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British Colonial Policy as Push Factor in Inter-Ethnic Migration in Nigeria 1893-1930

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ABSTRACT

The advent of British Colonial rule in Nigeria transformed the traditional African society in a number of ways, some positive others negative. The initial policies adopted to integrate Nigerian into the British colonial system, however, proved a catalyst that triggered mass movement of people from rural to urban centers thereby creating as it were unexpected demographic dislocation. British development of communication and infrastructures such as railways and the network of road system was part of a deliberate policy to foster the growth of “legitimate trade” in the interior. The early imposition of tax regime in the Northern Protectorate induced people from the zone of taxation to migrate to tax free zones. The combination of abiding peace, agricultural export and modern communication system stimulated migration during British colonial administration in Nigeria. It is the conviction of the author that establishment of British rule had fundamental far-reaching effect on inter-ethnic mingling and migration. The paper examines the various policies of the British at the onset of colonial rule and the effect of these on inter-ethnic migration and mingling. Attempt is made to briefly define the two key words, migration and colonialism, in order to give better understanding to the work. The paper concludes that British colonial policies had profound effect on the people’s decision to leave home and migrate to zones of administrative and economic activities.

Keywords: Colonialism; Migration; Policy; Push; inter-ethnic

1. INTRODUCTION

Imposition of British Colonialism

For a number of factors-some religious, some cultural, others plainly economic or simply sheer love of adventure, European penetration of the interior of Nigeria, was by the beginning of the 20th century, a *fait accompli*.

British interest and policies in the Niger Area, since the first contingent of British traders visited the Bight of Benin and Biafra in the 18th century, developed steadily and gradually.¹ The noose of imperial control was gradually tightened and the imposition of direct British colonial administration was the culmination of several stages and changes in the level of direct British involvement in the local affairs. The revocation of the charter of the Royal Niger Company, effective from 1st January, 1900, was the climax of the recognition of the need for a policy change on the Niger, dictated by the awareness that the Niger Delta could be lost to rival interest if no urgent action was taken.² The bombardment of the cities of Bida and Ilorin in 1897 was therefore, preparatory to and consistent with the policy objective dictated by the changing circumstances.³ By 1903 the entire Niger area, which metamorphosed into Nigeria, was completely subjugated through either force or diplomacy. The seizure of Ilorin Emirate by the troops of the Royal Niger Company in 1897 and the ultimate declaration of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria in 1900 brought Ilorin Emirate and the allied province, under direct British control.

The establishment of British rule and consequently Pax Britannica had fundamental and far-reaching effects on inter-ethnic mingling and migration in Nigeria. The relative peace, law and order that followed the establishment of British colonial administration ensured that security consideration was no longer a threat to long distance trading. This was of particular importance as the closing years of the 19th century were characterized by bitter wars in the Yoruba country.⁴ But as the country settled down rapidly at the onset of colonial rule, both ruler and subject entered into more or less an unwritten co-operation with the Resident who then represented the symbol of British colonial authority. Commerce increased by leaps and bounds.⁵ The defence of the walled town began to crumble into ruins and the inhabitants spread far and wide since they no longer feared devastation of war or slave raids.⁶ Consequently, the opening years of the British colonial administration were taken up mainly with internal reforms and efforts were directed at opening up the country to trade and commerce by peaceful means through the development of infrastructures.

Opportunities for trade or employment, which opened in consequence of colonial intervention, provoked great movement of people into areas inhabited by other ethnic groups. In some cases, this movement was purely an economic response to opportunity for profits, in others it was stimulated by social consideration such as the desire to escape from the restricted nature of traditional African society. In yet others it was induced by the policies of colonial power.⁷ The movement of Yoruba traders into the markets of Togo, Gold Coast (present day Ghana) and Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso), the spread of the Igbo from the impoverished or over populated lands of the south east to the northern parts of Nigeria as traders and clerks are obvious examples of movement instigated by predominantly economic motives and facilitated by the imposition of colonial rule.

However, much of the movement of people in West Africa was stimulated by considerations that were as much social as economic.⁸ The new administrative and commercial centres of the colonial powers presented many Africans with the opportunity of

escaping from situations that they did not wish to tolerate at home. A slave could liberate himself from his obligations to his master and even hope to forget his inferior status by escaping. So also could the authority of the Emir and chiefs be avoided through migration.

The exodus from the countryside to the towns was one of the most striking of social changes brought about by the establishment of colonial rule. It was as dramatic as the great shifts of population, which resulted from taxation, and labour policies of the French. Generally the establishment of British rule meant that greater numbers of people were involved in economically motivated migration. It is the effect of this colonial policy influenced migration that is the subject of this paper.

Definition of Concepts: Colonialism and Migration

Towards the end of the 19th Century the meaning of the term “Colonialism” was relatively clear, it was equivalent to “Imperialism” the establishment and extension of political sovereignty of one nation over alien people and territories⁹. Curiously this did not usually include the extension of political sovereign over contiguous land area. Czarist expansion into central and East Asia was not included, nor was U.S. westward march across North America till it reached the Pacific shore included. The word was specifically reserved for colonialism of maritime powers.

Today many writers find it impossible to speak of colonialism without putting great emphasis on the economic aspects of the matter. An English Author, Michael Brown, described colonialism as “a complex of economic, political and military relations by which the less economically developed lands are subjected to the more economically developed...¹⁰” Colonialism remains the best word for general system of unequal world economic relations. An American likens colonialism to “the network of means of control exercised by one economy (enterprise and government) over another.¹¹

Some continue to stress the direct extension of sovereignty; for example .an author equates colonialism with “the process of founding an empire beyond the nation’s natural frontiers with the aim of subjecting the population outside this frontier to the political rule of dominating country¹². Others are willing to extend the term to more indirect mechanism as well, such as military diplomatic pressure or economic penetration. Thus a pair of analysts describes colonialism, as the extension of sovereignty or control, whether direct or indirect¹³.

International inequality is a fact of life and it frequently, though not always; result in the effective subordination of some nations by others, that is the imposition of some sort of rule of control¹⁴. Colonialism refers to those particular relationships between inherently unequal nations which involve effective subjugation, the actual exercise of influence over behaviour of others¹⁵. The concept is basically operational. Inequality is the necessary condition, active affirmation of superiority and inferiority is the logical condition sufficient to establish such relationship¹⁶. Therefore British occupation of Niger Area which transformed to Nigeria from the early part of the 20th century was imperialistic and was by all intent and purposes colonial governance.

Human migration in a broad sense refers to a relatively permanent movement of individuals or a group over a significant distance.¹⁷ This involves a change of residence from one community to another and usually the crossing of a specified kind of internal administrative boundary. Internal migration is here distinguished from international migration, and from intra-community movement. This definition or any paraphrase of it merely begins to delimit the subject. Consequently the exact meaning of the most important

terms (“permanent and “significant) has to be specified. A person who goes to another country and remains there for the rest of his life, we say, is a migrant and one who pays a two hour visit to the nearest town is not. Between these two extremes lies a bewildering array of intermediate instances, which can only partly be distinguished by more or less arbitrary criteria.

What then should be the minimum duration of stays that differentiates a migration from a visit? For the purpose of this research, we shall adopt the United Nation’s recommendation on international migration which defines removal for one year or more as “permanent” and thus as migration; while a stay for shorter period is classified as a visit.¹⁸ No particular specification of the duration of stay suits all purposes and each analyst has to adapt the available data to his needs as best as he can.

In the case of “significant” distance, a person who moves from one home to another in the same neighborhood, and who therefore retains the same social framework is not deemed a migrant. Geographical distance is here taken as a rough measure of whether the migrant crosses into another sub-cultural areas outside his own origin. That is crossing a politically defined boundary such as district; province or state is regarded as a significant distance and therefore regarded as migration.

In this study, the movement of a large group of Nigerian from one part of the country to another and into a different sub-culture, some for as long as a life time or active years, could be regarded as a permanent movement of people and the distances covered were no doubt significant enough as required by definition. They have crossed internal administrative boundary. They could therefore be regarded as migrants in their places of settlements. Therefore the inter-ethnic mingling that resulted from the imposition of British colonial rule was migration by any standard.

2. BRITISH COLONIAL POLICY AND ITS EFFECT ON MIGRATION

Administrative Policy

To secure central direction of policy and pool economic resources together, the British government from 1898 adopted the policy of gradual amalgamation of its various administrative units in Nigeria.¹⁹ In May 1906 the Lagos Colony and Protectorate was amalgamated with the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. The views of Nigerians were never sought on this. This did not however result in administrative fusion. It was done to ensure a convenient and practical means of securing firm administration. The 1914 amalgamation gave the Northern and Southern Provinces a common political head. No uniform style of administration however developed in either group of provinces. Not all the major government departments were merged or centralized between 1912 and 1914. Education, police, and prison were merged between 1920’s and 1930’s.²⁰ Notwithstanding the limited scope of integration that amalgamation brought at the early stage of the exercise, the mere concept of merger of the entire British holding around the Niger river made easy movement of men and materials easier and therefore accelerated internal migration.

The basic principles guiding British policy in administering its colonial territory called Nigeria was that of divide and rule encapsulated in the “Indirect rule”, a system of government where the British had to rule their vast empire through chiefs. Lugard in Northern Nigeria first introduced indirect rule on a large scale because it well suited the existing political structure

where distances were long and there was well-established system of government with laws and law courts and financial administration based on Islamic law. The administration imposed was necessarily ad-hoc and greatly influenced by the personality of the man imposing them and circumstance under which a particular area was occupied – by conquest or by treaty.²¹

More important was the character of the society to be governed: different techniques had to be employed to govern the large centralised states, the small independent village and the desert nomad tribes. The underlying philosophy of the system of government adopted by the British as guideline for the administration of African peoples, as earlier mentioned, was indirect rule or that body of theory which held that there could be no identity with such divergent culture as those of Europe and Africa, and that as a consequence the metropolitan power should rule its African subjects through their own institutions.²² Far from proving initiative for innovation in African society, it became the chief agency for the conservation of its more traditional elements. The emphasis on traditional ruler rather than the educated elite as the means for administering Africa was to have profound impact on the nature of African nationalism in British West Africa and the character of the countries they inherited on independence. Preservation of traditional chief's repositories of tribal customs emphasised ethnicity.²³

This policy manifested itself in several shapes and colours in the art of governance. However, it could be clearly seen in the imperial policies which, though, saw Nigeria as a single geographical unit, treated it as if the interest of a section was not only distinct from, but in certain cases, antagonistic to the interest of the other. The governing outlook was not directed to a consideration of the interests of Nigeria as a whole. Indirect rule, taxation system, education, land tenure system were never the same in the early years of colonial administration.²⁴ Up to 1912, when Lord Lugard came to Nigeria as Governor-General charged with the duty of amalgamating the Northern and Southern Protectorates, the British made no attempt to achieve uniformity in the method by which they employed or attempted to employ traditional authorities for purpose of local government. In the South, throughout the period of colonial administration, contrary to what operated in the North, the British political officer was a member of the Native Authority Councils and courts and in the east of Yoruba land, he actually presided over the sittings of a council, when present. In the south, the Native Authority was usually a council of chiefs or supposed chiefs but in Sokoto Caliphate and in Borno Province, it was usually a single chief or Emir called Sole Native Authority. There was well-established tax system and native court in the North; this did not however come about in the south until the 1920's.²⁵

Lugard's scheme did not explicitly provide for the development of national government even after 1914 amalgamation. The British claimed that they hoped that national feeling would grow up from below. They did not think any good would come out of setting up of national assemblies in order to stimulate national feeling, hence, the extra emphasis on regional and separate development.²⁶ Therefore, Indirect rule which served as the basic principles upon which colonial governance was based might perhaps lead to good local governance, it was not designed to produce a national government.

The disparity in the system of administration between the North and the South influenced people's choice of permanent place of abode especially the Igbomina people of Kwara State whose immediate neighbours to the south remained untaxed until the 1920s and who enjoyed better modern infrastructure than they did. This was part of what motivated the migration southward.²⁷

Indirect Rule, the basic principle of British colonial administration, was not particularly alien to African society. The great African rulers of old, like Mansa Musa or Sunni Ali had ruled their vast empires through local chiefs, and the *Alaafin* of Oyo also used similar system by using local chiefs under the supervision of *Ajele* in governing their conquered provinces. It was, however, a system well suited to Northern Nigeria as designed by the British.²⁸ There was large well-established native administrations already in existence with laws and law-courts and financial administration based on Islamic law. It needed a good deal of adaptation to regions with a different system, such as the clan system of the Igbo. The British were so full of ideal that there must be a chief and his council in every district, that if they could not find chiefs they created one. One important cause of the Aba riots of 1929-30 in Eastern Nigeria was that certain individuals tried to exert authority which the British had given them but which the people did not recognise.

Cameron was among British colonial administrators who thought there was a great divergence between the theory of indirect rule and Northern Nigeria practice, a situation where in his words, of “make-believes” in which administrators did, as they liked regardless of policy.²⁹ Northern emirates and their Native Authorities, he thought, were British creatures, artificially founded and zealously protected from outside influence by officers who looked on their region as the “sacred North”. This was part of the policy design of the colonial administration to ensure that the North was kept apart from the rest of the country. Northerners as a result, were trying to make emirates into native states on the Indian pattern; self-sufficient units rather than mere agencies of local government under central direction from Lagos.³⁰ Cameron observed further that the necessary infusion of European influence was being resisted by excessive concern for supposed African devotion to Islam and to tradition generally. This held up development in the region and kept the north an exotic backwater, attractive to its British protectors but administratively inefficient, corrupt and insensitive to the needs of its own people, especially the non-Muslim and the non-Northerners.³¹ The consequent alienation of the non-Hausa/Fulani stocks in the north would to some extent account for the direction of migration by the people of middle-belt region in the 20th century. It was a recipe for future antagonism and disharmony among the multi-ethnic and multi religious society such as Nigeria. In the south, even where traditional authorities were equally referred, the infusion of Christian influence and the emergent crop of western educated elite limited their powers.

In the light of this lack of modernisation in the north, communities living in the borderline between the north and the south, especially people of Yoruba extraction in the middle-belt, became greatly attracted to the south. The pull factors were obvious, greater infrastructural development that brought modernity closer to the people, rapid expansion of education industry, existence of vegetational zone where cash crops like cocoa could be cultivated (although this was not man-made) and thriving commercial activities in the coastal region. All these were responsible for the coastward migration of people including the Igbomina of Kwara State, from the middle belt region.

Every year, the gulf widened in the system of governance between the north and the south and its ultimate bridging became a matter of greater difficulty. While on the one hand Northern Nigeria had the priceless advantages of concentrating on political and administrative problems: on the contrary British rule in Southern Nigeria had been in slow growth over years, advancing here by conquest, there by pacific penetration, here by one kind of arrangement with the native chiefs, there by another kind of arrangement thereby making

impossible the introduction of a uniform policy for the entire country. Politically, and of necessity, British rule in Southern Nigeria was a thing of shreds and patches.³² No broad line of public policy was laid down from the colonial office in London. The result was that each governor or acting governor ran his own show. The governors' position was rather like the Roman Emperors and the officers responsible for large districts never knowing what a new governor's policy would be, looked upon every fresh change with nervous apprehension, which had a very unsettling effect.³³ On the contrary, the North had settled for indirect rule under the tutelage of its traditional rulers and supervision of the British Resident Officer.

The introduction of tax at a widely divergent period between the north and south was a policy difference that probably stimulated northern inhabitants to migrate to the tax-free south. Imposition of tax in the north was a policy that forced those who were not already producing groundnut or cotton to do so or migrate. Taxation was introduced in Northern Nigeria in 1903 but the proclamation was not issued until 1904.³⁴ The proclamation gave legal backing to the system by which the government would share the taxes. Another proclamation in 1906 superseded that of 1904. It again gave legal backing to the complete system of taxation, maintaining the original native organization but in an "improved" form. It was called the "Native Revenue Proclamation" which authorised the levying and collecting in accordance with certain detailed provisions.³⁵

The basis of assessment was to be the annual value of the lands and produce, of the profits from trade and manufactures, of flocks and herds of nomad shepherds and of certain other existing sources of revenue. The sum (tax) was fixed arbitrarily by the Resident who made rough guess at the population and its general wealth.³⁶ Such arbitrary way the assessment was carried out led to tax riot in Ilorin in the spring of 1913. Two District Officers were mobbed and pelted with mud and stones³⁷ at Ilorin, and riot broke out at Ajasse-Ipo in 1933. Not only was the sum imposed above the economic capacity of peasant farmers to conveniently meet, women, under-aged male and dead members of the communities were enumerated for taxation, the bulk of which had to be shared by the community.³⁸ The Proclamation and Memoranda on Land Taxation especially contained a significant if not ominous silence as to how much the Native to actually pay. Not even was a maximum directed by way of protection to the taxpayers, in truth the actual amount of the taxation and its percentage was quite discretionary and fixed by the Governor and varied in different districts. This no doubt was a breach of two of the four cardinal principles of taxation, equality and certainty.³⁹

The imposition of direct tax was delayed in South-western Nigeria until 1917-18. In the South East it was not introduced until 1928.⁴⁰ It should be noted that British colonial system of taxation was by no way easily absorbed by Northerners. Even in the so called Muslim area of Northern Nigeria, prior to the imposition of British colonial rule, taxes were levied not on individuals but on communities or villages and were paid in kind rather than cash. Therefore, the change to payment in cash was to create great difficulty.⁴¹ Lugard maintained however, the absolute right of government to levy tax in return for benefits conferred on the citizens. He merely postponed the step until such time as the population would have accepted a coin currency obtainable through the opening of the country to commerce.⁴² Lugard regarded taxation as triple-edged weapon; as a stimulus to production, as source of revenue for the support of the colonial administration and finally as the basis for the development of his system of indirect rule which meant the modernisation of traditional institutions through their own agencies.

Northern Nigeria has no seaboard, therefore, it could not resort to indirect taxation derivable from custom duties on sea-borne imports and there was no custom frontier between Northern and Southern Nigeria. Northern Nigeria therefore, depended on receiving shares from Southern Nigeria custom shares, which for several years stood at £34,000 (N8,840,000), though this later rose to £75,000 (N19,500,000). This was very meagre as southern custom revenue was over £1,000,000 (N260,000,000) in 1906. It was also inadequate to defray the cost of administration in Northern Nigeria. The local revenue was also inadequate and the cost of administration had to be met by a grant- in-aid from the imperial treasury, which averaged ¼ million pound sterling annually. The sum total granted by the British exchequer from 1899 to the end of 1913 to Northern Nigeria, including grant to the West African Frontier Force, was £4,900,000 (N1,274,000,000). This was in addition, of course to the £865,000 (N224,900,000) paid to the Royal Niger Company for the withdrawal of its charter. It was therefore, an urgent political necessity for Sir Lord Lugard to raise local revenue, and the only, or at all events, the chief source of revenue was direct taxation.⁴³

Taxation did not only stimulate productivity, it stimulated migrations to areas of relative economic advantages by people in search of cash to pay tax. All men were subject to pay tax, but since people who lived on land that produced no cash crops, and tax had to be paid in cash rather than kind, young men were forced to migrate to regions where there was shortage of labour. Lagos one of the administrative and commercial centre of the colonial government, with a fast growing economy, offered prospective migrants one of such attractions.

3. GENERAL ECONOMIC POLICY

A very important aspect of the problem of consolidating colonial rule had to do with the imposition of a new economic and social regime on the nation. The effective exploitation of the country's human and material resources to the advantage of the metropolis was the most important single factor accounting for British presence in the country. To a very great extent, therefore, the methods of consolidation were designed to lead to the successful achievement of this goal through ensuring the maintenance of law and order on a scale acceptable to British and conducive to her interest. As Joseph Chamberlain, the then Colonial Secretary once said, "colonial territories are acquired for the benefit of our people and for the benefit of the people of the territories".⁴⁴ The desire for the metropolis to enjoy material benefits was however, paramount in the scheme of things. One of the immediate effects of the establishment of colonial rule in the period 1893 to 1913 was that most of the obstacles to the free flow of trade were swept off.⁴⁵ Freedom of movement was made mandatory and military patrols ensured that it became effective. The West African Frontier Force and the police maintained law and order.⁴⁶

The imposition of a new economic regime was by itself a method of extending and consolidating British rule. There were two sides to the creation of the new economic regime. The first dealt with the setting up of the infrastructure, that is modern means of communication and transport.⁴⁷ Fundamental to this new economic order was improved communication by water, road and railways, telegraph and telephone were also relevant. These means of transport and communication were equally important politically and militarily. The second dealt with the direct promotion of the production of the desired economic or cash crops.

Except in the areas of transport and communication, the economic policy of the colonial power in Nigeria, throughout the early years of the colonial administration, (1900-1920), was unspectacular and uninspiring. It had three distinguishing features. First, it was marked by a determination to introduce European method of trade in place of indigenous methods, which as far as the British were concerned were considered primitive and obstructive of trade expansion. Secondly, it sought in a mercantilist sort of way to achieve the economic development of Nigeria by encouraging the people's agricultural efforts as a complement to Europe's industrial efforts. In other words, Nigerians were indirectly restricted to production of raw materials or extractive trade to satisfy British industrial raw material requirements. Finally the policy was marked by timid experimentation in the introduction of new methods of cultivation and new breeds of certain cash crops.⁴⁸

A noteworthy feature of the economic policy of the colonial power in Nigeria was that, unlike the policy pursued in Congo, Cameroon and East Africa, it left the exploitation of the resources of Nigeria, mines excluded, in the hands of Nigerians themselves, not in those of concessionary companies. It was not that concession hunters were lacking but that they were discouraged.⁴⁹ This was ostensibly designed to preserve the traditional pattern of agricultural production. Peasant agriculture rather than plantation system was evolved. However, Nigeria's escape from being overrun by concession-mongers is to be attributed to geography and demography. The inhospitable climate for European settlement and the thickly populated forest belt was already heavily farmed which made plantation system of agricultural production impossible or rather unprofitable. The peasant production system encouraged migration of people from the middle-belt region, whose area was not particularly viable for production of any of the cash crops, to cocoa producing belt of the South-western Nigeria from the 1930s. Agricultural production however, involved provision of necessary infrastructures to facilitate production and movement of goods and services. These included communication and transport.

Development took place only in those areas that were of interest to the metropolitan economy with the result that vast area of the country remained untouched by the colonial regime until the beginning of the economic planning in the 1940s when the colonies were looked at not exclusively in terms of their usefulness to the mother country but as economic entities in themselves.⁵⁰

Colonial government played a much more dominant role in the economies of their African colonies than they ever did at home. State ownership of the means of production which would have been rejected by an anti-socialist Britain or France, if it concerned the metropolis, was never challenged as far as Africa was concerned. Government provided the bulk of the capital for long-term investment like railways and ports.⁵¹ Even in the midst of the confusion in administrative policy, the imperial policy on communication designed to facilitate effective exploitation of the colonial territory through transportation, proved a great asset to the development of commerce and industries of extractive form. Transport and communication are critical to modernization because of their impact at various levels on social, political and economic development. Basically, they channel the flow of persons, commodities and ideas between places and over time and mediate relationships and interactions between individuals and communities.⁵²

Relations between the people inhabiting modern day Nigeria prior to the establishment of a railway system and the imposition of British rule were limited to the field of commerce. Human and vegetation limitations had imposed on the peoples varying degrees of

interdependence of one group upon another.⁵³ The improvement of communication from the coast to the interior of Northern Nigeria owed its origin not only to the strategic necessities but also to the hope that the protectorate might thereby develop into a greater cotton exporting country. The tin mining also demanded transport facilities both to export ore and to import machinery.⁵⁴ Transport fostered integration of people spatially separated. Transport constitutes a crucial factor in the effort to create a sense of common identity and commitment to national goals. Without transport it is difficult if not impossible, to transform a subsistence economy into a market economy in which specialization and exchange take place.⁵⁵ Scholars have therefore described transport as the formative power of economic growth. Not only does it promote spatial contact it also enhances territorial and technological specialization. Not surprisingly therefore, from the 1880s mercantile interests in Britain clamoured for energetic and imaginative railway policies in West Africa as a solution to the problem of easy and dependable access to Nigerian interior.

Therefore to foster the development of agricultural export, construction of railway started in Lagos in 1896.⁵⁶ Baro to Kano railway started as a separate and independent venture in 1908. The amalgamation of the two railways in 1912 not only marked the beginning of a unified railway system in Nigeria, but also the beginning of a sudden awareness that the two separate protectorates and Colony of Nigeria could not be effectively administered separately. The Eastern railway was opened in 1916, but the link between the Southeastern and Northern Nigeria lines were not effected until 1926.⁵⁷

Between 1900 and 1913, as a result of the development of railway system, export of palm-produce increased three fold from ₦3million to ₦10 million. The provision of transportation facilitated the production and distribution of goods and services. As a provider of transport for haulage and mobility, the railway was second to none from the beginning of the 20th century until the third decade when the motor road became a noticeable competitor.⁵⁸ Even then the railway remained unbeatable for the movement of bulk goods over long distance. The Lagos to Ilorin line, 246 miles, was opened on 27th August 1908 and the extension to Jebba, 306 miles, was in August 1909. The whole line to Kano was opened on 3rd November 1911 (700 miles from Lagos). However, the traffic across the Niger at Jebba was carried on by a train ferry. The rail bridge was not made ready until 1915.⁵⁹

For many, the settlements in railway junction towns marked their first venture from their places of birth. The concentration of wage-earning population in these junction towns stimulated demand for some essential products, which invariably enhanced economic activities. This induced large movement of people to junction towns. The railway also engendered inters- group trade in non-export products like yams, kola nuts, grains and some domestic products.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of railway to the Northern Protectorate. Railway construction stimulated economic activities. It provided the indigenes with the means whereby they might place their produce on the world market and receive in exchange the manufactured and other commodities of foreign countries. Involvement in the construction of railway not only induced labour migration; through it people also learnt the system of daily and weekly wages and the use of money.⁶⁰ Through exposure gained in railway construction people became alert and self-respecting and had educative influence. Through it, people learn to trade and satisfy their growing wants by means of wages, which they earned. Great impetus was thus given to trade by cheapening communication consequently; migration towards European development areas was therefore inevitable.

For example migration of Igbomina traders of Kwara State, which hitherto was restricted to a few who could trek the distance to Lagos, became opened to many, as the railway system was extended to Offa? Although many were still trekking as late as the 1920's, the availability of modern transportation made travelling easier and safer.⁶¹

The British realised that the railway would be uneconomic without good roads to act as feeders. Consequently, road building was undertaken as an important aspect of the bid to provide proper infrastructures for the new economic regime and to establish their rule. An important part of the duties of the chiefs was the recruitment of forced labour for the roads as well as the supervision of road making and maintenance. Hand in hand with road making and maintenance went clearing of creeks and streams, where they existed, to make them suitable for launch and/or canoe traffic. The "Southern Nigeria" Protectorate in 1903 issued a Roads and Rivers Proclamation (later Ordinance) under which a warrant chief on instruction from the District or Provincial Commissioner was required to recruit labour for meeting these needs. Each adult was expected to work for six days in a quarter.⁶² To supplement the railway system, a considerable effort was devoted to road construction, which was the pre-occupation of the British district administrators.⁶³ Roads were built to link major commercial centres and centres of government activities.

The effect of this modest investment in transport, coupled with the prevailing peace was spectacular. Between 1900 and 1913 the export from Nigeria increased by about 3½ times while import rose in similar proportion. Basically, transportation channels the flow of persons, commodities and ideas between places and overtime and mediate relationships and interactions between individuals and communities. It is vital to the economic migration of Nigeria people that started in the 19th century.

Economically the impact of transport and communication on development is clearly seen first in providing the preconditions for reaching and settling in the developing new areas, then in stimulating the growth of the market. Generally the development of transport facilities has had important economic and social results and has been of definite advantage from an administrative point of view. On the economic side, it can be claimed that the increase in the export trade in tin, coal, cotton, groundnuts and palm oil was due to the creation of a more adequate transport facilities.⁶⁴

It should be noted however, that the railway system was particularly designed towards the economic exploitation of the colonial territory. Rail-lines were only extended to cash crop producing areas to ensure easy haulage of commodities to the coast for export. Large areas remained without any effective railway service and lateral communications. The economic policy subordinated African interests to those of the needs of the metropolis. The railways and later the tarmac roads, simply linked areas that produced the crops and minerals European needed with the ports at the coast. There was little attempt to develop communication in such a way that the internal, as distinct from the export economy of the colonies, would be stimulated.⁶⁵

The railway system was constructed with the sweat of peasant farmers through money raised locally from taxation, increased import duties and Loan Bill passed through Parliament in 1899,⁶⁶ thereby incurring debt for the colony which had to be paid back through heavier taxation of the subject people. The forced labour associated with railway construction was another objectionable aspect of the project despite the positive impact, which the system was said to have had, for the colonial government.

Agricultural Policy

The colonial policy, which primarily through taxation gave pride of place to export agricultural products such as cocoa, palm produce, cotton, groundnut, to the detriment of subsistence crops, was another policy directive that had great effect on inter-ethnic migration. For example the introduction of cocoa into the south western forest belt was of particular importance to Igbomina and some other people of the middle belt area whose land, was not good for the production of many of the cash crops.⁶⁷ As late as 1900, cocoa was not mentioned among the products, which Nigeria was hoping to develop but by the 1930's it had become a major export. The establishment of this crop in western Nigeria was largely the work of a small group of African entrepreneurs who were significantly, also leaders of the African Church.⁶⁸

The general indolence of colonial government in agricultural affairs in the early years was a reflection of the general policy that saw agricultural production as essentially a problem for the African peasant. Overall attempt to assist him increase his output through research into more productive varieties of the crops were negligible.⁶⁹ Expenditure on agriculture was perversely low even though this was the basis of the economy. It is to be noted that, whereas British interests provided the stimulus for cash crop production and British administration created the necessary conditions, the reaction of Nigerian to their new economic opportunities was swift and efficient. Actual production for export was directed almost entirely by Nigerians.⁷⁰ The capitalist plantation system gained hardly any footing in Nigeria, partly because the authorities were unwilling to disturb the indigenous land tenure system or to risk the political complications, which would be involved in the introduction of European landownership system, and mainly because it was unnecessary. African farmers were willing to do the job on their own, and could do it much more cheaply. Even the choice of crops to plant reflected African judgement rather than British wishes. Cotton production, on which the British government placed most emphasis, made disappointing progress, in the savannah zones, while the output of groundnuts, which were better suited to most of the local soils, increased drastically.

The success of the agricultural enterprises however, was due to a number of factors, in addition to the rising world prices, which provided an incentive; the new transport system made possible the export of bulky products. Land was abundant, so also was labour, for it was clear that the traditional economic system could by no means absorb the full potential energies of the population especially of the young males. Essential to this development was an efficient marketing system providing both for the collection of the agricultural produce and the distribution of the imported goods which were the incentive for production. All these were facilitated by colonialism. The colonial era brought peace with it, stimulated certain forms of agricultural export and furnished both the demonstration effect and large scale outside contacts that accelerated migration to dominant areas of colonial presence. The mass migration of people of the middle-belt region to the Cocoa belt of the southwest was a direct response to the opportunity offered by the Colonial agricultural policy.

Monetary Policy

The colonial government's monetary policy was another factor that facilitated the growth of economic activities and greater interaction among Nigerians. In one of the annual reports by 1902, the administration made references to currency as one of the factors retarding

the development of trade, all trade was therefore by barter. This assumption was technically wrong as, over the centuries, local traders and their European counterparts had evolved method of exchange through mutual acceptance of units which served the purpose of currency.⁷¹ It is important to mention that it was not colonialism that brought the use of money as a medium of exchange to Nigeria. Long before the establishment of colonial administration in West Africa, many traditional currencies had been in circulation and had been used as legal tender for commercial purposes. Such customary currencies included cowries, iron-rod, brass and copper rods, manilas, and strips of certain clothes, gold dust and salt.⁷² European traders, who later maintained regular commercial contacts with West Africa, gradually introduced such foreign currencies as gold coins, Spanish doubloon, the American dollar, the French Napoleon, the British Sovereign and the Silver Maria Theresa dollar.⁷³ Barter trading was used side by side with cash mainly on the coast. But as European traders began to spread their commercial tentacles into the hinterland, their relationship with African producers began to assume complex forms. This in turn adversely affected the procedures for trade negotiations and complicated barter terms of trade,⁷⁴ that became inadequate for commerce on the scale, which had now developed.

However, right from the inception of colonial rule, European traders put more pressure on the British authority to introduce a uniform monetary policy whereby all the pre-existing traditional and foreign currencies would be eradicated. The eventual demonetisations of traditional currencies from 1900 ushered in a modern tradition of monetary policy whereby the British colonies were integrated into the world market. The growth of commerce and trade that this entailed could not but foster inter-group movements and migrations as economic activities grew in leaps and bounds.

The most important innovation was the setting up of the West Africa Currency Board in 1912.⁷⁵ The system adopted was what is known as the “100 per cent sterling exchange standard” and its effect was briefly that the purchasing power of West Africa residents was determined absolutely by the territories’ earnings from exports. This prevented inflation and so made West Africa more attractive to foreign investors, but it also made the economies still more “dependent”, and in the opinion of some economists, had an unduly depressing effect on internal development.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The introduction of convenient currency and banking operation brought an enormous expansion of trade.⁷⁵ Opportunities for trade or employment provoked great movement of peoples into areas inhabited by other ethnic groups. In some cases this movement was a purely economic response to opportunity for profits. In others, it was stimulated by social considerations such as the desire to escape from the restricted nature of traditional African society. In yet others, it was induced by the policies of the colonial powers.⁷⁷

In conclusion, there are five features of British colonial policy in Nigeria, which separately and collectively, disrupted the traditional socio-economic arrangements in the various Nigerian communities. This made peasant farming materially unrewarding for many farmers and created the psychological situation in which they have become shiftless and wanted to try their hands at something else and seek their fortune elsewhere.

Therefore, the imposition of systematic and universal taxation, compulsory use of standard coin and currency, encouragement of production of the exports crops and exploitation of Nigerian mineral resources, control of external trade by the colonial government and British monopoly capital, the establishment of new urban centre of trade and administration, all were colonial policies which had direct bearing on peoples migration to urban, administrative and economically productive areas in the twentieth century.⁷⁸

It is, therefore, the cumulative effect of these British colonial policies and some other factors, which stimulated the mass exodus of able-bodied Nigerian to seek work beyond their own unproductive native land, starting from the latter parts of the 19th century.

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