



Analysis of Malam Sa'adu Zungur political thoughts on liberation of northern Nigerian political system

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Abstract

This article focused on the political thoughts of Malam Sa'adu Zungur. A man who had served his people in so many capacities of social life, education, politics, religion, to name a few. One who never aspired to be anything but a true servant of the people. A poet, a social critic, an ideologue, an organizer, philosopher, scholar, and a nationalist. Utilizing his greatest advantage, intellectualism, Zungur not only initiated, but led activism with tremendous courage against foreign control, and even domestic dictatorship. He deliberately lived a modest life, and exemplary leadership give him the ability to mobilize the masses to checkmate the excesses of the leaders for a just and fair society. This political re-awakening was the greatest contribution made by Sa'adu Zungur to politics and leadership in Northern region and Nigeria in general. His thought was encouraging people to confront bad rulership without hesitation. He believed that people should never let the sleeping dog lie but wake it up. The paper employed qualitative method. It uses narrative critical analysis that covers relevant textbooks, articles, chronicles, internet resources for gathering and analysis of data. The paper concluded that Malam Sa'adu Zungur was of the greatest personalities on whose shoulder the post-colonial leaders such as Tafawa Balewa, Ahmadu Bello among others, stood on for the fierce struggle for his political reawakening of the masses against the colonialist in particular and bad leadership general.

Keywords: Education, leadership, liberation, nationalist struggle, political activism

1. Introduction

During the early period of Islam, education aimed not only at nurturing spiritual growth but also developing intellectual, emotional, social, economic, and physical well-being. Consequently, the early Islamic scholars demonstrated intellectual prowess across various facets of human existence. However, with the passage of time, there has been a decline in the motivation among Muslims to pursue knowledge. This decline has been further exacerbated by the influence of colonialism. Consequently, Muslim traditional Islamic institutions were dominated by secularism and its ideology (Aliero, 2001).

The process of Islamizing knowledge has existed since the inception of Islam. From

the very start of receiving revelations, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was instructed by Almighty Allah to engage in reading, seeking knowledge, and utilizing the power of writing. The command emphasized the importance of knowledge acquisition in the Islamic faith: "Read in the name of thy Lord who created, created man from a clot of blood. Read: any thy Lord is the most bounteous, who teaches (the use of) the pen. Teaches man that which he knew not" (Qur'an 96: 1-5). However, the West tried to divide the knowledge into divine and temporal. Considering the consequences brought by western domination in every aspect of human life there is need for Islamization of knowledge to restore Islamic culture to the

heart and mind of every individual as it was before. In Nigeria, the Islamization of knowledge can be traced back to the era of Sokoto jihad leaders, who contributed scholarly writings that encompassed various aspects of life, including politics, economics, law, philosophy, poetry, medicine (Gwarzo, 2003). Since after the Jihad of 1904 scholars took it upon themselves to purify the knowledge and at the same time not rejecting current realities. They tried to support young Islamic scholars to study Islamic knowledge in the modern way. One of these scholars is Malam Sa'adu Zungur.

No doubt, among the greatest men and women on earth, who helped or touched the lives of humankind positively with their sweat, blood and sometimes their lives, mostly ended up being “nonentity” or ended up without being adequately acknowledged and celebrated. Eventually many ended up on the forgotten side of history. The lucky ones among such personalities are sometimes mentioned in between appendices at the end of books and only suffer while establishing or developing a “just” or an “egalitarian” society. This kind of society, they did not strive to build and enjoy, but left it to the coming heritor. Ask any nationalist alive today read any of their memoirs, biographies, and autobiographies, go through many historical fragments on Nigeria, colonial era materials, anti-colonial reports, and theses; his name is mentioned as part of the “sword” or “spade” that helped in the destruction of the “colonial enemy” or excavated the dirty politicking during struggle for independence in Nigeria, you find the name of Malam Sa'adu Zungur. Testimonies upon testimonies, the Azikiwes, the Aminu Kanos, the Awolowos, the Tafawa-Balewas, the Abubakar Imams, all knew they reaped the bounties of post-colonial power and popularity not because they really sweated hard for it, but because of the looming presence of such people like

Sa'adu Zungur at the background (Malumfashi, 2013).

Throughout his life, Sa'adu Zungur never aspired to be anything but a true servant of the people. A poet, a social critic, an ideologue, an organizer, philosopher, religionist, and nationalist. He deliberately lived a life of penury, so that others may enjoy it. He organized the masses, so that others may rule justly. The greatest contribution made by Sa'adu Zungur to the political re-awakening in Nigeria is by encouraging people to confront the colonialist without hesitation. He taught the people, never to let the sleeping dog lie, wake it up (Umar, 1999).

Using critical narrative analysis, this paper presents the ideas, thought and works of Malama Zungur. This type of narrative analysis examines the socio-political and ideological effects of a narrative, and interrogating its causal assumptions and values. Scholars of research may evaluate the ways in which a narrative reflects or reinforces dominant power structures, or how it challenges or undermines those structures. Critical analysis can be used to know the part that narratives play in determining social and cultural norms.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Life of Malam Sa'adu Zungur

Sa'adu Zungur, born (1915-1958), belonged to a prestigious lineage of Islamic scholars. His family has historically held the title of Imam, signifying their leadership in the Central Mosque in Bauchi. Despite his strong background in Islamic scholarship, Sa'adu displayed exceptional intelligence and diligence as a student, becoming the first individual from northern Nigeria to pursue a Pharmacy degree. Despite his modesty and disinterest in material possessions, Sa'adu was renowned for his fearlessness and unwavering character (Dambazau, 2001).

Sa'adu Zungur, born in 1915 in Ganjuwa ward of Bauchi city, was commonly known as Ahmad Mahmud Sa'adu Zungur.

He completed his early education in Bauchi before proceeding to Katsina Teachers College for his high education. Later, he attended the Kano and Lagos Schools of Hygiene, and eventually matriculated at the prestigious Royal School of Hygiene in London, England, from where he graduated with distinction. His family's scholarly background and the knowledge he acquired during his formative years had a profound impact on his life. Sa'adu's father, Muhammad Bello, was not only fluent in the local language Hausa but also spoke Fulfulde (a regional language spoken by cattle herders in West Africa) and Arabic. Known for his exceptional memory and insatiable thirst for knowledge, Sa'adu was regarded as a brilliant student in fields such as Qur'anic interpretation (Tafsir), Arabic grammar (Nahw), Jurisprudence (Fiqh), and theology. His cousin, Malam Salman, once mentioned that Sa'adu would constantly engage in deep reflection and contemplation, leading the family to express concerns about his perpetual reading, writing, and introspection. There was a particular tree in Zungur, known as the "Giginya" tree, an unusually tall date palm, which served as Sa'adu's favourite spot for contemplation (Umar, 1993).

Leveraging his comprehensive Western education and deep religious knowledge, Zungur actively confronted the prevailing injustices in his society. His Western education placed him in direct opposition to the British colonial administration, resulting in their deliberate obstruction of his employment opportunities (Yakubu, 2006). This ban by the colonial administrators compounded his already challenging predicament, as the absence of a viable private sector left him in a state of bleak unemployment during that era. Despite this obstacle imposed by the colonialists and their collaborators, Zungur remained undeterred. He went on to establish the first political platform for northern youth, followed by a forum for adults, marking the first recorded instances

of such initiatives in the northern region. Zungur not only initiated activism against foreign dominance but also fearlessly led it with determination and courage. His most significant assets were his intellectual capabilities (Falola, 2001).

He was educated in both Arabic and English. Later in his life, he was well versed in the knowledge of the Qur'an and served as an adviser for Islamic law in the newly founded *Jam'iyyar Mutanen Arewa* (Northern People's Congress) (Yakubu, 1999). Zungur also attended the Yaba Higher College in Lagos as one of the first Northern students to study in the Western part of Nigeria. Though, he was in Lagos trying to study to be a medical dispenser, he was taken by the Ahmadiyya Movement there and devoted innumerable time to the movement. He returned to the North and settled first in Zaria city. During his stay in the city, he co-founded the Zaria Friendly Society with Abubakar Imam and a few others. He later earned the threat of the colonial authorities when he tried to use society as a platform for his political beliefs, especially those concerning the reform of the Native Authority who enjoyed the blessings of the colonialist (Sklar, 2004). As a radical, Zungur does not believe in the way colonial rulers, and the native authorities exploit the masses. He later taught in Bauchi and in the mid-1940 together with Aminu Kano and Muhammadu Baba Halla, the three men tried to form a political organization to challenge the Native Authority to reform. This was after the officially sponsored Bauchi Discussion Circle in which Zungur was a participant and closed with the colonial administration. In 1948, Zungur became the secretary of National Congress of Nigerian and Cameroon as the first northerner to hold that position in a party for national outlook and affiliation. This means that his political struggle goes beyond the shores of the North and wrote articles on national issues which was widely read across the country. He left the party in

1950. Thereafter, he was part of the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and provided intellectual vitality to the Bauchi branch of the party (Yakubu, 1999).

He was a leading Hausa poet and political activist of the mid-twentieth century. Zungur was an outspoken activist and nationalist at a time when few non aristocratic Hausa men were conspicuous in political matters. He was described as a rebel with a noble cause in his Hausa native community. He was also the father of politics in Northern Nigeria. He had lofty dreams for a prosperous and independent Nigeria who did not live to see it. At last, he was not there to witness the independence anniversary as he left this earth precisely in 1958, two years to independence at the age of forty-four (44) due to a protracted illness (Paden, 1973). He was influenced by radical anti-colonial politics and used his writings to mobilize the poor to join the nationalist movement. He was a revolutionary who challenged traditional authorities and abuse of power (Falola, 2001).

2.2 Literary Works of Zungur On Political Liberation on the Northern Region

The literary works of Malam Sa'adu Zungur is strongly associated with post-war history of Nigeria. His poem dealt with various political developments of the country. In the period prior to gaining independence in Nigeria, divergence issues arose between the Muslim North and the more developed and constitutionally privileged South. The anxiety felt by the Hausas in the North found their reflection in the poem of Zungur "Arewa Jumhuriyya ko Mulukiyya" (is the North to be a Republican or a constitutional oligarchy?) in which he called for political and social problems to be solved on the basis of existing Islamic institutions, rejecting alien political concept. With time, he concluded in the poem "wakar yanci" (song of freedom) that this idea of mulukiyya

(republic) could not be realized under the existing circumstances of colonialism (Andrzejewski et. al., 1985). At that time, the conservative Northern elites were both against independence and republic. They opted for the *mulukiyya* to maintain their status-quo. This was supported by the colonial indirect rule policy of the colonial masters. Zungur opposed this position and called for change the poem of republic of oligarchy. By this, politically he was the first to move for sensitization of people for independence through poetic means.

Apparently, making Islamic arguments for western education is part of Muslims' political strategies of avoiding marginalization in Nigeria. But less clearly recognized is the equally significant point that the Hausa poems composed to advocate western education are also an integral part of a larger public debate on modernity among Muslims of Northern Nigeria. For example, the combative and dialogic nature of much political poetry has led to occasions where poets have entered lengthy poetic exchanges, some in private and some in public. Sa'adu Zungur's poems do not neatly fit into the conservative NPC in which he was a founding member though he later joined NEPU (Yakubu, 2006). Zungur's most poems articulate the radical politics of NEPU. In fact, central to these poetical exchanges is the important question of whether Northern Nigeria remained a monarchy, the position that favoured the conservative. Other important political issues during the era of politics were reform and modernization of the emirate system that had formed the bedrock of British indirect rule during the first three decades of colonial rule in Northern Nigeria. He rejects the idea of *mulukiyya* and went for *jumhuriyya* (Umar, 2002).

2.3 The Political Movement of Sa'adu Zungur

In a similar vein, the late Malam Sa'adu Zungur, who held progressive visions for the advancement and progress of Nigeria as a whole, as well as Northern Nigeria

specifically, embarked on organizing and establishing the Zaria Friendly Society in 1940. The primary objectives of this association encompassed advocating for social reforms within the Northern Region and enlightening the populace on political matters. Additionally, Dr. R.A.B. Dikko and Malam Sa'adu Zungur, alongside other members of the educated Northern elite, founded a cultural organization known as Jam'iyyar Mutanen Arewa in 1948. Eventually, this association transformed into the Northern People's Congress (NPC) after adopting an English name, relinquishing its Hausa nomenclature (Gwarzo, 2003). As the organization was not officially declared as a political party, the colonial authorities astutely reminded civil servants, who were affiliated with the association, of the provisions stipulated in relevant government regulations. Violation of these regulations could result in job loss. Consequently, doubts arose among the members of this organization regarding their active participation. Eventually, Zungur resigned from the party at a later stage (Dudley, 1968).

The cultural political associations that started emerging from the late 1930s to the early 1940s reflected the general divide of Nigeria, though some of these associations initially did not demonstrate such overt and sharp division. Sa'adu Zungur founded the first of such cultural associations, the Northern General Improvement Union (NGIU) in 1941, and it drew membership from such tendencies. Mostly, the Union drew membership from the North. Thus, prominent people like Abubakar Imam, Wazirin Zazzau Sanusi, Malam Julde, Malam Jumare, R.A.B. Dikko, and John Garba, the Emir of Zazzau, and others based in Zaria amalgamated as one association. This means that such organizations had membership drawn from the remnants of the precolonial state apparatus as well as from the colonial state and were often organized for the protection of such interest. Sa'adu Zungur, along with other radical

members of the organization, refused to tolerate the discrimination against women or the unjust actions of the Emirs and Native Authorities. Their opposition was not only justified, but they also substantiated it with numerous references from the Qur'an. Moreover, their dissent was articulated through the powerful mediums of poetry and song. The NGIU was therefore disbanded, and its members transferred to other locations within and outside the province (Paden, 1973). Sa'adu was transferred to Anchau to fight infectious diseases being him a medical practitioner and hygiene expert in the field. Although the NGIU was disbanded, this did not appear to have stopped the organization of interests along the two major tendencies identified above. Throughout Northern Nigeria, from Bauchi, Kano, Kaduna, Sokoto, Katsina, to Zaria and through the pages of newspapers such as the Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo, Sodangi, Comet and the West African Pilot, issues such as the rule and operation of the Native Authorities, the position and role of emirs in tax affairs, "backwardness" of the North, and the nature of the emergent postcolonial states were raised and debated. Three volatile issues dominated these debates: forced conscription of Northerners to fight at the war front, forced labour at the tin mines in Jos, and the diversion of food meant for the people to the war front (Skalr, 2004).

At different fora across the Northern Provinces, such issues were raised and expressed through literary and poetic forms. It was clear that the colonial government and the native authorities, at the head of which were the emirs, were the subject of discussion. Such debates and discussions were justified on religious grounds, though, for the "conservative Islamic tendency," reform was the watchword, while for the "radical Islamic tendency" fundamental change in the system was the main goal. So, after the abolition of NGIU, Zungur and his fellow comrades formed the Bauchi Discussion Circle (later the Bauchi General

Improvement Union) in 1943. It was during these years also, that the Zaria Zumunta Association, Sokoto Youth Social Circle, and Citizens Associations of Kano were established (Barber, 2006). By the end of the 1950s, some of these organizations began to merge into political parties. Thus, the famous Northern People Congress (NPC) was formed from a merger of various cultural associations, amongst which are the Jam'iyyar Mutanen Arewa, Jam'iyyar Jama'ar Arewa, the Sokoto Youth Social Circle, and the Citizens Association of Kano. In 1951, the NPC underwent a transformation that involved distancing itself from its more radical members, including individuals like Malam Sa'adu Zungur. It became evident that the party had aligned itself with the existing power structures and assumed the role of an establishment party (Malumfashi, 2013).

Owing to its initial composition and the members it attracted, the NPC had the ability and indeed claimed to espouse radicalism. It openly criticized the traditional establishment and put forth some reformist ideas that deeply unsettled both the colonial state and the traditional rulers. This pressure not only led to the suppression of such radicalism but also prompted a shift towards accommodating changes aimed at developing the colonial institution rather than completely transforming it. The endeavour to rid the NPC of its radicalism and radical tendencies reached a climax at the party's Jos convention in 1950, resulting in a division between the conservatives and radicals. Consequently, several radical members, including Malam Sa'adu Zungur, were expelled from the party (Sklar, 2004). The Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU) was in the main, the organization that championed the objectives of the "radical Islamic tendency. It was initially launched in 1946 under the name of the Northern Element Progressive Association. NEPA resolved to foster "mutual understanding and cooperation" between

the people of the North, as well as to clear away the belief that "the Northerner is silent because he is satisfied." NEPA's objectives, right from the start, were radically political and were expressed in painful criticism, both colonial establishment and the emirs who cooperated with them. The disbandment of NEPA in 1949 led to the formation of NEPU in 1950. NEPU's objectives were radically different from that of NPC's. NEPU was in addition committed to the total emancipation of the *talakawa* (poor people) from the domination of a privileged few, through the reform of the existing autocratic political institutions in the North. Its articulation of the anti-colonial struggle, anti-imperialist and pan-Nigerian nationalist terms meant it was also against regionalism as well as the colonial state. By thus declaring itself against regionalism and autocratic power, NEPU was seen as posing a serious threat to the whole colonial project. This threat became even more serious in view of NEPU's efforts to build alliances within regions.

The distinctiveness of both parties is therefore historically embedded in the kind of issues both came to represent. Beyond the parties lie two social forces that are locked in conflict over the nature of domination, the exercise and limits to such domination, the relationship between rulers and the ruled, as well as the nature of the emergent post-colonial state. Such conflicts have been influenced by religion, and their expression indeed takes place through religious language. The expression of such conflicts and the opposition to them has been predominantly poetic and literary, and Sa'adu Zungur was the main configuration that served as a catalyst (Malumfashi, 2013).

As rightly observed by Yakubu (1999), Sa'adu Zungur's exchanges in newspapers, poems, and letters from 1941-1956 are united by interrelated themes. Sa'adu Zungur's primary objectives were centered around the pursuit of justice and the ultimate liberation from British colonialism

and their allies. His organization, NGIU, underwent a transformation and evolved into the NPC. Similarly, his BGUI in Bauchi led to the establishment of NEPA, which later became NEPU. Additionally, his affiliation with NCNC in Lagos paved the way for the emergence of UPGA. These various associations and political transformations were instrumental in advancing his vision of justice and liberation.

During his speech at the 1948 NCNC convention, Zungur emphasized the importance of tribal unity in conjunction with the struggle for independence. He highlighted divisive tendencies emerging among certain Yoruba individuals in Lagos, which were being fuelled by the colonialists. Zungur proposed the establishment of an organization called the National Society for Inter-tribal Understanding under the umbrella of NCNC, with branches nationwide. He firmly stated that there were individuals within Nigeria who aimed to hinder efforts towards uniting the people in their pursuit of emancipation and self-governance. Zungur further mentioned that he had previously published two articles in the West African Pilot, where he accused specific Yoruba leaders and sections of the local press of intentionally promoting tribal animosity and attempting to create hostility between the Ibos and Yorubas. Zungur saw no advantage in further dividing the freedom fighters based on tribal affiliations, regardless of the reasons behind it (Wada, 2011).

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

Sa'adu suffered from an unexplained illness that some suspected to be asthma while others thought it could be tuberculosis. Despite being a thorn in the side of both colonial and local authorities in his quest for justice and fair treatment, neither the native nor foreign powers tried to provide him with adequate medical care. In that era, the cost of private medical treatment was exorbitant, making it inaccessible for

individuals of average means like Sa'adu. As a result, he found himself without hope or the necessary support. Prolonged unemployment plagued him throughout his adult life, leading him to provide voluntary services without seeking any compensation. He selflessly extended his help wherever possible, but tragically, his illness ultimately claimed his life during the prime years of his existence. Malam Sa'adu Zungur is poetic and prolific writer very prominent among his contemporaries both in the North and across the Niger Bridge.

He is among the first set of nationalists who set the stage for independence struggle. A radical scholar whose ideas do not spare the local traditional rules let alone the colonial masters. In his own words to the Bauchi Divisional Officer (head of the colonial administration in Bauchi): *"I prefer to write rather than speak. If I sit in a place with you, I am sure to be overpowered by your personality; and I must out of obedience and politeness listen more and speak less. I write because I feel these things so passionately that I must cry out. I have tried not to write this letter. I tried to put the thought of the destiny of Northern Nigeria behind me. I cannot. I go to bed with these thoughts; I get up with them."* (Yakubu, 1999). *The legacy he set prepared the stage for independence of Nigeria which is celebrated in the country. May Allah be pleased with him, Amin.*

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