-dominated City, migrant-dominated Sabon Gari, and the mixed neighbourhoods of Naibawa and Badawa.

which are in competition for social control over (segments) of the population. In this competition, social control over the behavioural rules of society is the currency for which social organisations compete; and influence over people's interpretations of the world is a powerful tool in controlling their behavioural rules (Migdal 2001: 51-2). In the subsequent three sections, this chapter will show that traditional, religious, and community leaders in Kano are in a position to influence collective perceptions and interpretations of the social world, including those of horizontal inequalities, by propagating particular cultural models of this social world. It will also highlight some of the factors that can explain this particular position, such as the communal nature of their authority, their direct links with the communities, and their links to other social organisations.

### III The Kano Emirate

Kano Emirate is the traditional structure of government in Kano state, with functions in the spheres of both religion and governance. In religious terms all imams in Kano need official recognition by the Emir to perform either daily or *Juma'at* prayers. Similarly, the Emir leads most of the annual religious festivals and calls the sighting of the moon at the start of the fasting<sup>5</sup>. In governance terms, traditional rulers use their community links to mediate disputes within their communities and between their community and the state. Although the executive responsibility for maintaining social stability lies with formal authorities<sup>6</sup>, it is culturally and politically preferred that disputes and other social disturbances are resolved informally, without resorting to the formal channels of law enforcement and adjudication (Wilson-Fall 2000: 49-50; Paden 2005: 92). Before the governance reforms of the late and post-colonial period, the traditional authorities were responsible for administering justice through formal channels, while informal dispute settlement was usually the job of community elders (Paden 2005: 92-93). In the current democratic dispensation, the Emirate has not replaced but subsumed the roles of these elders, striving to become the institutional umbrella for informal dispute settlement processes<sup>7</sup>.

The organisational structure of the Emirate is highly hierarchical, with the Emir at the apex of the power structure, supported by an Emir's Council that consists of four kingmakers, high-ranking district heads, Islamic scholars (*mallamai*) and other influential advisors. The Emir also chairs the Emirate Council, an advisory council to the government that consists of Local Government chairmen and allows the Emirate institutional access to the state. The Emirate has different levels of government. The Emir has 44 district heads (*hakimai*), who can be responsible for a territory or an administrative department. Each district head, especially in the rural districts, has several village heads (*dagatai*) who report to him. Each village consists of multiple wards, which are under authority of the ward head (*masu unguwa*). Village and ward heads are local people with roots in the community they supervise.

This organisational structure provides the traditional authorities with a unique and ambiguous position between Kano's communities and the government. On the one hand, the organisational structure of the Emirate enables traditional rulers to retain a close connection to their

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with dr Salahudeen Yusuf, Islamic scholar, 10 September 2006 in Kano

<sup>6</sup> The federal government is responsible for Nigeria's law enforcement agencies and the army, while the Kano State government provides the judiciary.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with *Tafidan* Kura, district head Kura, 15 September 2006 in Kura

people. The ward and village heads are part and parcel of the community they supervise<sup>8</sup>. They report all disturbances and problems to their superiors in the Emirate<sup>9</sup>. Policies and laws proposed by the government are reviewed by the Emirate Council to make sure “they will not cause conflict [...] and will be helpful for the people, useful to the community”<sup>10</sup>. Although no formal power is attached to their advice, the Governor listens to the Emirate Council because of its base of popular support. Similarly, if state actors like the police misbehave or injure their communities, traditional rulers usually file a complaint defending the interests of their people against the police. On the other hand, the Emir also has close links to the Kano state government, both through the Emirate Council and the State and local government Security Committees.

The Emirate thus holds an ambiguous position between state and society, which can be explained by tracing the historical transformation of traditional institutions from a theocratic, despotic executive government to the symbolic ‘fathers’ of all people in Kano. Historically, the traditional government structure is an Islamic theocratic system of government, with the Emir as the “kingly power as a sacred trust from God” (Paden 1973: 214) and sharp demarcations between the traditional ruling class (*sarauta*) and commoners (*talakawa*). As Native Authority under British indirect rule, the Emirate became more authoritarian, or more “decentralised despotist” (Mustapha 1990; Mamdani 1996: 53-65), which led to a crisis of legitimacy of Emir Sanusi in the 1950s. At the same time, a Western-educated counter-élite came to re-present the old conflict between the *sarauta* and *talakawa* classes in the struggle between the conservative NPC and Aminu Kano’s radical NEPU, respectively (Yahaya 1980: 30). Their incremental reforms, from the 1954 Native Authority Law to the Local Government Reform of 1976, effected a transformation of the traditional authority from executive to symbolic, or formal to informal, functions – not simply a rejection of ‘traditionalism’ (Yahaya 1980: 203, 22).

After its transformation from formal to informal leadership, traditional authority has been legitimised by five interlinked elements. First, traditional authority is based on the close link between the rulers and the community of the territory. Traditional rulers are said to be “part and parcel” of their community and are therefore accepted as legitimate authorities. Second, their legitimacy is based on long-term commitment, as opposed to the short-term (and often self-interested) positions held by elected politicians<sup>11</sup>. Third, their symbolic function and message of unity and peaceful integration grants traditional rulers legitimacy, especially in a context where politics is perceived as ‘a dirty game’, revolving around power, money, and patronage. Thus, it is the very distance of traditional rulers from formal power and politics that explains their legitimacy. Fourth, people’s perceptions of the personal qualities of traditional rulers plays an important role in determining their legitimacy. Last, the Emirate symbolically represents the unity of Kano and a long tradition of both African and Islamic state building. Much like Western European royal families, history and tradition give meaning and a measure of legitimacy to the Emirate institutions.

In sum, the authority wielded by the traditional rulers is dependent on their symbolic position between the government and the city’s local communities. Traditional rulers have offices - often close to the local government office - in ‘their’ community, where they informally settle disputes, provide legal advice, and mediate between the people and the State in other ways. So long

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<sup>8</sup> Although outside Kano City, the connection between traditional rulers and their communities has suffered from the tremendous increase in the city’s population.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Abdullahi Sule, president of YEDA, 15 August 2006 in Kano

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> *Tafidan Kura*, op. cit.

as they keep their distance from politics they are respected, have the ear of the formal authorities, and are often quoted in popular radio programmes and newspapers. In one way, therefore, traditional authorities have become the symbols of Kano and promote the cultural model of an inclusive, *Kanawa* identity for both ‘natives’ and ‘settlers’. But their position is not uncontested: as representatives of the ‘traditional’ royal *sarauta* class in Kano, their very existence propagates a contested class-based social distinction. Moreover, maintaining their distance from formal politics is often difficult, for example because the current governing party (ANPP) is seeking a legitimating alliance. And lastly, in a city that has witnessed a veritable explosion in terms of demography and diversity, traditional rulers are struggling to maintain the level of local control and support that has proven essential to their legitimacy.

#### IV Religious Leaders

Although Islam is the ‘native’ religion in Kano, there are substantial Christian communities among the ‘settlers’ (as well as small ones within the ‘native’ population). Islamic authorities in Kano can be divided into the Sufi Brotherhoods (*tariqas*), radical reformist movements, and the Jama'at Nasr al-Islam (JNI), the umbrella organisation for Islam in Nigeria. The role of these religious authorities comprises both internal and external functions: on the one hand strengthening the faith, providing social services, managing marital and social tensions, and promoting the spiritual welfare among their followers; and on the other, representing the interests of their followers in society. Individual *tariqas* and radical associations usually focus more on internal responsibilities, while the JNI emphasises its role in uniting Islam and ‘evangelising’. It is characteristic of radical associations in Kano to attempt a wide provision of social services, such as hospitals, education, and crisis relief; whereas *tariqas* rely more on government provision (Gwarzo 2003: 302-8; Larkin and Meyer 2006: 306-8)<sup>12</sup>.

Christianity was introduced in northern Nigeria through migration of southern Christians and the missionary activities of both Western and African missionaries. It is organised in churches that differ in doctrine, rituals, social position, and membership. Although the exact number is unknown, a quick survey of the Sabon Gari area showed that almost every street has at least 3 churches of various denominations; Egbe road, the westernmost street of Sabon Gari, is home to no less than 25. The roles of Christian authorities are similar to those of the Islamic ones, combining both internal and external responsibilities. Individual churches focus more on their internal responsibilities, which include providing a wide range of social services such as hospitals, education, and crisis relief. The external, evangelical functions of Christian leaders are sensitive in Muslim-dominated Kano, but while many ‘orthodox’ churches refrain from open competition, Pentecostal churches and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) are strongly evangelical (Marshall 1993: 233-6).

Historically, Islam in Kano has been represented by the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya *tariqas*. Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, rests on the core belief that Muslims should foster their personal relationship with God. The Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya *tariqas* are structured around the authority of a single leader (*sheikh*)<sup>13</sup>. For example, the Qadiriyya *tariqa* is led by Sheikh Qaribullah, son of the

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with reverend Jebis, reverend ECCN and member of CAN, 14 September 2006 in Kano

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Sheikh Qaribullah, leader of African Qadiriyya, 9 September 2006 in Kano

late Sheikh Nasiru Kabara<sup>14</sup>, who leads Kano members in prayer and *zikir*, the ritual remembrance of Allah (Kabara 2004: 66-80). In places outside of Kano, Sheikh Qaribullah can sanction representatives (*muqadam*) to represent him. In contrast, radical movements like Izala have a more formal organisational structure, with a president (*amir*), secretary, treasurer, and modern accountancy practices<sup>15</sup>. Similarly, the JNi is organised formally, with a chairman (the Sultan of Sokoto), supreme patron, secretary general, and a number of committees and state chapters (Loimeier 1997: 141). In Christian churches, a distinction can be made between orthodox<sup>16</sup> and Pentecostal churches: the former have formal organisational structures and are led by an executive council on the basis of a church constitution<sup>17</sup>, while the latter are structured around the charismatic authority of *prophets* (Marshall 1995: 244). Individual churches of both types are linked to Christian movements and organisations in Nigeria and abroad, through missions, sponsorship, and education of their leaders<sup>18</sup>. Churches in Kano are also represented in CAN, which represents the interests of Nigerian Christians in the political sphere and mirrors the Islamic claim for a universal *ummah*.<sup>19</sup>

Attitudes of these religious organisations to the State vary from denomination to denomination. Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya *tariqas* have close connections to the state government. They legitimise government policies, while profiting from this relationship through government subsidies and political influence (Gwarzo 2003: 301). Moreover, since the extension of *sharia* in 2000, Governor Shekarau (ANPP) has ‘adopted’ different Islamic scholars and authorities into the various *sharia* bodies and institutions. In contrast, the radical movements generally question the legitimacy of the secular Federal state (Gwarzo 2003: 301) as well as the alleged Islamic Kano State government, although some do accept government assistance. The fulcrum of radical criticism is the “non-implementation of Sharia and lack of Islamic zeal” (Gwarzo 2003: 302). Churches also have an ambiguous relationship with the Kano State government, but for different reasons: they oppose the State because of its Islamic character, but at the same time accept and depend on it in terms of law enforcement<sup>20</sup>. The link between Christian leaders and traditional rulers is similarly ambiguous, because of Emirate’s close ties with Islam. Although the appointment of Christian traditional rulers in Kaduna state shows that Christians could become part of the Emirate structure, Sabon Gari remains part of the larger Fagge district and represented by a Muslim district head, prince Mahmud Ado Bayero<sup>21</sup>.

The links between the Emirate and the *tariqas* have been subject to complex political struggles between the royal (*sarauta*) and commoner (*talakawa*) classes and between the Kano Emirate and Sokoto. These patterns can be traced back to the fact that the Qadiriyya was the ‘established’ *tariqa* of the Sokoto empire after the Fulani Jihad (Loimeier 1997: 19-20), while the Tijaniyya was introduced only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although competition between them was initially fought in the circles of the ruling elite and scholars, Tijaniyya affiliation was a sign of political and religious protest against the establishment (Loimeier 1997: 21). In the early 1940s, the Tijaniyya

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with dr Tahir Gwarzo, director Kano State Polytechnic, 10 August 2006 in Kano

<sup>16</sup> ‘Orthodox’ denotes denominational churches, e.g. Protestant or Catholic.

<sup>17</sup> Reverend Jebis, op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

transformed itself into a mass movement, with a support base among Kano's traders, farmers, and artisans (Loimeier 1997: 71). The Qadiriyya reacted with a transformation (*tajdid*) under Nasiru Kabara (Paden 1973: 69-70), but remained conservative politically, linked to the traditional rulers in Sokoto, the *sarauta* class and the NPC; the Tijaniyya has retained its connections with traders, *talakawa* and NEPU. In Kano specifically, Emirs Abdullahi Bayero and Sanusi were members of the Tijaniyya, demonstrating their spiritual and political independence from the Sultan, despite the fact that their network within Tijaniyya was linked to the Fulani ruling class (Loimeier 1997: 72-75).

Although most Muslims in contemporary Kano go to mosque without an affiliation to a specific association<sup>22</sup>, religious leaders in general still wield a considerable authority that is based on a measure of 'closeness to God' – or in Sufi terminology, *baraka*. This term denotes spiritual grace, but has also come to imply political and economic power (e.g. Cruise O'Brien 1975: 10). An Islamic leader, such as an imam or Sheikh, is respected because he is believed to represent divine authority. In some forms of Islam, such as the Sufi *tariqas*, closeness to God can be transferred within dynasties, but it is mostly dependent on knowledge. Knowledge is available through informal networks of Islamic teachers or formal colonial educational institutions, such as the Kano School of Arabic Studies. The basis of most Christian religious authority is similar to that of Islamic leaders, based on knowledge, followers and respectability. Pentecostal authority is exceptional because its leaders rely on *Ase*, a form of charismatic power that derives both from adherence to the frugal mores of the 'born-again' doctrine and from a measure of wealth and social success (Marshall 1993: 226).

It is important to note here that this religious authority, although extensive in a deeply religious place like Kano, cannot necessarily be used to mobilise people for ends other than religious worship<sup>23</sup>. The real extent of a religious leader's authority depends on a complex mix of factors, such as the scope of his knowledge, his charisma and age, and the benefits of his preaching and leadership to the community. Imams, as well as Christian leaders, are dependent on the number of faithful attending their prayers and services<sup>24</sup>. These prayers and services provide religious leaders with their main platform from which they use their authority. In addition, religious organisations control the important institutions of quranic or biblical education and advise people on personal and societal matters pertaining to Islam. Thus, through preaching and education, religious organisations promote a 'religious' cultural model, which in Kano overlaps with the 'native'-'settler' distinction and amounts to a rather exclusive world view. Moreover, this dichotomous moral world view is often connected to an evangelisation agenda, especially through the heavily politicised JN1 and CAN. The risks inherent in such interpretations are illustrated by the 2004 riots in Kano, which were triggered by violence in Jos because it was interpreted as an extension of the local oppositions between Kano Christians and Muslims (Human Rights Watch 2005; Ehrhardt 2007).

We have also seen, however, that religious organisations provide social services that increase overall welfare in the city. This social provision may reduce some of the tensions between communities, even if it is not necessarily geared towards reducing inequalities between them and often carries denominational religious content. Secondly, both Islam and Christianity contain

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<sup>22</sup> Based on the survey results from Kano in 2008, only 22% of Muslims were member of a religious association.

<sup>23</sup> Dr Tahir Gwarzo, op. cit.

<sup>24</sup> Dr Salahudeen Yusuf, op. cit.

discourses and ideals of ‘inter-religious’ dialogue and peace between religions. And although it is in competition with the religious discourses of ‘strengthening the faith’, there are many religious leaders who acknowledge the importance of promoting inter-religious understanding (e.g. Channer 2006) - perhaps increasingly so after the deeply negative (economic) consequences of the 2004 riots and Kano’s reputation as a place of religious violence. In 2006 for example, Islamic leaders did not interpret the re-publication of the Danish cartoons local terms as they had done after the Jos violence in 2004, but as an international insult to (African) Islam by the Danish people - leading to mobilisation for nonviolent protests against and economic boycotts of Denmark, rather than for riotous violence against Kano’s Christians (Ehrhardt 2007).

## V Community Leaders

Ethnic leaders and community elders perform informal leadership functions at the neighbourhood level. In Sabon Gari, the ‘settler’ neighbourhood, there are three types of non-indigenous community authorities: non-indigenous traditional leaders; leaders of the ethnic associations; and the non-indigene leadership association (NLA), which comprises leaders from all individual ethnic associations. The traditional rulers of non-indigenous ethnic groups, such as the *Eze* Igbo and the *Oba* Yoruba, wield positions that have been created, or ‘invented’, as ‘traditional’ specifically in the context of Kano’s centralised Emirate structure (Osaghae 1994: 59-60). They are “in charge of everything pertaining to tradition and culture”<sup>25</sup>; the administrative and limited executive authority in the communities is wielded by the ethnic associations. Both the non-indigenous traditional rulers and the ethnic associations promote development, security, and access to education, politics, and economic resources for their community (or the entire non-indigene community, through the NLA) in interactions with the state and the traditional authorities. Every ethnic group in Sabon Gari has their own traditional rulers and ethnic association, but the Igbo and the Yoruba associations are the most influential due to the size of their communities.

The internal functions of non-indigenous traditional leaders resemble those of the Emirate, in leading rituals and ceremonies, managing tensions and informally settling disputes (Osaghae 1994: 62-63). Intra-ethnic disputes are also often settled by the corresponding ethnic association, while interethnic conflicts are addressed through either the NLA alone (if all parties are non-indigenes) or in co-operation with the district head of Fagge (if one of the parties is an indigene), the local government that comprises Sabon Gari. Ethnic associations are also explicitly political in their outlook. They educate their members to be politically active and sometimes offer advice on who to vote for<sup>26</sup>. The recent appointment of an Igbo as advisor to Governor Shekarau was celebrated as progress for the Igbo community, and, by extension, a victory for the Igbo Association<sup>27</sup>. Similar positions have been given to one representative from the Yoruba Association and one from the other minority ethnic groups.

Ethnic associations developed in the 1940s after the position of *Sarkin* Sabon Gari, an institution that “provided legislative, judiciary and executive roles in regulating inter-group relations” (Olaniyi 2002: 22), was abolished and its authority transferred to the Kano Emirate. The

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<sup>25</sup> Interviews with Chief Boniface Ibikwe, president-general Igbo Association Kano, 16 September 2006 in Kano; and Chief Olayiwole Adeaga, vice-president Yoruba community Kano, 6 September 2006 in Kano

<sup>26</sup> Chief Boniface Ibikwe, op. cit.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.; Interview with Chief Olayiwole Adeaga, op. cit.

new ethnic associations united the state and town unions (Olaniyi 2002: 21-24), but where the unions had focused on maintaining nation-wide links within ethnic groups, ethnic associations and the newly 'traditional' ethnic rulers integrated into the institutional framework of the Kano Emirate (Olaniyi 2002: 25). They function within the boundaries of the state and the Emirate, while challenging them for the emancipation of their community<sup>28</sup>. Ethnic associations are usually formally organised, with a constitution and an elected executive council. They also have several functional committees, such as the peace committee that deals with crises within the Igbo community<sup>29</sup>. Every ethnic association is divided into state or hometown unions, which compete among themselves for recognition in committees and functions of authority. Together, the executive councils of the ethnic associations have formed the non-indigene leadership association (NLA), whose main role is to mediate between members of different ethnic groups and represent the entire non-indigenous community in interactions with the state. Individually, most of these ethnic associations are part of larger regional or national ethnic associations<sup>30</sup>.

'Native' communities in Kano have elders, who command respect and authority because of their age and life experience. Older men in northern Nigerian society, especially those with distinguished careers or extensive religious knowledge, may therefore occupy positions of informal communal authority (Paden 2005: 93). Their age, wealth, knowledge and experience command respect, their houses are social hubs for prayer, community discussions, and people come to them with problems. In the case of Hotoro, a neighbourhood in eastern Kano metropolis where a community elder was interviewed, all elders meet regularly (about once a month) in order to discuss the developments in their communities<sup>31</sup>. Like the traditional rulers, elders represent territorially delineated communities. Like ethnic leaders, however, they represent their people in case of external problems and manage tensions and problems within their community. External representation can either go through the ward head or the local government channels, depending on the nature of the issue. Internal dispute resolution takes place through informal hearings and discussions and can lead to arbitration or a mediated settlement. If this proves unsuccessful, the dispute is referred to the ward head<sup>32</sup>.

Although their roles are similar, there is a significant difference between the basis of authority of ethnic leaders and community leaders. Ethnic rulers are appointed on the basis of their suitability as 'traditional ruler'. The *Eze* Igbo, for example, is selected on the basis of age, income, respectability, knowledge of traditions, and personal authority (Osaghae 1994: 61). Leaders of ethnic associations, however, are democratically elected. Their legitimacy depends on 'modern democratic' values such as free and fair elections, transparent government, honesty, management skills, and progress of the community<sup>33</sup>. The authority of elders is determined by age, social accomplishments, and knowledge. Elders are not (democratic) representatives of an ethnic group, but wise men whom people respect and listen to. For them, good leadership is not dependent on 'modern' qualities of good governance, but on the social skills and personal qualities of the elder.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Chief Olayiwole Adeaga, op. cit.

<sup>29</sup> Chief Boniface Ibikwe, op. cit.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.; Chief Olayiwole Adeaga, op. cit.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with an anonymous (ii) community elder, 30 August 2006 in Kano

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Chief Boniface Ibikwe, op. cit.

<sup>34</sup> Anonymous (ii), op. cit.

Thus, community leaders have considerable influence on social life at the local level. They meet the people from their neighbourhood or ethnic group in formalised meetings (ethnic associations), audiences (traditional leaders), or at their homes (elders), as well as on the street - or beer parlour - of their locality. Ethnic traditional rulers often have good links with the Emirate traditional rulers and perform a largely ceremonial role in their communities. Ethnic associations are politicised, but unlike the religious leaders they represent migrant communities and therefore aim for emancipation and political advancement in the Kano Emirate and State Government structures. As leaders of migrant communities, ethnic traditional leaders and associations push an 'ethnic' interpretation of the social world, emphasising the importance of the culture of the ethnic group - especially as a migrant minority. At the hotly contested Igbo association's elections in November 2008, for example, the performance of Igbo cultural rituals and the use of Igbo language were central to the event's proceedings, taking far longer and celebrated with more enthusiasm than the actual election procedures. Community elders in 'native' or mixed neighbourhoods lack this strongly ethnic definition of the world, but are rather the unofficial local extensions of the Emirate traditional governance system. Their cultural model is one of respect for age and social status, often interspersed with religion and the importance of the local community or neighbourhood.

## VI Conclusions

Traditional, religious, and community leaders are thus not in positions to affect the 'objective' inequalities underlying conflict, but they can promote cultural models through which people can interpret their 'objective' environment. Emirate rulers represent Kano as one territorial unit, with a common identity that softens the boundaries between 'natives' and 'settlers' - thus de-emphasising the grievance of horizontal inequality. However, positioning themselves as a royal ruling class, their cultural model also contains the historical divisions between the *sarauta* and *talakawa* classes - an interpretation that produces its own conflictual social divisions. Religious leaders argue for a social world structured through religious divisions and social norms, a model that is powerful and dichotomous and has the potential to interpret horizontal inequalities as a deep, religious grievance. Ethnic leaders of migrant communities present an ethnic organisation of the social world, in which 'settlers' can integrate into the host community as members of distinctive cultural and linguistic groups. In this cultural model, horizontal inequalities between 'natives' and 'settlers' can become an inter-ethnic grievance, although ethnic fragmentation on both sides of the divide has induced mobilisation for individual group emancipation rather than for conflict between the aggregate 'native' and 'settler' groups.

The case studies have also outlined some explanatory factors for this capacity that could be summarised as: first, the communal nature of their authority; second, their direct links to their communities; and third, their links with other social organisations. First, in terms of authority, the case studies showed that Emirate rulers have a measure of 'traditional' legitimacy, based on their long-term commitment and representation of the 'indigenous' political tradition of the pre-colonial Emirates, but that this is dependent on their distance from formal politics and on the benefits of their leadership for their communities. Religious authority is based on knowledge and a measure of 'closeness to God' - which positions religious leaders at the symbolic heart of the religious community - but also on the benefits of their teachings to the community. Community leaders wield authority as the guardians of migrant culture, but also on the basis of their function as informal (or

even formal) representatives of their community. In all three cases, therefore, authority depends on the benefits of its execution to the community and a sense of being the ‘heart’ of the community - as guardians of ‘tradition’ and culture, or as the ones closest to god.

These forms of authority bear a close resemblance to Weber’s (1978) ideal-typical forms of traditional and charismatic legitimacy, but also include Spencer’s (1970) informal “consent of the ruled”: even though formal elections are often not held (except in the case of ethnic associations), these social organisations are accountable to their members in an informal manner. It may therefore be useful to make a categorical distinction between this type of authority - which I refer to as *communal* and that is defined as based on a measure of *embeddedness* in a community - and what could be referred to as *legal* authority, that is based on (constitutional) law (cf. Weber’s legal-bureaucratic legitimacy). One of the hypotheses derived from this chapter is then that informal social organisations with communal authority can influence the cultural models that are central to collective interpretations of ‘objective’ reality and hence affect popular *perceptions* of horizontal inequalities. To actually affect ‘objective’ horizontal inequalities, these social organisations need a measure of *legal* authority or links to those who wield it.

Second, the case studies have also shown how these three informal organisations have close organisational connections to their communities, which they can use to exercise their authority and propagate their particular cultural model. Traditional rulers are mainly represented at the local level by the ward and village heads, who live in the community they supervise. Religious leaders meet their community during prayer sessions and church services, as well as in educational settings and informal meetings. For community leaders, there are important differences in the ways they maintain contact with their community. More specifically, contact between traditional ethnic leaders and their community is often highly ritualised; ethnic associations maintain quite formalised relations through committees, discussion meetings, and elections; and elders have rather informal contact with their neighbourhood in the context of their own houses. This shows that there are different ways in which a social organisation can be part and parcel of its community: where the Emirate and elders focus on physical presence within their locality, ethnic traditional rulers are more dependent on being imagined as the heart of the ethnic community. Religious leaders combine the two methods, because they are the imagined core of the religious community and maintain tangible interactions.

Lastly, the chapter has indicated that the links between different types of organisations also affect their authority and the ways in which they can use it. For the Emirate, maintaining links with Islamic organisations is important to maintain its position as the ‘administrative’ leadership of Islam in Kano. At the same time, however, it is seeking links with Christian leaders in order to prove they represent the entire population of Kano - not merely Kano’s Muslim ‘natives’. Relations between religious organisations have fluctuated, depending on trends in religious doctrine; the lack of contact between Islamic and Christian leaders has, however, been a constant factor. Relations to state organisations are crucial to some religious leaders - most notably those involved in implementing *sharia* law in the State - while a lack of such relations are the defining element of other, more radical ones. For ethnic traditional rulers, integration into the Kano Emirate system provides recognition and increases their legitimacy; similarly, recognition of ethnic associations and the creation of special advisory posts for their representatives by the State Government increases their legitimacy as representatives for their community. Moreover, this recognition of ethnic associations by the State Government has offered them a seat at the table where formal policy is

made, thus granting them a small measure of legal authority. Elders require good relations with their local ward heads and local governments in order to represent the interests of their neighbourhoods and preserve their 'respect'.

In the face of economic crisis and globally increasing inequalities, therefore, this chapter has suggested that informal organisations such as those in Kano can perhaps not do much to alter the 'objective' differences in income and political influence, but do have the capacity to alter people's perceptions of these inequalities through the cultural models they propagate. Because of the importance of this interpretative process in the path from inequalities to conflict, the mechanisms presented here may warrant further comparative research into the interpretation of horizontal inequalities in other social contexts. The findings in this chapter would suggest that in many of those other contexts, social actors with a measure of communal authority, good community links, and constructive connections with other authorities will be in a position to propagate their own cultural models - and hence influence the ways horizontal inequalities are perceived by their constituencies.

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