

PART I. FROM CALIPHATE TO FEDERAL REPUBLIC

ONE. A TALE OF TWO EMIRS

Colonialism and Bureaucratizing Emirates, 1900–1948

In January 1851 Emir Bello of Katsina received a visit from a young German on an exploratory mission for the British government. His visitor, Dr. Heinrich Barth, posed the emir with a dilemma. Barth's companions had parted ways with him, going instead to Katsina's rivals. One went east to the empire of Borno, which had resisted the jihad that had brought the emir's regime to power. The other went to Maradi, a city founded by the Katsina dynasty the jihad had displaced. Barth himself was on his way to Kano, Katsina's trading rival, and ultimately to Sokoto, the capital of the emir's overlord. The presence of this European in Katsina presented Emir Bello with both opportunities and dangers. As ruler of Katsina, he was entitled to presents from travelers coming through his land. Europeans had access to valuable things: manufactured goods unavailable through normal sources, rare medicines, powerful weapons. Receiving such presents from Barth was doubly desirable when hostile powers (not to mention formally friendly rivals like Kano) might be trading in such goods with Barth's friends. But the emir was no mere shakedown artist. He had a reputation to protect as a just Muslim ruler who fostered the traders on whom his land's prosperity depended. He owed obedience to Sokoto, which was doubly important since its sultan had deposed Bello's predecessor for disobedience a few years previously.¹ And thus his challenge: how could the emir use Barth's presence to best advantage?

The emir's ten days of negotiations with Barth are recounted in the latter's extraordinary travel narrative. The drama demonstrates important and enduring qualities to political life in the region. While the caravan in which Barth traveled was still encamped several miles from the city, the emir came to greet him. Soon thereafter the emir sent his European guest a present of a ram and two calabashes of honey. This was, Barth remarked, "an honor which was rather disagreeable to me than otherwise, as it placed me under the necessity of making the governor a considerable present in return. I had no article of value with me, and I began to feel some unpleasant foreboding of future difficulties."² The ten days that followed confirmed his worst fears.

The morning after that initial meeting, Barth confided to the leader of his caravan he had very little appropriate to present to the emir—only razors, cloves, frankincense, and two red caps. The bulk of his possessions having been diverted along another route, he did not even have enough money to purchase a formal gown as a present. The caravan leader warned him the emir "had made up his mind to get a large present from me, otherwise he would not allow me to continue my journey."³ Visiting the emir, Barth made a present of the caps, razors, cloves, frankincense, a piece of calico, some soap, and a packet of needles. Barth then announced his intention to go to Kano and thence to Borno. There, he explained, he would be reunited with the bulk of his possessions, which had been diverted east. Having access to these goods would enable him to travel west to Sokoto to meet with the sultan. The emir replied that he would be foolish to allow Barth to leave when his companions had gone to Maradi and Borno. Tactfully, the emir forbore pointing out that Barth himself planned a journey to the latter. It was out of the question to allow Barth passage when he had done so little to acknowledge Katsina's dignity, and when he clearly intended to dispense favors elsewhere. Barth was instead separated from his caravan and provided with a house inside the city as an involuntary guest of the emir. Barth's obligation to produce a more spectacular present then deepened when the emir sent him another ram and two ox-loads of grain. In Barth's next meeting with the emir, the discussion expanded from the issue of adequate presents to Katsina's ruler from a visiting dignitary and began to consider Barth's legal status in the country. Barth presented the emir with letters written on his behalf by the sultan of Agadez, which he hoped would convince the emir to allow him onward passage. Emir Bello and his advisors, however, insisted on another interpretation:

According to the sagacious interpretation of these men, the purport of the letter was to recommend me expressly to this governor as a fit person

to be detained in his company. All my representations to the effect that [the sultan] had recommended me in exactly the same terms to the governors of Daura and Kano, and that I had forwarded a letter from Agades to the Emir el Mumenin in Sokoto, informing him that, as soon as we had received new supplies from the coast, one of us at least would certainly pay him a visit, which, under present circumstances, robbed and destitute as we were, we could not well do, were all in vain; he had an answer for every objection, and was impudent enough to tell me that a message had been received from Maradi, soliciting me to go thither; that as Bornu had laid hold of one of my companions, and Maradi of the other, so he would lay hold of me, but of course only to become my benefactor. . . . Seeing that reply was useless and that it was much better to let this lively humorist go through his performance, and to wait patiently for the end of the comedy, I took leave of him and returned to my quarters.⁴

Barth felt trapped. His resources inadequate to satisfy the emir, he realized pretexts might be manufactured to detain him indefinitely. His next move was to try to find a sponsor in local politics. He had been placed under the protection of the expatriate who informally coordinated the affairs of non-Africans in the city. Acquiring a loaf of sugar, Barth reviewed his letters of introduction with this protector, who pledged to support his interpretation of their import, on the understanding that Barth would return to Katsina later after he had been reunited with his possessions. At that point his friends would be rewarded.⁵ The strategy was not immediately successful; at his next meeting with the emir he was greeted with a demand for 100,000 cowries (Barth calculated this was equivalent to £8, more than he had with him), which the emir justified as adequate reciprocity for the gifts of foodstuffs Barth had received from him.⁶ Ultimately, instead of money the emir received a caftan and a carpet, along with various medical goods: “a few powders of quinine, of tartar-emetic, and of acetate of lead, and . . . a small bottle with a few drops of laudanum.” Although the emir then demanded two additional medicines—one for “conjugal vigor” and the other for war (i.e., rockets)—he ultimately allowed Barth to leave, despite disappointment in these last wishes.⁷

By itself the encounter between Barth and the emir has little historical importance. It outlines, however, a political logic of enduring significance. The issue at stake was not finding a fee for services to be rendered, nor was Emir Bello’s conduct an exercise of government authority that could be termed proper or improper. The questions were deeper, and the transactions more profound. What was Barth’s status in the emirate with regard to the sultan of

Agadez or the sultan of Sokoto? What kind of present was an adequate gesture of respect for the emir, and what were appropriate forms of reciprocity between him and a distinguished visitor? It is a sign of Barth's extraordinary lack of ethnocentrism that he narrates this encounter in a straightforward way. Frustration comes across, but so does his presentation of himself as enmeshed within a web of reciprocal transactions. He was annoyed by the emir but recognized himself as a political inferior. More than that, Barth's narrative underlines the centrality of reciprocal prestation in the governance of the Sokoto Caliphate.

Goods were not simply goods; they were tangible symbols of political position. Their transfer as presents was a means of representing and consolidating political relationships. Medicines, gowns, and carpets were not just useful in their own right; they coordinated Barth's (and by extension Britain's) political position in the central Sudan, and Katsina's position vis-à-vis its overlord, allies, and enemies. Relationships between states were manifested in flows of people and commodities. Katsina sent money and goods and slaves to Sokoto. This was part of a routine process of tax collection, but the symbolism was dense. On his installation, Emir Bello had paid the *kudin sarauta* new officeholders give their overlords, and he regularly sent gifts as "greetings" (*gaisuwa*). Barth's encounter is not just important for its snapshot of the tangible aspects of mid-nineteenth-century diplomacy or because it portrays political culture in some untouched past. Rather Barth's experience is a window onto one moment, with a specific set of historical actors, institutional constraints, and economic considerations, and it demonstrates a mode of politics transformed but persistent in other historical contexts. The manner in which the political culture of mid-nineteenth-century Katsina was incorporated into modern Nigeria is a condition of possibility for more recent practices, which are frequently called "political corruption," and which I suggested in the introduction should be understood as part of a distinctive "corruption-complex" of material practices and discourses about those practices. But it would be anachronistic to suggest the same for the 1850s.

Barth suggests the emir's actions are not entirely admirable even within his own frame of reference:

Notwithstanding the injustice of every kind which he daily commits, he has some sentiment of honor; and feeling rather ashamed for having given me so much trouble for nothing, as he was aware that it would become known to his fellow-governors, and probably even to his liege lord, the Emir el Mumenin, he was anxious to vindicate his reputation.

It was from the same motive that he begged me most urgently not to tell any body that I had made him the presents here, adding that he would afterward say that he had received them from me from Kano.⁸

There is no hint in the text the emir was “corrupt” in the modern sense of the word—frustrating, disingenuous, perverse, greedy, oppressive, unjust. But not *corrupt*. Emir Bello committed injustice but retained “some sentiment of honor.” And critically, Barth did not accuse him of misusing his office, just of causing Barth “trouble for nothing.” Even in Barth’s frame of reference this was no violation of a set of bureaucratic rules. Barth was, perhaps, not entirely fair to the emir. Aside from noting tensions with Maradi and Borno, he did not acknowledge the complexity of Bello’s political position. The emir’s grip on power was not entirely secure. His predecessor had been removed from Katsina’s throne, and the deposed emir remained in the region, threatening to make common cause with Katsina’s other enemies. Though Bello had been in power since 1844, he did not fully succeed in consolidating his authority until after 1853, when his predecessor invaded unsuccessfully.⁹ At the time of Barth’s 1851 visit, therefore, Bello was engaged in a struggle to install his own supporters in offices of state, to consolidate support among existing officeholders, and to stabilize his position within the caliphate and internationally. Barth’s presence was potentially significant for doing so, offering the promise of decisive advantage, but any hopes the emir entertained were disappointed. Barth, for all his acumen, did not acknowledge this.

Despite its nineteenth-century details, this passage in Barth’s narrative reads as surprisingly modern. It strikes a chord in anyone who has met repeatedly with officials and been frustrated by a constantly shifting set of requirements. In more recent times, official demands—which some would call “corrupt”—can be structured in a very similar way, with protracted discussions about supplicants’ status, the government services necessary for their situation, and the appropriate recompense. For example, during a long research stay in Nigeria I had business in a government office and needed to receive an official document from the officials there. I was forced to visit the office multiple times across three weeks, as I met and befriended a variety of officials in the office, from the most senior to the quite junior. Our interactions were sociable, but friendly conversation served deeper purposes, working out how I was to apply for what I needed, and how much it would cost, both in formal fees and other expenses. Eventually, my primary advisor, one of the more senior officials, determined my case would need to be decided by the relevant ministry in Abuja, the federal capital. In order to expedite my case, I would need to pay

for a junior official to take my file there himself, covering his costs of travel, as well as other expenses he and his colleagues would incur on my behalf. The sums involved were substantial, and considerably greater than the published fees, but from my vantage they were not wholly extortionate. As Daniel Jordan Smith has suggested for southeastern Nigeria, this kind of intricately negotiated encounter is all-pervasive but generally perceived as problematic,¹⁰ not unreasonably, since so many resources must be devoted to such demands. How did a politics in which negotiation between superiors and inferiors involving significant material transactions become “corruption” and become a problem?

Hausa States and the Sokoto Caliphate

Emir Bello ruled a state with a venerable history. Katsina had long been famous as one of the *Hausa bakwai*, the seven ancestral Hausa city-states. These polities (the major states of Kano, Katsina, Zaria, and Gobir along with the more minor state of Daura, the Kano vassal Rano, and Biram in what is now Hadejia) claimed descent from a common ancestor-hero who had saved the city of Daura from a snake and married its queen. The Hausa states shared the Hausa language, many aspects of culture, and many elements of their constitutions. In their governments, the king was assisted by a constellation of subordinate officials (the *masu sarauta*, lit. “possessors of office”).¹¹ Some of these offices were reserved for men and some for women, for royals and nonroyals, for free people and slaves (and sometimes eunuchs), though the specific offices and rules for filling them varied from kingdom to kingdom and across history. In addition to their functional offices, the *masu sarauta* played a key role in territorial administration. Every settlement under a kingdom’s control owed allegiance to some officeholder, who assumed responsibility for collecting its taxes and administered its affairs through intermediaries called *jakadu* (sing. *jakada*).

Officeholders gained income from two sources. As a requisite of office, they possessed large plantations staffed by slaves, whose incomes went to them personally. They also retained a portion of the taxes they collected from settlements inhabited by free people. When an officeholder first attained office, he or she would also make a payment (*kudin sarauta*) to the king, and subordinates regularly made presents (*gaisuwa*) to their superiors. Kings established and maintained their authority through their ability to appoint and remove officeholders and to grant slave plantations. Gifts thus went both ways, and the demands of superior officials were balanced by their ability to give patronage.¹²

Hausaland became incorporated into the great trans-Saharan trading routes beginning in approximately the eleventh century CE, and Islam came into the region along with traders. Widespread Islamicization came slowly, and it played out differently in the various states; where in Kano the aristocracy converted before ordinary people, in Katsina the reverse happened. Everywhere, this was a feature of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, if not later. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, however, Islamicization took a new turn. Some centuries previously, a group of nomadic pastoralists, the Fulani, had come into the region. Though the nomadic Fulani kept to an indigenous religion, some of them settled down in cities, and among those a number became renowned as devout religious scholars. One of these latter, a man named Usman ɗan Fodio, became a close advisor to the king of Gobir and later a bitter opponent. ʿDan Fodio and his followers ultimately fled the Gobir capital of Alkalawa and then launched a jihad against the kingdom, which was quickly joined by Fulani in other Hausa states and even beyond. Although most of the states the jihad made war on were officially Muslim, the jihadists declared that the practice of Islam in them was syncretistic and improper. They had great success. Most Hausa states were conquered, and their Hausa dynasties replaced by Fulani emirs subject to Usman ɗan Fodio, who presided over the empire from a new capital built at Sokoto.¹³

In the decades that followed, the new caliphate systematized the practice of Islam, particularly in cities and larger towns. Wars persisted with enemies beyond the empire's frontiers—kingdoms founded by displaced Hausa dynasties (such as Maradi or the Zaria successor at Abuja), other chieftaincies, and confederations. The jihad and then the continuing state of war intensified practices of slave raiding and slave holding that were already well established. Hausaland had long exported significant numbers of slaves, and its aristocracy depended on slave labor. Larger numbers of war captives expanded these sectors of the economy and also fostered a tendency of emirate authorities to sponsor slave raiding. Under Islamic law it is illegal for Muslims to enslave Muslims, but it is permissible (indeed, meritorious) to enslave pagans, who might thereby be convinced to convert. Across the nineteenth century, parties of quasi-official slave raiders increasingly targeted settlements within the caliphate's borders as well as beyond them, often depending on the flimsy justification that the settlements being raided were only nominally Muslim and had slid back to idolatry.¹⁴

At times, practices like the *bori* spirit possession movement were persecuted, and women's public role eroded as offices that had been female were filled by men. In both cases, the emphasis was on ensuring that government

and officially sanctioned religious practice sufficiently accorded with Islamic norms. The new Fulani emirs were subject to Sokoto, owing the sultan taxes and tribute, appointed and overseen by this supreme authority. With the intensification of Islam as a principle of governance, a moral vocabulary for assessing governmental conduct became increasingly available to ever-larger numbers of people. And (especially since the jihadists burned documents that might have demonstrated pre-jihadic Islam was less syncretistic than they had claimed) a larger number of surviving documents and oral histories has allowed a detailed reconstruction of government practices in the nineteenth-century Sokoto Caliphate. Orthodoxy and obedience were key ways of characterizing official conduct. Officials were regularly deposed for a variety of offenses—oppressive conduct, failing to forward a sufficient share of tax. And yet, corruption was not an obvious idiom for describing these shortcomings. That began to change with the start of the colonial period.

Colonialism and Indirect Rule

In the aftermath of the Conference of Berlin, where Great Britain was allocated a vaguely delineated territory covering much of what is now Nigeria, the British government granted a charter to the Royal Niger Company to establish a protectorate over what is now northern Nigeria.¹⁵ The company's interests lay in trade, and accordingly its protectorate established effective control only in the extreme southern portion of Northern Nigerian territory along the Niger and Benue Rivers, which facilitated trade to the south. Major powers like Borno and the Sokoto Caliphate remained independent, their manufacturing sectors producing textiles and leather goods for the Middle Eastern and north African markets and their traders relying on caravans across the Sahara desert. While this trade (along with the considerable profits to be made selling slaves) made them prosperous, it did not prove attractive for European commerce. Toward the end of the century, French and German activities intensified along Northern Nigeria's frontiers, and Britain increasingly worried about the possibility of their encroachment on what was supposed to be a British sphere of influence.

Despite these dangers, the company was disinclined to establish more of a presence further north. Accordingly, the government canceled its charter and declared a royal protectorate in 1900. It appointed Sir Frederick Lugard as its first high commissioner but gave him strict instructions to avoid unnecessary military conquest. British taxpayers were unenthusiastic about subsidizing new African colonies even while appreciating the glory of imperial possession, and there was little convertible currency to be gained in the northern

emirates. Only an external subvention would make a European administration self-sustaining, and London's object was a presence as small and cheap as was compatible with keeping territory out of French or German hands. Lugard and his subordinates, by contrast, were determined to make names for themselves as heroes of the empire by presiding over imperial expansion. Missionaries enthusiastically supported their imperial ambitions in the hopes of gaining access to the vast territory's population, which had been blocked by emirate authorities. Missionaries and colonial officers were joined by antislavery campaigners, who considered Africa to be the last frontier for abolition.¹⁶ This confluence of forces provided political cover as Lugard and his subordinates found *casus belli* against emirates that remained independent in the first years of the protectorate, directly annexing the major emirates by 1903. This form of expansion was controversial—an influential group of Liberals advocated imperialism through trade rather than direct conquest—but Lugard and his supporters managed to make themselves political conquerors.

The marginal financial situation of the British regime created a practical problem of how to govern a vast territory with a relative handful of European officials—nine when the protectorate first was declared.¹⁷ The solution was to evolve an extreme version of the near-universal imperial tactic of governing through indigenous political institutions.¹⁸ In the Sokoto Caliphate and Borno, therefore, Lugard retained the precolonial political structures more or less intact, replacing monarchs who had fought the invaders and demanding that their successors swear allegiance to Great Britain. Since these officials could be supported by local tax collection, the resulting regime would need relatively little in the way of convertible currency. But an ideological difficulty emerged in the metropole. Direct annexation had been justified to the British public by lurid accounts of Nigerian misgovernance. The Fulani emirs were represented as tyrants, sponsors of slave raids that terrorized the population and degenerate inheritors of a once-proud imperial tradition. The African masses (in this portrait) desperately needed European governance, which was not immediately compatible with retaining the structures of emirate governments intact. Lugard's skills as a propagandist helped to paper over this contradiction, and has had a legacy of enshrining his system of indirect rule as a coherent and innovative policy that Britain extended to all its African colonies, enabling a distinctive form of colonial rule. Lugard's extensive writings¹⁹ and those of his admirers²⁰ fleshed out indirect rule as a theory of imperial administration uniquely suited "to tribal government, in order to secure maintenance of law and order through the least disturbance of tradition by the imposition of civilized authority,"²¹ as the journal *Nature* ecstatically described it.

Existing governments were corrupt (in the older sense of the word), but they also had many admirable traits. Africans would not easily accept European systems of rule because they were conservative and hidebound. It was much better, Lugard argued, to retain familiar systems, which would be cultivated and gradually modernized under British tutelage.²² Scholars have debated the importance of indirect rule—how interventionist it was in practice, how much autonomy native authorities enjoyed, how different British indirect rule was from French practices of direct administration.²³ These questions are difficult to answer. More productively, one can say that the British indirect rule dictated the terms in which policy debate was conducted, constraining what was politically possible. Preserving tradition was unassailable, but indirect rule also implied a mandate for change and reorganization, often cast as a means of preservation. Indirect rule elevated tradition (and culture more generally) to being a central principle of government.²⁴

Whatever colonial policy was called—and whatever its political implications in Britain—the regime faced pressing administrative problems. The political staff genuinely was spread thin. The protectorate was organized as a group of provinces, each headed by a political officer termed the resident. Provinces generally contained several divisions, and each district was headed by a district officer who reported to the resident. For example, Kano emirate was large enough to constitute its own division, and Kano city was also the headquarters for Kano province. Until 1926 Kano province also contained Katsina division (which administered Katsina, Daura, and Kazaure emirates) and Katagum division (with responsibility for Gumel, Hadejia, Katagum, Misau, Dambam, and Jama'are).²⁵ Residents and district officers had wide-ranging supervisory responsibility. They spent much of their time touring the rural areas of their territories and reviewing the administrative decisions of emirate authorities. Precolonial territorial administration was almost opaque to British review, especially since conveying directives and collecting taxes did not generate paperwork. A target of immediate hostility was the system whereby officeholders administered settlements while continuing to live in emirate capitals. The *jakadu* who enabled this system to work were assailed by officers as personally immoral and arbitrary, their vices the cause of much of the oppression in precolonial administration. In truth, they attracted British hostility for a system of administration that was complex, personalistic, and negotiable, all of which made it difficult to monitor. To compound the difficulty, the *jakada* were slaves, which was something of an embarrassment to the avowedly abolitionist government.

As a result, the colonial government engaged in a thoroughgoing reorganization of territorial administration during its first years in charge, implemented at different times in different emirates. Rural settlements were grouped together geographically and then placed under one officeholder, who then was responsible for administering this new contiguous district. District heads retained the responsibilities implied by their emirate offices, but they were also expected to spend the bulk of their time living in their districts and personally heading territorial administration. In theory, they did not retain *jakadu* on their staffs, but practice was more complicated. At the same time, the categories of tax collected from the population were consolidated and simplified, and their absolute incidence increased considerably.²⁶ Difficulties emerged almost immediately. Soon after the reorganization took effect, officials were switched from being compensated through a share of tax revenues to being salaried employees of the government. However, salaries were far too low for officeholders' responsibilities to their constellations of clients. Moreover, salary levels were set according to British officers' assessments of individual officeholders' job descriptions rather than through indigenous conceptions of rank and propriety. This was deeply problematic, since it created a class of officials in dire need of money. It also placed them geographically in rural areas and with staffs of unprecedented size, which increased their ability to monitor rural areas and to place pressure on the people living there.

The advent of British supervision superimposed a very alien set of bureaucratic imperatives on Nigerian officialdom, often with no explicit recognition that change had occurred. The intensely personalistic system of precolonial administration had placed a premium on an officeholder's ability to control subordinate officials. Emirs and other *masu sarauta* needed to consolidate their positions so they could control the apparatus of governance, but this was not always possible when British officers demanded explanations for their decisions, explanations that needed to be structured by particular forms of bureaucratic logic. Discourses of corruption emerged in this conjuncture: a practical and material administrative reorganization in which officials in rural areas, who had new powers and a real shortage of money, confronted an ideological context in which the use of office to "personal" ends counted as corruption. But one should be clear about the distinctive characteristics of this moment. A corruption-complex had emerged, simultaneously dictating and proscribing "irregular" behavior in office. This pathologized indigenous political culture, but it also dictated an erratic colonial response to activities that might be considered irregular.

Emir Aliyu ɗan Sidi of Zaria

In early 1921 the emir of Zaria, Aliyu ɗan Sidi, was removed from office because of charges of corruption and misuse of his authority. The colonial government concluded he had diverted food intended for prisoners, selling it for his own profit. He had allowed prisoners to die from neglect, and he retained a thief in his personal retinue. More generally, the government claimed, he had prevented his subjects from complaining to the colonial government through threats and intimidation. The abrupt end of Emir Aliyu's reign was a reversal of fortune. In many respects he was an unlikely candidate for charges of malpractice and immorality. When he had assumed the throne in 1903, he was considered relatively friendly to British authority and also to the activities of missionaries within his emirate. Accordingly, he enjoyed good relations with colonial officers and local missionaries. Emir Aliyu was renowned for his piety and continues to be well known as a devotional poet of great power and sophistication.²⁷ In the early years of his reign the emir had succeeded at balancing the internal considerations of emirate politics against the tensions emerging from his relationship to colonial authorities and to the missionaries active in the southern part of his kingdom. However, contradictions built up between emirate politics and Aliyu's need to keep a good relationship with external actors. The deposition illustrates how British characterizations of governmental malpractice only partially reflected the political logic of Aliyu's administration but nonetheless began to constitute what would become a familiar narrative of corruption and official malfeasance.

From the time of the jihad, the Fulani emirs of Zaria had always occupied a delicate position. The roots of Aliyu's difficulties lay in the troubles that toppled his predecessor, Emir Kwassau. Aliyu assumed the throne in 1903 after a six-month interregnum following Kwassau's deposition. The latter's acceptance of a protectorate and his eventual removal from office had stemmed from a set of internal political challenges.²⁸ From the time of the Fulani jihad, Zaria's throne had alternated between three main dynasties. When the throne was vacant, Zaria's electoral council would propose a candidate from each dynasty to Sokoto, which tended to alternate between dynasties. Emir Kwassau was an exception to this rule. He was the son of his predecessor, Emir Yero, and therefore represented a second appointment for the Bornawa dynasty. Sokoto was disinclined to allow Kwassau's appointment and instead intended to appoint an elderly member of the Mallawa dynasty. Zaria's Fulani aristocracy suspected this candidate would be a puppet for the powerful *galadima* of Zaria, who was ethnically Hausa and thus undesirable from their standpoint.

When the *waziri* of Sokoto came to make the appointment, the emirate's office-holders and military supported Kwassau instead, and they made it clear that turbaning the other candidate would be resisted by force. The *waziri* therefore went along with Kwassau's irregular election, but the new emir's power was shaky. He was undermined by the continued tenure of the Hausa *galadima*, a domestic challenge compounded by sour relations with Sokoto. Indeed, soon after Kwassau's ascension the emir of Kontagora—a close ally of the sultan of Sokoto—invaded Zaria, prompting Kwassau to accept the protection of British troops and thus beginning the colonial period in Zaria.²⁹

Accepting a protectorate allayed an immediate threat to his regime, but Kwassau immediately faced a whole new series of dangers. It was obvious to all that the British planned further military conquests. Christian missionaries were entering the emirate to evangelize its peoples. As a subject of Sokoto and a just Muslim ruler, Kwassau was caught in a bind; loyalty to Britain was incompatible with his moral duties to Sokoto and to Islam. Attempts to temporize won him few friends. He continued to share military information with his Fulani colleagues,³⁰ which Lugard interpreted as an “inability to refrain from his innate ‘*munafiki*’ [*munafunci*, hypocrisy, treachery],” and he also attempted to circumvent the *galadima*'s right to collect taxes from the settlements under his control.³¹ This double betrayal led the British to conclude “that he was a thoroughly bad man, possessed of great cunning, wholly unscrupulous, and by nature cruel and treacherous.”³² He was deposed for these sins and because of charges he was involved in continued slave dealing.³³

Lugard played the politics of the deposition carefully, as he developed a procedure that he could bill as a continuation of precolonial procedures of governance. He asked Sokoto to select the new emir. The sultan's choice of Aliyu brought the Mallawa dynasty back to power. But Aliyu immediately faced the same dilemmas of balancing his obligations as a Muslim ruler of Zaria against the dangers of removal by British officials, though he enjoyed an initial degree of success. As Lugard reported in the immediate aftermath of his installation: “I was somewhat prepossessed by this man, who appeared quiet and dignified, and showed some anxiety to grasp the principles upon which he was to rule in the future. His fear was chiefly lest the Resident should be misinformed by tale-bearers hostile to him, and he insisted that so far as he was able, he would act up to my instructions, and that any default would be from ignorance and not of intention.”³⁴ The emir's concrete actions and ability at diplomacy convinced the British he was ruling in accordance with Lugard's instructions, and as a result bearers of hostile tales were not believed. He allowed the school that the Church Missionary Society (CMS) ran in his emirate to flourish in Zaria

city itself. Kwassau had initially restricted missionaries to another town and ultimately chased them out, exiling them until just before the Kontagora invasion.³⁵ In 1905 Lugard wrote with satisfaction about relations between the emir and the head of the mission, Dr. Walter Miller: “The Emir himself has apparently formed a close friendship with Dr. Miller, and invites a frank expression of his opinions on social abuses which come under his notice.” Indeed, Miller reported that he had “met with nothing but courtesy from the Emir and people, and not only has there been no hostility, but the people have manifested a desire ‘to read, to hear, and to consider.’”³⁶ Aliyu personally accepted instruction in Roman script, though by the time he achieved fluency in that writing system, missionaries were already becoming frustrated at Muslims’ disinclination to send their children for a Christian education.³⁷ Meanwhile, British political officers viewed Aliyu as relatively tractable and open to the modernizing imperatives of the new colonial administration. But even during this initial period of harmony contradictions began to accumulate.

Although there is little direct evidence of Aliyu’s stance toward colonial authority, Sani Umar has brilliantly demonstrated that his poetry indicates an attempt to articulate a mode of maintaining his moral and religious bona fides while cooperating with British authorities sufficiently to remain in office. Umar suggests that Aliyu’s *Wakar Zuwan Birnin Kano* (Song of Going to the City of Kano) and his *Wakar Diga* (Song of the Digger) offer key insight into his assessment of the contemporary political situation and of how it might be ethically interpreted. *Zuwan Birnin Kano* was written on the occasion of a durbar in 1912 held to welcome Lugard back to Nigeria as governor-general of the amalgamated protectorate. But while the poem pays intricate attention to the assembled dignitaries, provocatively there are only two mentions of Europeans, and no reference to Lugard himself. The poet instead provides a complex mapping of political power in Northern Nigeria as it was manifested in the positions taken up by the visiting emirs (and their host, Kano’s Emir Abbas), and the appearance of other Northern Nigerians from outside the caliphate as well as within: the former are described with an acute eye to their political importance, the latter as subject peoples or as prey to the caliphate’s predators. The provocative representational absence of colonial power from this intricate portrait of political power is paralleled in *Diga*, which describes the building of the rail line up to Kano, across much of Zaria emirate. In *Diga*, Aliyu describes the terrible power of the technology behind the railway and notes people’s fearful reaction to it, but he ascribes this power ultimately to Allah rather than any human agency—suggesting that those who felt fear “have forgotten God, who created us all, including the European who made

the digger”—neatly eliminating colonial power as anything but a channel for Allah’s will.³⁸

Aliyu’s poetry demonstrates an ambivalence toward colonialism, as well as an ability to convey it to discerning readers without alienating the foreigners he needed to keep placated. A similar sophistication is evident in Aliyu’s strategies for establishing political control. Any emir of Zaria needed to consolidate his control over the machinery of emirate governance.³⁹ Political expediency required appointing members of rival dynasties to high office, but emirs needed to do so carefully in order to keep their own political authority. And in the precolonial period, incumbents had done so with varying degrees of success. Too many rivals in too-influential positions would undermine an emir’s ability to exert his will. Access to office—even and especially offices below the emirship—was not just a means of gaining political power. It also was potentially a way of acquiring economic resources. One might be given money and property when one assumed office, or one might accumulate them while in office. After one’s death or deposition, however, the emir might take all or part of those resources, but not if they had been granted as heritable by one’s heirs. Different royal lineages tended to follow different strategies in this; Aliyu’s Mallawa dynasty tended to grant supporters resources when appointing them to office, but they also confiscated a large portion after dismissing them. Getting access to state resources was thus critically important for the emir’s ability to gain the loyalty of his officeholders. As Aliyu assumed the throne, he not only needed to ensure his control of his subordinates; he also needed to ensure he had sufficient resources to make the political networks that also circulated economic resources on his behalf. This political dilemma was intertwined with the difficulties posed by the British. Although their ability to oversee the emir on a daily basis was limited, official appointments were much easier to monitor. And the British did not consider dynastic considerations a valid reason for appointment. Even less were they an excuse for deposing an incumbent. Thus although Aliyu succeeded in dismissing the chief alḳali of Zaria as well as the powerful galadima, he was forced to reappoint dynastic rivals to other offices after he tried to dismiss them without a justification the British found acceptable. Almost worse, the British regularly made him dismiss members of his own family when they were charged with corruption and misuse of office.⁴⁰

To compound these issues of tenure in office, the British policies to reorganize, regularize, and make transparent the system of territorial administration being implemented across the protectorate created problems for the Zaria aristocracy. The masu sarauta detested the creation of districts and the move

of officeholders out of Zaria city, but the more serious corollary was the British move across the first decade of colonial rule to change systems of official remuneration. In the precolonial period, officials had enjoyed revenues from their own estates, but they also retained a portion of the taxes they collected before passing the remainder to the emir (who himself retained a portion and sent the other part onward to Sokoto). This system persisted into the first years of colonial rule, but the British quickly attempted to move to another basis, in which village and district heads collected taxes and then passed them along to their superiors in their entirety. In place of the percentage of tax previously theirs, they received a government salary, in theory commensurate with their official responsibilities. At the same time, the system of taxes was radically simplified. In the precolonial period, taxes had been collected under a number of headings, but in the colonial period these were consolidated into a tax on farmland and a tax on cattle. (An “industrial tax,” *kudin masu sana'a*, had a relatively low incidence, since it only applied to men who did not own farms as well.) These developments presented individual officeholders with a difficult set of dilemmas. By virtue of their offices, they had considerable responsibilities as political leaders. An officeholder was, by definition a *babba mutum*, a big man (in contradistinction to a *karamin yaro*, a small boy), but his responsibilities were not so much generated by the demands of administering towns as they were related to the importance of his central office. His following of clients was not equal to all of the villagers in his district but had more to do with politics in the capital. The salary structure that was put into place did not readily reflect the hierarchies undergirding Zaria politics. Since this set of political developments was going on at the same time that district heads were moving out into the districts and assembling a whole constellation of district officials to aid them, and since a new and intensified tax system was coming into force, the net effect was to enable—indeed to create—the incentive for a much intensified system of extracting money from the peasantry. The stakes of appointment and deposition thus became even higher as resources that went along with officeholding were renegotiated.

This was an opportunity for Aliyu, but also a problem. Patronage was a critical tool in consolidating an emir’s power, but it also made policies that could be interpreted as oppression or the irregular extraction of tax revenue almost universal among officials. Aliyu’s ability to dominate existing masu sarauta and aspirant officeholders was heightened, but the machinery of emirate government could generate as much scandal as British officials wished to read from it. Still, while Aliyu remained in favor administrative difficulties received official remark chiefly as problems with Aliyu’s subordinates, not as the fault of the

emir himself. District and village heads might be charged with embezzlement and misusing their offices in other ways, but the emir was unbesmirched.

An immediate point of tension, for which no euphemization was possible, concerned the judiciary.⁴¹ During the precolonial period, the court system had been relatively limited in scope. The emir maintained a judicial council, and there existed also courts presided over by the chief *alkalai* and subordinate *alkalai*. With the advent of colonial rule, lower-level courts were inaugurated in most district capitals as well, their *alkalai* under the supervision of *Alkalin Zaria* rather than the emir. The extension of the court system was meant to aid in the regularization of rural administration, since officials who got in trouble with the law were increasingly sent to court.⁴² As a way of gaining control over the judiciary, Aliyu had appointed his own candidate as *Alkalin Zaria* a month after taking office.⁴³ But as time passed, the emir's direct authority declined vis-à-vis the expanded judiciary, and he therefore attempted to reassert his influence. In 1916 he moved the incumbent *alkali* to the office of *waziri* (which he had only recently revived), in the hopes that a new *alkali*'s need to consolidate his own hold on the office would diminish his capacity to interfere with Aliyu's own power. Given British notions of judicial independence, any dissatisfaction in how justice was meted out in this new regime left Aliyu personally open to criticism, but he weathered British disapproval. Rather than recoiling with horror at such machinations, British officials tended to the position that, whatever its shortcomings, Fulani administration and the way the courts worked in practice were far superior to any realistic alternatives. Responding to a criticism of the court system from Miller, an officer wrote, "No one but an antiquarian or fanatic would desire to re-write the Sharia. It reflects the ideas and ideals of an age different to that in which we live. It can neither be emended nor corrected. Any school boy could criticize it and compose legal quips and dilemmas from it. It is however a code—which adapted or ignored according to environment and liberally interpreted—commands the respect and obedience of all the 5,000,000 Moslems who surround Dr. Miller and his household."⁴⁴ On the specific issue of judicial independence, even during the investigation of Emir Aliyu the acting lieutenant governor wrote that although "it is of course most improper of the Emir . . . to influence the judiciary" nonetheless the "selection of *Alkalai* and members of Courts should be by the Emir with the advise [*sic*] of the *Alkali*"⁴⁵

A more serious conflict began when charges arose that Galadima Idris was dealing in slaves,⁴⁶ which resulted in his removal from office and eventual conviction for enslavement and perverting the course of justice. He was sentenced to two years in prison. The attorney general, however, declared that

the conviction for slave dealing was improper and that the galadima's only real crime was counseling and procuring the commission of a perjury.⁴⁷ The case that got the galadima in trouble was somewhat complicated. A girl of slave origin had gone to court looking for a certificate to recognize her freedom. The court acknowledged a payment made to her former master from a man with whom she proposed to live as a concubine. A payment from a woman or her fiancé to her master would have been perfectly licit because it enabled the woman to obtain her freedom. The issue in this case was that the woman was becoming a concubine rather than a wife. "Concubine" is a slave status. Courts supervising transactions that ended in concubinage were ipso facto engaged in slave dealing because they had acknowledged a transfer in custody. Officials like the galadima who facilitated such cases were therefore guilty of slave dealing as well. The acting lieutenant governor argued forcefully that this placed officials in an impossible position: the distinctions between marriage and concubinage were tenuous, particularly for a woman of slave origin.⁴⁸ The charge of slave dealing made little sense in its legal or cultural context; the galadima's real crime was trying to facilitate a set of transactions some British officials did not fully understand, which did not map easily onto a bright-line distinction between "slave" and "free."

The galadima's legal woes might not have badly harmed the emir, but a more serious problem emerged from different quarters. The missionary Walter Miller had decided the emir was a tyrant and needed to be deposed, and he had waged a long campaign to publicize Aliyu's abuses and dethrone him. Miller had long been ambivalent about Fulani rule in northern Nigeria. As early as 1903 he had proclaimed "the Fillani *is not, will not be and cannot* ever be loyal to the British Government."⁴⁹ Across the first decade of Aliyu's rule, Miller's purported friendship with him had faded. Writing many years later, Miller claimed "a very warm place in my heart for the picturesque old tyrant," explaining, "Race, heredity, and circumstances had badly moulded a character which might have given great things to the world."⁵⁰ He went on to describe an initial interaction, when Aliyu was acting *wombai* and aspiring to the emirship after Kwassau's deposition. Miller claimed that Aliyu had sent a messenger to him with the present of a turkey and the request that Miller should intervene with British authorities and recommend Aliyu's appointment to the throne. Miller refused the present ("thus greatly outraging native etiquette," he noted) and declined to offer assistance. Despite Miller's refusal to help, Aliyu was appointed anyway. This touched off "a reign of eighteen years which was a long drawn out torture to the people of the province."⁵¹

From the vantage of fifteen years later, Miller emphasized that the British administration was blameless for this: “That he was able to live such a double life, combining so much that was useful and efficient with what was so terribly evil and oppressive, yet remain largely unchecked by the able Residents . . . is a tribute to his skill in avoiding detection rather than a reflection on their ability as rulers.”⁵² The contents of this retrospective condemnation are striking: despite constant assertions that Aliyu was a terrible tyrant, Miller only details a few crimes: he sponsored “highway robbers” when Wombai, took a free woman as a concubine (Miller noted darkly she died in a suspicious fire after the matter had garnered unfavorable publicity), mistreated prisoners, and imposed brutal regimes of forced labor on the populace.⁵³ Miller was nobody’s fool, and his concern for human suffering comes across as very genuine. Nonetheless, it is significant to note what attracted his outrage and why. Of Aliyu’s support for “highway robbers,” the activities in question sound like those of slave-raiding parties, who genuinely did terrorize the countryside,⁵⁴ but which had at least arguable legitimacy. To a British audience, the story of Aliyu’s machinations with the turkey was amusing; considered in context it reflected badly on Miller, as he admitted himself with the mention of “native etiquette.” In the uncertain climate of early colonialism, it would not have been clear to Wombai Aliyu how British colonial hierarchies worked, and the head of the CMS mission was relatively accessible and also had obvious connections to the colonial government. The present of a turkey was a gesture of respect to a dignitary of whom one was requesting an important favor. How else was one to maneuver for political position? Who was being obtuse and improper, Aliyu or Miller? What is striking about the other crimes Miller enumerates is how unexceptional they were: the sexual exploitation of women, political interference in the court system, brutalization of commoners in order to mobilize forced labor. These were all accusations colonial officials were able to ignore when it suited their purposes. They were also not new developments in the last years of the emir’s reign.

The year 1920 was a watershed, but why? Relations between the emir and Dr. Miller by then were thoroughly sour, though if one discounts the latter’s having become disillusioned as a result of information he had not known previously, the reasons are not entirely clear. Indeed, Miller’s own account of his relationship with the emir emphasizes the constancy of the emir’s sins, leaving unmentioned the earlier period in which Miller was describing him to Lugard in hopeful terms. Although there is little direct evidence for a reason, it is worth noting that Miller’s hostility did seem to increase during the second decade of colonial rule. One possible change is the 1910 passage of the Land and

Native Rights Ordinance, which placed land tenure in most of the protectorate under the control of local emirs, which would have made the mission itself vulnerable to Aliyu's goodwill. As Miller's hostility became more and more public, relations between the emir and the provincial administration were increasingly ambivalent. The resident (and later the acting resident) suspected the emir was guilty of the same slave-dealing sins as the galadima. Dr. Miller continued a steady stream of complaints about the emir's oppression of Hausa commoners, which culminated in an eighteen-page dossier.⁵⁵ And the emir's continuing attempts to maintain his control over the mechanisms of emirate governance increasingly appeared a questionable use of his authority.

The governor, Sir Hugh Clifford, was initially skeptical of the gravity of the situation. While on tour in the north, he was informed of the galadima's deposition, but his response was moderate. He directed the acting resident to summon the emir to the northern capital in order to inform him that the administration was deeply disappointed in his conduct and expected much better from him. According to the acting lieutenant governor, Aliyu's response to this admonition was unconciliatory. The acting resident then reported that upon Aliyu's return to Zaria the emir held a meeting of his council in which he included an official the British had ordered deposed. This may have been the emir's fatal mistake, for it convinced the lieutenant governor of Aliyu's tendency to defy British orders. The administrative response, however, was not formulated as a countermove to the emir's defiance. It was bureaucratic, launching an investigation of misconduct in office. The difference was that now the administration was less inclined to dismiss accounts of his wrongdoing than it had been previously. Scenting blood, the members of the emir's judicial council also came forward alleging the "cold blooded murder" of prisoners.⁵⁶ And at that point a number of other reports of oppression also began to come in from both masu sarauta and commoners.⁵⁷ The governor therefore ordered the acting secretary for the north to investigate the charges fully.

As the secretary's investigation progressed, the acting resident, Captain Byng-Hall, prepared a report detailing his objections to the way Emir Aliyu administered justice, highlighting the government's long-standing concern with his attempts at exerting control. Byng-Hall painted a dire picture of a court system dominated by a savvy and unscrupulous tyrant determined to subvert the rule of law. Byng-Hall asserted that the creation of the emir's judicial council in 1912 had given the emir an opportunity to exercise power without constraint. In the precolonial period, the emir had been present in a court presided over by an alkali who had been appointed by Alkalin Zaria and therefore enjoyed a considerable degree of judicial independence. Byng-Hall em-

phasized, “The Emir had no judicial powers at that time, except so far as punishing, i.e. deposing—his office holders and chiefs.” Although the institution of the judicial council initially appeared a continuation of this earlier system, it was actually very different, since it placed judicial power in the hands of the emir, who had much more power than his precolonial predecessors because of the British administration standing behind him. “Being an exceptionally clever chief,” the emir installed puppets on his judicial council and proceeded to deliver any verdict he saw fit. Even worse, the emir had taken to interfering in the court of Alkalin Zaria as well. In one case, the emir had sent a man to be tried in the Alkalin Zaria’s court, with instructions to give him a heavy sentence because he was a well-known thief. The man had been employed by the emir, but Aliyu did not submit any actual evidence that he was a habitual thief, and so ultimately the alkali passed a sentence far too heavy for the relatively simple case of theft before him.⁵⁸

The acting lieutenant governor agreed that the current function of the judicial council gave the emir too much power and indeed that “it was largely the fear of this improperly run Court which prevented natives reporting the gross wrongs perpetrated by the Emir Aliyu.”⁵⁹ However, even at this late date the substantive lieutenant governor was more nuanced. He minuted that “Capt Byng-Hall is new to administration in the Mohammedan emirates” and did not entirely comprehend how autocratic emirs were in the immediate precolonial period. He was skeptical that any written legal procedures would alleviate the problem, suggesting instead that regular supervision from the political staff would prevent the emir from getting away with any too-glaring subversions of acceptable legal procedure.⁶⁰

If the dissatisfaction about Aliyu’s conduct of the judiciary ultimately proved minor, the same was not true about other charges against him. The governor reported to the Colonial Office the emir’s recall to Kaduna “had the effect of putting courage into the Chiefs and people of Zaria who now began forthwith to prefer a number of charges against the Emir.”⁶¹ This evidence enabled investigators to conclude the emir had committed various offenses, including the deaths in custody (“murders of a particularly inhuman character”) of four prisoners in the emir’s prison, severe floggings, threats made against anyone inclined to report the emir’s crimes, the diversion of prisoners’ grain for the emir’s own purposes, and allowing a “notorious thief” to live in his house.⁶² A somewhat darker allegation was that the emir was behind several attempts to poison Captain Byng-Hall, the last of which “made him unconscious for a time and very ill for several days.” For that charge, at least, there was no admissible evidence. The emir was again called to Kaduna, where he vigorously rebutted

the accusations against him, but to no avail. The acting lieutenant governor ruled that the charges against him were proven, which led the governor to order his deposition. Aliyu was therefore deposed and a Bornawa candidate was installed in his place.

The strange trajectory of Emir Aliyu's woes indicates a dynamic of enduring significance: the moment he lost the administration's support was when he insisted on determining the personnel to be included on his council and when he was unconciliatory about the charges against him. Nonetheless, the justification for his removal was not that he was too restive or too arrogant. Rather, the record depends on a shifting series of accusations about malfeasance, malpractice, and misappropriation. Every one of these was, at some moment, dismissed as unfounded or insufficient to warrant deposition. But ultimately, they helped to constitute a pretext, albeit a nebulous one. Emir Aliyu was removed for corruption, even if it was not clear *how* his corruption had manifested itself in legally admissible ways.

Governor Clifford ruefully admitted that British supervision of Emir Aliyu's government had "been most perfunctory and inefficient." Shortages of staff as a result of World War I explained a part of it, but previous residents should have been more diligent in their inspections of the prisons and the emir's court. The Colonial Office, agreed, responding, "Every effort must be made by the Provincial staff to put an end to serious malpractices of the kind which the present enquiry has brought to light."⁶³ The next month, reporting his installation of the new emir, the governor described the speech he gave after the emir had taken his oath of allegiance, explaining to those assembled that "tyrannical conduct . . . would inevitably be punished." At the same time, he happily conveyed the resident's report that "that since the news of Aliyu's deposition has spread large numbers of people have flocked back to Zaria who had abandoned their homes in the town owing to the fear which Aliyu had inspired. His deposition has apparently been hailed with great satisfaction by Chiefs and people alike."⁶⁴ And administration proceeded under the new emir.

The drama sums up the ways in which the colonial regime had constituted "corruption" as a charge that could be used to depose officials, though it was not applied consistently or universally. Emir Aliyu had the misfortune of Dr. Miller's proximity and, across the 1910s, his hostility. Nonetheless, the emir retained the administration's support until relatively late in the day. Captain Byng-Hall's animosity increased his vulnerability, as perhaps did a recent scandal over flogging in Northern Nigeria in which Miller played a muckraking role. That humanitarian scandal may have left the governor and his subordinates disinclined to protect a potentially embarrassing official.⁶⁵ Whatever

the proximate cause in this case, patterns of conduct that pervaded the northern emirates were treated as “corruption” only when committed by officials the administration desired to depose, a process whose logic has little to do with the bureaucratic logics “corruption” indexes. But while the case of Emir Aliyu presents a useful case study of the political complexity underlying such charges, a more humble case might illustrate better the more quotidian stakes of the colonial corruption-complex, both as a set of practices and as a potential accusation.

Missing Taxes or Taxpayers in Kacako

In 1924 Mohama Sani, formerly the village head (Hausa *dagaci*) of Kacako in the Sumaila district of Kano emirate, went to the northern capital of Kaduna to make a complaint to a British official, the secretary of the Northern Provinces. Sani reported that he had been improperly forced to resign only a year after taking office. He had been appointed just as tax collection was getting under way in the autumn of 1922.⁶⁶ He claimed to have discovered shortly after his appointment that the official list of taxpayers included a number of dead people whose farms had been abandoned. These dead people would have been liable, he said, for tax totaling roughly £40. He had duly reported the discrepancy to Kano’s Emir Usman, but he was told that he was personally liable for the 1922–23 shortfall. However, the error would be rectified for the 1923–24 tax season. Sani borrowed the £40 he owed, and the district head, who held office as the *makama* of Kano, sent a revenue official to inspect the farms in question. The resulting adjustment in the tax list did not correct all of its errors, and there was another shortfall for 1923–24. As collection got under way in 1923, Sani returned to the emir to report his dilemma, only to be told he would again be liable for the missing tax. Sani declined to go further into debt, and he was detained in Kano. He was later deposed.⁶⁷

A political officer visited Kacako on tour in November 1923. Commenting on his report, the district officer noted he did not think Sani’s resignation had been entirely voluntary, since Sani was initiating a complaint before Emir Usman against servants of the district head. As it turned out, Sani charged that district head’s son Muhammadu and two of his servants had received gowns as compensation for helping get Sani’s tax list revised. Although the *charge* was demanding gowns—that is, accepting bribes—Sani was later to report to the secretary that his *grievance* was that the revision was not made. Muhammadu proved his innocence by taking an oath, so no further action was taken against him. Or rather, no temporal action was taken against him: he died within the

month; swearing a false judicial oath was held to lead to damnation but also to more immediate, earthly misfortune such as premature death. Muhammadu's two servants did not take exculpatory oaths and on the basis of Sani's complaint were convicted of bribery. These matters remained for seven months, until Sani made his trip to Kaduna and swore out his complaint.

The emir's conclusions about Muhammadu and his servants did not satisfy the British staff, and the secretary queried the Kano provincial office, which insisted on further investigation. In July, the emir sent a party out, which included both Sani and a member of the revenue department, to enumerate abandoned farms and their tax liabilities. They returned with a list whose total non-collectable revenue was £16.3.3. Sani objected to this conclusion, complaining that the revenue official had refused to look at an additional list of abandoned farms he possessed, so a second party was sent out, discovering more abandoned farms. These would have paid £13.7.4½ in tax. The resident suspected that this latter list comprised farms that had not been abandoned in 1922–23, so he was inclined to discount it.⁶⁸

At this point, Sani made an explosive allegation. He produced a second supplementary list of farms, all duplicates of holdings on his original list. He claimed the district head had ordered him “to collect the sum shown as additional to the amount recorded in the Official Tax lists.” Although the total liability from this supplementary list was £20.11.6, he reported having paid only £13.6.9, saying he did not collect this sum from the taxpayers but took it from his own pocket. The government took this allegation very seriously: the resident “used every possible means to try and trace the writer of these lists and [has] compared the calligraphy with those of the District Head's Malams, the Village Head's Malam, and the Members of the Central Revenue Staff but without result. Appellant has no evidence as to how the lists came into his hands and all the persons named by him (including the D.H.) have taken oaths that they know nothing of the papers and have never seen them before.”⁶⁹ The implication of Sani's claim was that the district head or his staff was attempting to collect tax from certain households twice over, once on account of the official tax list and a second time from the mysterious supplemental list. According to Sani, the £13-odd he passed on was out of his own pocket rather than extralegally extorted from put-upon peasants, but the resident's report leaves ambiguous whether this bit of self-sacrifice was voluntary or not. The resident concluded that Sani had been unjustly deprived of his office but also admitted restoring him was not feasible. His tenure in office and his subsequent complaint had won him no friends in the emirate hierarchy. If he were reappointed, “sooner or later trouble would inevitably ensue.” Moreover, his successor had

already been turbaned, and it would have been an injustice to deprive the new village head of office through no fault of his own. Instead, the resident ordered Sani be given £20 in compensation for the loss of office, in addition to £16 for his out-of-pocket payment for 1922–23. Half of the latter was to be paid by the district head, half by the emirate treasury. The resident concluded his report by noting the entire incident showed serious deficiencies in emirate administration. Tax records had been demonstrated to be riddled with errors, but worse, the central administration had declined to rectify them until the resident had intervened personally.⁷⁰

This conclusion was relatively sanguine, and it appears more calculated to withstand casual scrutiny than to come to terms with any serious structural deficiency. Sani's allegation about the second supplementary list implied certain unfortunates were being squeezed by a double tax burden, whose surplus would presumably go to the district head or the emir. The resident implicitly acknowledged the gravity of the charge through his reaction in forcing district and emirate officials to take oaths of innocence. Nonetheless, in the absence of any confession, the resident simply dropped the matter. But attention to any aspect of this resolution underlines how unsatisfactory it really was. Sani's own figures indicated he was £42.17.4½ out of pocket, but the resident was inclined to discount the supplementary list of abandoned farms—because, he avowed, the odds were that they had only been abandoned for the 1923 growing season. He also discounted the farms on the mysterious second supplementary list—due, he claimed, to his inability to identify the list's origin. If no one could identify the list's calligraphy, there was no reason not to conclude Sani had manufactured it himself. But this reasoning is not compelling. There is a more obvious reason for the resident's skepticism; the tax liabilities on the two lists were almost identical: £13.7.4½ and £13.6.9, only 7½d different. The resident's inclination to ignore both suggests he was inclined to view the serial production of the two lists as an attempt to claim essentially the same compensation twice. Under this assumption, when frustrated in his attempt to claim reimbursement for taxes paid on recently abandoned farms (which presumably he had collected in 1922–23, before they were abandoned), Sani managed to generate a compelling claim to scandal. In either case, he really wanted £13-odd, increasing his claim from £16 to £29.

A less comforting but more likely possibility is that Sani was telling the truth and really was £42 out of pocket. Sani's claim to have paid villagers' spurious tax liability from his own pocket shows admirable charity and public spiritedness—but what if he actually had initially attempted to collect the tax? Farmers unable to pay their tax bills were generally forced to abandon their

farms. Closer to Kano, officials sometimes took advantage of that fact to obtain farms they would allocate to followers or use for their own purposes.⁷¹ In less land-hungry regions like Kacako, such farms simply went out of cultivation. But if farmers faced with a double tax bill had fled before paying during the 1922–23 tax season, Sani would have been faced with a £26-odd liability *and* a collection of farms abandoned just at the start of 1923, which perfectly accords with the allegations made in his complaint.

The whiff of scandal emanating from the district head's son, Muhammadu, grows stronger when one considers that the district head himself was deposed for embezzlement at precisely the time his son Muhammadu was tried for accepting bribes. Makama Aminu had been criticized earlier for administering his large district ineffectively, and the provincial administration used the excuse of another accusation of tax embezzlement to remove him both from the district headship and from his central office.⁷² Indeed, Dokaji Abubakar, the noted historian of Kano emirate, reports Makama Aminu presented a great contrast to his father and predecessor, Makama Dahiru. Where Dahiru was "famous for kindness," in Aminu's time the people of his district "feared him very much indeed."⁷³ At least according to Sani's testimony, Muhammadu was not implicated in the problems with assessment. Instead, he was capitalizing on Sani's urgent need to get the abandoned farms off his tax list. Presumably Muhammadu's present was more lavish than the gowns given his servants, but Sani's strategy did not succeed. The tax list remained unrevised, and Sani was deposed. Only then did he move forward with his complaint to the emir about the gift giving. And it was only after his relatively open invitation to revise the tax list and quietly overhaul its questionable contents was rejected by the revenue official that Sani proceeded with his more shocking revelations. By then, the district head had been deposed. The reform went further, in response to claims that the district was too unwieldy even for a head more competent than the unfortunate makama. It was divided in two and Kacako put under a newly appointed official, the Dan Darman.⁷⁴ The somewhat disingenuous refusal of emirate officials even to entertain the notion that there was something wrong with the £13 tax liability and with the farms abandoned after the 1922 harvest suggests one of two things. Either they were attempting tactfully to overlook further evidence of the previous district head's malfeasance, or someone else in the emirate hierarchy was implicated in the scheme to double-tax certain inhabitants of Kacako. The resident's resolute inattention to these sinister possibilities after his initial attempt to ascertain who had produced Sani's second list suggests he was acutely aware of the scandal that might cut deep into the emirate hierarchy.

The resident's attempt at euphemization was masterful. The only time his report to the secretary of the Northern Provinces even uses a term that might suggest corruption was one instance in which he states Muhammadu's servants were convicted of receiving "bribes."⁷⁵ Other than that, his investigation simply noted Sani had suffered an "injustice" and that the case had "unsatisfactory features," including that revenue records were "defective" and emirate authorities only corrected them under pressure. He attributed this to the emir's anxiety that Sani's successor as village head of Kacako might unfairly lose his office. The resident was nobody's fool, and none of these aspects of the case would have escaped him. Despite the fact that the district head—already deposed for corruption—provided a ready-made scapegoat for all of these intimations of malpractice, both the resident and emirate authorities chose to avoid blaming him. Why? The claim that it was an overdiligent sense of justice for Sani's successor is hardly convincing. The £20 compensation paid for Sani's loss of office did not entirely compensate him for the £26 he may have lost from the double-counted households, much less offset the injury of losing his office. Instead, the resident clearly lacked the political desire to pursue a line of investigation that might ultimately implicate the emir himself, or at least demonstrate the previous district head was not simply an individual bad apple but rather was part of a much more systematic set of problems in rural administration.

Northern Nigeria and High Colonialism

In one regard, this vignette simply illustrates the difficulties of being a village head, caught between a set of rural realities and the demands of a complex and powerful administrative apparatus. But it also marks an important point of transition in the logics of Nigerian discourses about malpractice in the Nigerian government. The political pressures on Sani were not entirely dissimilar to the difficulties that had plagued officials for two decades already. Sani took office at a time when systems of rural administration had become reasonably systematized and, at least formally, were bound by a certain form of bureaucratic rationality. The language of complaint and accountability only imperfectly conceals the multiple dramas from which Sani's case emerges. His yearlong career as village head—a position he could have assumed only at considerable personal expense—was personally ruinous, but the damage was deeper. Sani was obviously a man of means, since he was able to borrow substantial sums to make up the shortfalls in his tax collection. The erstwhile owners of the abandoned farms he discussed, whatever the precise circumstances of their dispossession, were obviously not so lucky. The lingering question is,

what went wrong? Who got in trouble, and why? The case of Emir Aliyu demonstrates a political logic in which a set of relatively constant administrative (mal)practices, many of which were structurally determined, resulted in verified charges of corruption only when other political considerations led British political staff to assess the emir as a liability rather than an asset. “Corruption” in other words did not describe anything distinctive in the emir’s conduct but rather was a label that served as post hoc justification for a separate political calculation.

In this case, the administrative decision to offer Sani only partial compensation required ignoring malfeasance at multiple levels. Under other circumstances this malfeasance might have been called corruption. The investigations undertaken in direct response to Sani’s complaint did not find evidence of systematic problems in the administration, even though *other* undertakings (deposing the makama, splitting the district, conducting a reassessment) demonstrated an awareness of organizational shortcomings. Putting aside the issue of the “real” reasons for the deposition of the makama of Kano, the district head deposed for embezzling tax revenues and whose son’s servants were convicted of extorting bribes from Sani, the case is notable for the government’s stern inattention to matters of malfeasance and irregularity. No attempt was made to trace the owners of the abandoned farms or to investigate whether villagers really were being dunned for taxes twice over. The government pursued the relatively minor issue of intermediaries who demanded presents for lobbying their superiors for administrative favors (which, ultimately, was the crime of Muhammadu’s servants). This was prosecuted, but a systematic problem with the machinery of taxation got nothing but an abstract assurance of official concern and a mild admonishment to the emir. Anything more extreme would have been politically delicate, an acknowledgment that the tax system had grave administrative problems. But that should not obscure what is truly novel about this specific conjuncture. Without publicly acknowledging wrongdoing, the government did address some of the issues involved. The Makama was deposed, the district reorganized as two, and a political officer was dispatched in 1924 to do a thorough reassessment of its tax burden.⁷⁶

Other cases of corruption from the period—such as Emir Aliyu’s alleged crimes—were similarly confined to somewhat minimal questions of misbehavior and individual acts of wrongdoing, even if these were interpreted through a rational-legal framework. The problems with tax collection, by contrast, were embedded within a new administrative logic. The bureaucratic context of these malpractices represented a new referent for the potential charge of corruption. The colonial period had already occasioned wide-ranging reorganization, and

by the second decade of the protectorate this began to extend beyond issues of administration and of the political structure of the new districts. Methods of tax assessment and collection were radically reworked, sometimes with dramatic consequences, and at the same time the structures of emirate governance began a systematic transformation that would result in their ultimately paralleling structures of the colonial government in Kaduna. Some of these developments were central to the problems Sani had encountered.

Tax revenue had always been central to the colonial government's plans for the region. During the first decade of colonial rule, the hope was that peasant producers would begin to grow cotton as a cash crop, which would then be exported along the railroad that was extended to Kano in 1911.⁷⁷ A gradual consolidation of the precolonial land tax and the charitable donations (*zakkat*) collected from Muslims formed the basis for a unified land tax that was assessed under the general rubric *haraji* (Ar. *kharaj*). When the Report of the Northern Nigeria Lands Committee was codified by the Land and Native Rights Ordinance in 1910, land rights in the region were systematized, allegedly along traditional lines, in a way that was meant to accord with the paradigms of land rent propounded by the American socialist Henry George, whose theories had influenced Northern Nigeria's second high commissioner, Percy Girouard, and one of the most senior residents, Charles Temple. Accordingly, Northern Nigeria's land tax was designed to collect the value of agricultural produce that emerged from the natural fertility of the soil and from any publicly funded improvements (accessibility to the rail line, public irrigation projects, etc.). Output beyond that dictated by natural fertility and improvements was the result of a farmer's own efforts and so should not be taxed, lest industry not be sufficiently rewarded.⁷⁸ The theory required a tax system that would reflect what was naturally there, which required very careful monitoring of individual farmers' situations and landholdings. Beginning in 1909 in areas close to major urban centers, a land survey began to be conducted of farmers' individual holdings, which were surveyed by a staff of African officials who calculated farm size by pacing them out. They recorded these measurements on maps, which were then revised to reflect subsequent transfers of ownership or usufruct.⁷⁹ The survey process was called *taki* ("footstep") assessment, and the surveyors were called *taki malamai* (*malam* being the term for Islamic scholars, which by extension is used for all educated people and more generally as an honorific).

The difficulty was that these maps frequently bore a somewhat attenuated relationship to actual farm tenures. The *taki malams* frequently demanded bribes from farmers. Those who paid would be listed as having smaller farms than they actually possessed; those who did not were listed with larger farms

and thus larger tax bills. These methods also allowed higher-ranking officials to intervene in the process, adjusting maps and tax bills for their own purposes. In this way, an elaborate bureaucratic edifice both covered over and enabled various kinds of administrative malpractice.⁸⁰ When the system of taki assessment was first used to set levels of taxation in 1911, it was intended to be applied only in densely populated areas around well-established major cities like Kano, Katsina, and Sokoto. These were areas where land hunger was acute and where the infrastructural improvements (like roads and the railway) made peasant agriculture a more profitable concern than it was in more outlying areas. For this reason, agricultural production was imagined to be more closely tied to the acreage farmers could place under cultivation. A more systematic regime of tax assessment was unlikely to increase the marginal costs of extending acreages sufficiently to decrease overall production.⁸¹ And initially, areas like Kacako were supposed to be assessed through a less bureaucratic system, in which individual village heads were given an overall tax burden for a village, based ultimately on the adult male population, which they then allocated as fairly as they could. However, the system of taki assessment resulted in greatly increased notional revenues. That is, officers repeatedly discovered that with taki assessment farming families' theoretical tax burden remained constant, but villages' and districts' total liability substantially increased, leading to much greater revenues overall. In practice this indicated vastly greater tax burdens on farming families, which was a particular problem given the overall increase in tax assessment since the beginning of the colonial period. Nonetheless, with this incentive structure, taki assessment was extended ever further well into the 1920s,⁸² including to Kacako.

The taki assessment system began to generate complaints almost immediately, leading also to recommendations that especially the less densely populated regions should be moved back to lump-sum assessment. Indeed, that was proposed in the reassessment report of Sumaila conducted in 1924, which ascribed some of the problems in the land tax to the administrative complexities of taki assessment, and others to the personal failings of the taki malam on staff.⁸³ Accordingly, beginning in 1924 a more complicated, reformed system began to be put into place. The taki malamai were gradually removed altogether from their duties in outlying districts. In theory this was because they were so far away from supervision that their malpractices were difficult to detect. In their place, assessment reverted to the earlier system of lump-sum assessment, in which a village head was assigned a total tax to collect from a village and then shared it out among the families under his control using his own discretion. When reapplied to the outlying village, it resulted in higher

overall tax receipts, which suggests that by the 1920s small-scale farmers had learned to minimize their burdens under taki assessment. Officials anxiously outlined a procedure for reverting to the older style of assessment: a British officer would conduct a census of all households in the district in order to determine the adult male population and to get a sense of a town's general level of prosperity. Then the officer would compare the district under consideration with the tax levels of similar districts and with the tax incidence the district had paid under the taki system. The overall level of tax would be set to approximate the previous revenues as closely as possible, and then individual incidences would be distributed accordingly. Meanwhile, densely populated districts would be moved from taki assessment to the more methodologically sophisticated revenue survey, whose surveyors measured farms using chains and more modern survey techniques.⁸⁴

Taki assessment and the revenue survey created an appearance of bureaucratic rationality while maintaining personalistic, negotiable modes of rule.⁸⁵ Across the 1910s, the colonial government concentrated on installing an administrative infrastructure that, at least in theory, ensured regularity and accountability in governance. Officials' decisions were recorded and could then be monitored by their superiors. Taki assessment was not the only part of this new infrastructure. Records of tax collection began to be kept, and *hakimai* were warned that any sums collected that were not reflected in these ledgers would be considered evidence of a crime.⁸⁶ Taxpayers and other people who owed money to the government began to be provided with receipts. Courts were increasingly required to keep records, though initially in Arabic, a language few colonial officers could read. In this way, rural administration and the judiciary were supposed to become more easily monitored by the British colonial staff and more accountable to the populations they administered.

Similarly, the central organs of emirate administration were gradually reorganized. A major point of departure was the establishment of emirate treasuries, into which the proceeds of tax collection were to be deposited. The first official colonial-era *bayt al-mal* was instituted in Katsina in 1907 as the formalization of an arrangement in which Katsina's ma'aji kept the emir's treasury. Up until 1907, the ma'aji kept these funds at his house. With the reform, the practice continued but in a formalized way and under new accounting control: half of the tax revenue was passed directly to the British colonial administration while the remaining half remained in the new *bayt al-mal* and was deposited into bank accounts. One portion was used to pay the salaries and fund public works projects; the other was transferred to district and village heads. The new approach was extended to Kano in 1910. This was such a success that the

governor ordered it implemented in all emirates the following year.⁸⁷ At the same time, other functional divisions within the emirate hierarchies were also being systematized and deepened. One of the other major offices of state, the madaki had during the precolonial period been the commander of the cavalry, but with the inauguration of the district system, the new structures of territorial administration were placed under his control, and he also administered the process of revenue collection. The galadima, who had long functioned as a key administrator, retained responsibility for the emirate administration's functional organs such as prisons, sanitation, and public works.⁸⁸ In this process, departments of the emirate hierarchies began to parallel those of the British secretariat running the northern government in Kaduna, and indeed some of them began to be headed by British officials.⁸⁹

In the years after World War I and before the onset of the Great Depression, these functional organs of the emirate government became increasingly important. Especially in the second half of the 1920s, new initiatives in medicine, public works, and rural sanitation increased the expenditures of emirate departments considerably. In this period, however, the most significant effects were in the domain of tax collection. In this arena, the institution of receipts given taxpayers provided them, at least in theory, with a means of defending themselves from illegal demands. Nonetheless, as Michael Watts suggests, the procedure for making complaints was “Kafkaesque.”⁹⁰ In that regard, the manner in which the British political staff and superior emirate officials monitored those on the front lines of rural administration shows some fundamental continuities with the earlier period of less bureaucratic administration.

Emir Aliyu's deposition was justified as being a direct response to crimes he committed, even though none of the crimes for which he was held legally responsible was sufficient itself to warrant his losing office. Instead, the colonial government seems to have decided in 1921 that retaining him in office was more politically troublesome than removing him would be. Even in a moment when emirate governments were being remade along a bureaucratic model, the records of Aliyu's deposition do not reveal much evidence of his “corruption” as being composed of a deviation from the rules supposedly governing his office. Rather, “corruption” was a gloss for an array of charges made against him. It was a form of political critique, and it indexed moral failings. But it was not used coherently or consistently, and it did not easily map onto more recent implications of the term. Similarly, though new bureaucratic systems of rule in theory provided a set of adequate mechanisms for ensuring administrative regularity and for detecting and dealing with deviations from proper admin-

istrative procedure, in fact signs of malfeasance were often determinedly ignored for decidedly personalistic reasons.

The tax system is instructive to the extent it provides an illustration of the principles of rural administration that had emerged by the 1920s, outlining how official malpractice was imagined to occur. The implementation of such principles provided, at least in theory, a means through which such malpractice might be controlled. The dual system of taxation (revenue survey in densely populated regions, lump-sum assessment elsewhere) was a matter of administrative practicability (since only close-in areas permitted sufficient monitoring of the surveyors) and also accommodated land of differing economic value (since far-flung locations could not market their cash crops as profitably, and they also enjoyed less in the way of infrastructural improvement that might make agriculture more efficient). From the 1920s onward, therefore, the legally sanctioned system was superficially transparent and provided both a mode of tax collection and a means of supervising its administrators. But that regularity and transparency were illusions.

The illicit was transformed in tandem with the licit. The advent of the regularized apparatus for conducting and monitoring tax collection inflected the ways in which revenue could be diverted into officials' own pockets. Or, more precisely, the reorganization that placed hakimai on salaries and required that taxes be collected as "public" money and deposited into the bayt al-mal helped to create an explicit class of malpractices as crimes where none had existed so precisely in the past. New groups of officials—such as those within the revenue survey—were also put in place, creating both an administrative apparatus that could be used to "corrupt" ends and a cadre of new consumers of corrupt rewards. Sani's deposition as village head of Kacako demonstrates these dynamics in play as early as 1924. Indeed, changing administrative structures both enabled material malpractices and determined the ways in which those malpractices were conceptualized and, to some extent, were dealt with. The administrative reforms of the preceding two decades determined the form of Sani's tax list. Before the colonial-era reform of local administration, Sani would have set individuals' tax levels in consultation with the jakada who represented Kacako's fiefholder, the predecessor of Kacako's *hakimi*, the makama of Kano. Instead of a tax list whose somewhat notional mapping of individual farms determined a family's tax liability, the dagaci and jakada would have collected tax under a variety of headings, adjusting liabilities according to specific circumstances. While these negotiations would have been somewhat flexible—and would doubtless have been accompanied by gift giving as gestures of

respect and obedience—the primary effect of reform was to rigidify the levels of tax that emerged from being listed as cultivator of a particular amount of land and to define as “bribes” presents inferiors might give superiors. Extorting money from unlucky farmers became defined as misuse of office, and the possibilities for increasing the amounts collected were constrained by the bureaucratic requirements of the maps and tax lists. These, once generated, dictated the amounts that needed to be handed over to the hakimi and thence to the central administration. Collecting more therefore required either revising the lists, falsifying receipts, or double collection. And thus, the material forms in which money was extorted from farmers were transformed by the advent of colonialism.

The other transformation was the reorganization of government. The makama’s move out from Kano city to the district capital at least partially displaced the old jakadu from their roles as intermediaries. But the makama’s presence in his district capital (Wudil when Sani first became dagaci, Sumaila after the reorganization and Kacako’s half of the district came under its new head) created a new body of government actors. The demands Sani received from the hakimi’s son Muhammadu and his servants were enabled by the inauguration of the districts as a new level of government, with the district capital a new space where *dagatai* like Sani needed to negotiate the instruments of administration. While it is impossible to know the originator of the improper demands (Muhammadu? the hakimi? the emir? Sani?), it is clear that the forms the demands took, and their intensity, were determined by the reorganization of government.

As surely as material practices of exploitation shifted, so did the political logic behind charges of corruption. Adjudicating accusations of malpractice is always intensively political, and so the new politics of district administration inevitably dictated a new politics of corruption as well. It is striking here that the only crime Emir Usman was willing to consider was that of Muhammadu and his servants receiving bribes, and that the servants did not manage to prove their innocence through oath. (This may have been lucky for them; unlike their master they did not die the following month.) The issue of improperly refusing to adjust the tax lists was never taken up, and the issue of double-taxing households was treated so gingerly only the faintest traces remain in the archives. Thus, not only did the rank of the various protagonists help to determine their fates, but “corruption” only emerged as a charge in a limited (and less serious) subset of the ways it could have. This was despite the fact that the makama was almost immediately deposed for irregularities in other aspects of his administration. In order for “corruption” even to be explicitly articulated

as a possible charge, the crimes in question needed to be among those the government could acknowledge as actually having occurred. And the double taxation of individuals was a step too far. The charge was so serious, the possibility it had actually occurred could not be contemplated.

At the same time, the semantic range of “corruption” could hardly remain unaffected. While as late as 1920 it clearly had a relatively freeform set of implications, denoting a wider range of crimes than the term does in early twenty-first-century international usage, the reorganization of government helped to change “corruption’s” meaning by altering the nature of official malpractice. One potential reason for the memorialization of Emir Aliyu’s deposition as stemming from his maladministration of the legal system was that he had been deposed for “corruption,” which increasingly denoted *administrative* irregularity rather than tolerating slave dealers, taking concubines and burning them to death, or poisoning political officers. These irregularities, obviously, continued to be frowned on, but going forward they would be viewed more as criminal acts in their own right rather than manifestations of corruption. The functional transformation of emirate administration continued after the 1920s, but at a slower pace. The financial constraints of the Great Depression and then of administration during World War II greatly diminished the colonial government’s ability to invest in new administrative infrastructure. For this reason, the fifteen years from 1930 to 1945 were more a matter of particular logics playing out than they were of fundamental departures. In 1922 the inauguration of Katsina College, a secondary school for boys, created a class of officials with advanced proficiency in English, and by the 1930s alumni were beginning to assume high office within emirate administrations. Accordingly, the paper flows within the emirate hierarchy and between emirate officials and British ones increasingly resembled those of bureaucratic institutions in the metropole. However, absolute levels of investment were substantially diminished.⁹¹

In this conjuncture, “corruption” had taken on a powerful if somewhat counterintuitive role. The emergence of a bureaucratic administrative state helped to give the charge the sense of an abuse of office. At the same time, the political logic of the colonial state made it as much a weapon as an objective crime. “Corruption” was only prosecuted—or even admitted as a possibility—in some of the cases it might have been. This development took place in parallel with administrative reorganizations that made malpractice more feasible and more likely. In short, as early as the 1920s, corruption had emerged as a problem in Nigeria and was simultaneously recognizable as a phenomenon that might be generalized around the world and enmeshed in local meanings and relationships. The story does not stop there. After World War II, the start of party

politics across the country occurred in tandem with the inauguration of responsible government at the center, which brought politicians from all regions into competition with one another. That ethnicized and regionalized political competition, and the political economy of oil, would fundamentally alter government malpractice, even as “corruption” retained its status as an ambiguous and highly selective political weapon.

In this way, the early-colonial intermingling of personation and “corruption”—crimes that threatened to delegitimize the state and that were punished with public flogging—can be seen to have persisted, jointly transformed by a changing governmental order. Sani’s complaint resulted in no floggings, nor did it directly result in any coherent finding of official malfeasance. The categories of those considered to hold public office were somewhat blurry, as the successful prosecutions only of Muhammadu’s servants attested, but the selective nature of how the state addressed claims of corruption was already well along the way to its contemporary forms. Sani’s sad career as a village head has little historical importance by itself, but it illustrates how deeply embedded corruption is in practices of government—not as a pathological deformation of a set of bureaucratic rules but as a natural consequence of the constitutive logic of basic government structures. Selective prosecution, ubiquity, and ambiguity of what even counts as corrupt are all qualities of Nigerian corruption even today.