

# “The British and the trans-Saharan trade”: The Colonial State policies in undermining the trans-Saharan trade in Hausa Land (Northern Nigeria), 1890s–1920s

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The research examines the impact of British policies in undermining the trans-Saharan trade. The paper reassesses the position of the Northern Nigerian economy in relation to the new economic order introduced by the British. Issues discussed include the re-orientation in relation to the merchants; the basic concepts of colonial economy as defined by the British in Northern Nigeria. In addition, the paper highlights the colonial economy as distorted, characterized by the over growth of certain sectors needed by the colonial state i.e., foreign trade, while sectors connected with the indigenous markets i.e., cottage based production, local, regional or the trans-Saharan trade were neglected. In a nut shell, those activities (like the trans-Saharan trade) which could compete with colonial commerce or production were discouraged and prohibited directly or indirectly. In this respect, the trans-Saharan trade between Central Sudan and North Africa was stagnated during the colonial days and apparently, it was the same with trade within the West African sub-region. The distinctive feature in this context of an imperial economic system is that the colonial state had, within limits, created the formal framework for development in Northern Nigeria. This was what happened in the relationship between the mercantile class, the peasantry and the large expatriate firms who were backed by the colonial state and gained monopoly position to trade in raw materials and achieving their goals.

*Keywords:* Northern Nigeria, trans-Saharan trade, colonial policy.

## Introduction

Economic historians generally agreed that a sound economy is characterized by development in all facet of economic life, and diversified with a high level of development in various sectors. However, in the context of the political economy of Hausa land (Northern Nigeria) under colonial over-rule, when one considers the economy of a people as the sum total of what they do for a living, there was the overgrowth of some economic activities at the expense of others, which illustrates a gross distortion in terms of growth. The explanation to these distortions is hinged on the basis of the colonial economy in Northern Nigeria, which was never diversified. This stems out of the fact that the colonial economy

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was distorted by the overgrowth of certain sectors, especially needed by the colonial state, while sectors connected to domestic economy were neglected, discouraged and allowed to decay. The experiences of Hausa land generally, under colonial economy was akin to that of the South American colonies. This is strictly due to the nature of the colonial economy which in every ramification was mono-cultural in outlook and orientation, relying on foreign trade.

The character of colonial economy gave emphasis to sectors deemed by the colonial state as “productive” i.e., foreign trade, while indigenous sectors, or domestic economy, including cottage based production, local and regional trade were openly discouraged and left to decay. Commercial activities were regulated in the sense that the colonial state gave priority to trade that enhanced British capitalism, while local trade, cottage based production and indigenous merchants were allowed to degenerate and decline. In a nutshell, those activities which could compete favourably with colonial commerce or production were discouraged and prohibited directly or indirectly. For instance, the colonial state systematically and deliberately enacted certain policies that discouraged the trans-Saharan trade and cottage based production of certain items directly connected to the trade. That is largely part of the reason for the stagnation of the Saharan trails in the colonial era. The distinctive features of an imperial economic system in Hausa land was that the colonial state had, within limits, created the formal framework for the economic activities, and in some degree determine the character of development.

The scenario created in the Northern Nigerian economy by the British, placed the artisans, peasantry and the mercantile class at the mercy of the colonial state and its large expatriate companies, who were always supported to gain monopoly position to trade in raw materials. The process started gradually, actually in the last decade of the nineteenth century, when several attempts were made to penetrate the trans-Saharan trade, in order to stagnate, paralyse or at least, re-orient it in favor of British capitalism. This was the single most important objective of the British in Northern Nigeria.

With the conquest of Hausa land, the issue most striking to the British was the export of raw materials, which continued along the desert routes to the Mediterranean coast, rather than southwards to the Atlantic coast and Europe respectively. Long distance trade within the hinterland continued to flourish and prosper unhindered, and of course for a very long time afterwards. The large domestic cottage based products and markets of Northern Nigeria, especially in the re-export products from Bornu and Abzin, continued to serve the needs of distant areas like Ougadougou, Bobo-dioulasso, Poutenga, up to Kankan in Guinea, the Yoruba country and areas south of the river Benue to as far as the Volta side. These trade interactions and mingling continued unhindered, especially since the European colonial firms had not started to seriously encroach on the Northern Nigerian domestic markets, until way after the railway had reached Kano in 1911/1912. Until then the pattern of trade traversing Hausa land remained basically what it had been in the nineteenth century<sup>1</sup> [1, p. 221].

There are various ways scholars analyzed the political economy of Northern Nigeria under colonial over-rule. This is because scholars quite differently used different approaches, conceptual, theoretical and methodological framework. There are basically two

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<sup>1</sup> P.E. Lovejoy went on to divide the trade into three broad categorizations: (i) the trade to and from Gonga (ii) the trade to and from other parts of Hausa land (iii) and the trade to areas of Lokoja (and also areas south of the Benue) and Yoruba land [1].

approaches to analyze the colonial economy in Africa; (i) Those who thought that colonial economy had opened up the African economy (export expansionism in mineral and agricultural resources), which they deemed had been stagnant prior to the advent of colonial over-rule. The proponents of this view employed “the vent for surplus theory” to analyze the colonial economy. The thrust of the theory is that, factors of production ie, land, labor, capital and entrepreneurship were under employed prior to colonial rule in Africa. That colonialism provided peace, capital, incentive, security and the enabling environment (Pax Britannica) which compelled the artisans, producers, and the mercantile class to discard their pre- colonial economic culture to embrace the new colonial economic order, which opened a previously closed economy. This theoretical and conceptual approach is basically employed in the writings of economic historians like A. G Hopkins, J. S Horgendorn, Steven Baiers/Lovejoy. (ii) On the other hand, there are those economic historians who counter this view point in analyzing the African colonial economy. They use (amongst other theories)in particular, “the comparative cost doctrine”. The thrust of this theory advocates that export expansionism in an economy is attainable mostly at the expense of domestic economic growth. This is exactly this presentation. That the trans-Saharan Trade, the producers, artisans, cottage based industries and the general internal (domestic and regional economic growth) decayed or ebbed away, because of British colonial policies in Northern Nigeria.

### **The Pre-colonial glory of the trans-Saharan trade from the annals of European travellers**

To understand the implication of the British efforts to re-route the trans-Saharan trails from Hausa land, it should be reflected that throughout, three ethnic groups monopolised the operations of the trade in terms of organisation, funding, security and transportation. These were the Berbers, the Tuareg and the Tubu. The Berbers controlled the trade in their capacity as capital providers and re-distributors of imported and exported commodities to and from the Sahel across the Mediterranean. The Tuareg and Tubu, whose kingdoms were established on the cross roads of the desert, possessed a lot of camels. They had monopoly in security and the transportation of commodities to and from areas of the Central Sudan and North Africa. This was in addition to their control of the desert saline in Bilma, Kawar, Fachi and Durku [2, p. 156]. The major Tuareg groups in the salt and grain trade with Hausa land were Kel-Owi; Kel-Aghalel; Kel-Fiday; Kel-Tagama; Kel-Itisen; Kel-Imakkowa; Kel-Ekeskasan and their vassals. The salt was used in cooking; as medicine; as a salt substitute; for making dyes; and it was also mixed in snuff in tobacco. The salt and natron trade brought enormous riches to ‘Air’ Abzin and the Central Sudan state (Hausa land). For all intents and purpose, much of the entire Central and Western Sudan region’s economy lay in the hands of the Saharan traders. With their possession of salt and camels, they not only influenced the volume, value and seasonality of commerce in the Central Sudanese markets, but reaped a large chunk of the profits. This enormous wealth could not be quantified easily, however, the European explorer Heinrich Barth attempted an approximation in the 1850s when he visited Katsina:

Encamped on this same group with us was salt caravan of Annur, of Hamma, of the Kel-Tafidet, of Salah of Haj Makh mud with the Kel-Tagimmat, of AMaki, of more than two hundred

camels laden with salt...The whole of the salt, therefore, collected here at the time was, at the utmost, worth one hundred millions of kudi, or about eight thousand pounds sterling... We may therefore not be far from the truth if we estimate the whole number of the salt caravan of this of the Kel-Owi of this year at two thousand five hundred camels [3, vol. 1, p. 455].

Furthermore, the North African Arabs, Berbers, Tuaregs and Tubu merchants continued to maintain their ancient trade in slaves, grain, metals, skins, Ostrich feathers, currency exchange, silk materials and especially the old blue dyed cloth trade, popularly called *Turkudi* in Hausa. In fact, both trades were complimentary to each other. The complementary nature of the trade stems out of the fact that, the desert communities depended for much of their supplies of slaves, grain and cloth from the savannah. The most famous and ancient among these trades was the *Turkudi* cloth and slave trade. The *Turkudi* were manufactured primarily in Hausa land and predominantly in cottage based industries in Kano, Kura and Bichi as specialists. They are very fine cotton cloth, very heavily dyed with indigo. *Turkudi* cloth was used predominantly by the Berber, Tuareg and Tubu men and women. The Tuareg in particular value it extremely, that it constitutes a core element in their wedding, where it is used as part of their dowry. It was also used as currency in Timbuktu and many other places within Central Sudan and areas within the Sahara desert. The Ghadames/Tuati merchants in Hausa land exported it to Ghat, a desert market in the North-central Sahara, whence it was forwarded due west to Insalah and from there south again to Timbuktu. The cloth thus made two near complete crossing of the Sahara [4, p. 2–3]. In 1824; Clapperton estimated the value of the *Turkudi* gown (*riga*) to the darkest blue at 3000 cowries [5, p. 51–61]. He estimated the total value of the *Turkudi* gown (*riga*) at 5000 cowries. He also estimated the value of a *Turkudi* women's wrapper at 2000 to 3000 cowries. Heinrich Barth also estimated the value the *Turkudi* cloth from Kano in the 1850s at 300 million cowries, which was worth 120, 000 dollars at the very least. This was Barth's approximated load of some 1500 camels carrying about three to four hundred weight each, two to three thousand tons a year. Barth finally remarked with astonishment: "there is really some grand in this kind of industry." [3, vol. 1, p. 375, vol. 2, p. 362]

In the 1820s, Denham stressed on the prospect of the Saharan trade, by accounting that: "a camel-load of merchandise would be bought in Tripoli for \$150 (about 250 % above prime cost), and brought in a return of \$500 after paying expenses; one man was put in charge of three camels loads, who received one third of the profits remaining." [5, p. 321] North Africa contributed more to the Saharan trade than capital and enterprise. In describing the role played by the African merchants in the Central Sudan economy, Johnson mentioned one item that was outstanding in the nineteenth century:

Waste silk from the Mediterranean silk mills dyed there to colors unobtainable in West Africa, particularly magenta (from madder, which does not grow in West Africa); North African garments (haiks, burnouses, etc) were an important item in Kano imports; in later years they were imitated in France. The initial processing of Ostrich feathers removal from skins, and preliminary sorting, was done in North Africa (apparently another Jewish trade) [6, p. 127–146].

In addition, Barth further relates that, the goods imported into Hausa land by the trans-Saharan caravans remained fairly constant throughout the nineteenth century, and certainly this continued to the first decade of the colonial era. These goods were of various kind, which include; North African garments; raw silk dyed in Tripoli; a little hardware and cutlery; tea; spices and perfumes for the use of resident North Africans. Barth re-

ported also on the lack of interest on Manchester manufactured textile goods (Calico and prints) in Hausa land:

Calico certainly is not the thing most wanted in a country (Hausa land) where home-made cloth (Turkudi and white woven cloth — Sakarfari) is produced at so cheap a rate, and of so excellent quality; indeed the unbleached calico has a very poor chance in Kano, while the bleached calico and cambric attract the wealthier people on account of their nobler appearance. [Brackets mine] [3, vol. 1, p. 517]

### **Early British attempts to re-orient and re-direct the trans-Saharan trade**

The earliest recorded attempt by the British to penetrate the trans-Saharan trade started since the late 18th century. This was when Mr. Simon Lukas, a British Vice Consul in Morocco in 1788 was engaged by the African Association to cross the Sahara desert from the Tripoli to Murzuk, and gather information on the commerce in West Africa. He, however, did not reach Murzuk but gave up the journey and returned to Tripoli. Records of these inquiries are contained in the *proceedings of the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa* [7, p. 56]. Even prior the conquest of Northern Nigeria, the British interest in re-orienting and re-directing the trans-Saharan trade was of paramount importance. This intention was attributed to a single factor which can be summarized in a phrase: “to facilitate the introduction of British capitalism in Northern Nigeria” everything else is subordinated to this. One of the ways the British achieved this was by paralyzing the trans-Saharan trade. In fact, it is generally observed that, the second half of nineteenth century was a period of decline for the trans-Saharan commerce, due largely to the penetration of the representatives of British commerce in the desert trade. These representatives were mainly Jewish and Maltese merchants under the umbrella of consular protection. The important Jewish and Maltese merchants in the trans-Saharan trade were used maximally to achieve their imperial designs in Northern Nigeria. Opposition to these ‘protégés’ especially from the Arabised Berbers and Tuareg was great, yet both predominant stake holders in the desert side trade and the indigenous merchants in Northern Nigeria were powerless to halt their inroads. The activities of the protégés were aptly summarized by Shenton:

We know very little about the European protégés, yet for one family there is enough material to illustrate what is perhaps a representative origin and development. The Arbib family, Jews resident in Tunis under British protection, became principal financial bankers of trans-Saharan caravans in the last quarter of the nineteenth century....By the end of the nineteenth century; the Arbibs had members of the family in Manchester, Tunis and Tripoli as well as network of agents and sub-agents in Northern Nigeria. The Arbib's business was not a small one, the principal agent of the firm in Kano, Haj Khalifa Zennad, leaving on his death upward of 37 million cowries or £1,100 sterling. Haj Khalifa Zennad figures importantly in the earliest attempts to re-route the traffic from the trans-Saharan trade to the Atlantic [8, p. 64].

It should be reflected though, that there were several Jewish merchants like Haj Khalifa Zennad, who were under cover as Syrians or Lebanese merchants in Borno and Kano. Several experiments on re-routing the exports of skins from Northern Nigeria via the sea route to British and American factories were undertaken by the British agents in

Kano and Borno. They operated their businesses in Northern Nigeria since before the British occupation. For instance, in 1851 when the German explorer Heinrich Barth, visited Kano it was Bawu Gagliuffi's agent in Kano (a Jewish undercover agent for Britain), who introduced him to the Kano court. Since the mid nineteenth century, these protégés disguised as either Ghadamesi or Tripolitanians had been commercial fronts for British commerce. For instance, on Heinrich Barth's second visit to Kano in 1854, he arrived desperate and destitute than during his first, "he was able to raise a loan of 200 dollars (500, 000 shells) from the Ghadames merchants who had British property in their hands. Without these loans Barth's position in Kano would have been very precarious" [9, p. 178]. Similarly, in 1898 Lebanese (or perhaps Jews disguised as Lebanese) were encouraged to even exploit the possibility of disorienting the traditional livestock trade between Northern Nigeria and the Yoruba country (Western Nigeria) in favour of British capitalism:

The very first Lebanese to visit the Northern and Southern Nigeria, Micheal Elias in 1898 'took a caravan from Lagos through Kano to Borno to Lake Chad' this was certainly connected with the cattle trade by the end of 1920s, Elias had become a big cattle dealer. Elias's visit to those areas was undertaken with a view to studying the trade and indicates Lebanese interest (and indeed British interest) in the trade as early as 1898. [Bracket mine] [10, p. 117]

The use of alien merchants to re-orient and re-direct the trans-Saharan trade was, therefore, an old British project. The idea started way back in the early nineteenth century. The Jews, Maltese and Lebanese merchants acted as forerunners to the re-routing of the trade. In addition, the colonial state mapped out a strategy on how to discourage the trans-Saharan trade through heavy tolls on imported goods across the Sahara among many other ways. Envisaging the victory scored by the British commercial intelligentsia, particularly in Kano, F. D. Laggard remarked with pride and melancholy:

I foresee with great regret the decline of Kano as commercial center, when European goods super-cede her manufacturers, and the exports of other provinces are diverted by more direct routes to the factories of British merchants, instead of passing through the hands of her middlemen [11, p. 296].

The implication of the activities of the British commercial intelligentsia became manifest in the first two decades of their rule in Northern Nigeria. This is because, from then Northern Nigerian cities ceased to be centers of commerce, entrepots and manufacturing hubs for the desert side trade. Rather, they became encapsulated as part of the periphery of the Western trading system [6, p. 143]. Therefore, the penetration of the trans-Saharan trade by Jews, Maltese and Lebanese trade agents working for the British, like the Arbibs family, Haj Khalifa Zennad and Micael Elias, were precursors of European commercial dominance of Northern Nigeria.

### **British Colonial Policies on the trans-Saharan trade from c.1902 to the 1920s**

With the proclamation of Northern Nigeria as a British Protectorate in 1900, the colonial state was bent towards putting a final resting ground for the trans-Saharan trade. The first measure was taken as early as 1902, through enforcement of customs tariff proc-

lamation, in which stringent tariffs were waged on goods coming across the desert. The second measure was taken in 1903, through the caravan and hawkers proclamation. All of these proclamations imposed heavy custom duties on goods crossing the frontiers of Northern Protectorate (Northern Nigeria) from the desert side [12–15]. The colonial state sent agents as far as Tripoli to try and persuade merchants to engage in the trade with Northern Nigeria through the Atlantic coast, rather than the desert routes, as indicated in this latter in 1903:

**A letter from Zungeru explaining the general conditions of trade across the desert in the early colonial era**

**NORTHERN NIGERIA**

*Government House, Northern Nigeria,*

*Zungeru.*

*27<sup>th</sup> January, 1904.*

*Sir, I have the honour to address you with reference to the trade between Tripoli and Northern Nigeria (Bornu and Kano). I am informed that there is a general feeling of uncertainty in Tripoli on this question, which is increased by false reports from Northern Nigeria as to tolls and dues, and that merchants' agents appear to be waiting for the news on these points before proceeding South.*

*2. I should therefore be obliged if you would inform merchants of the actual facts.*

*3. I attach copies of the schedule under "The customs Tariff 1902" proclamation, as amended by "Caravan and hawkers proclamation 1903", from which you will see that duties are imposed on goods crossing the frontier into the Protectorate, and tolls on goods traversing the Protectorate.*

*4. There are at present no Export Duties from Northern Nigeria except 15% on Ivory.*

*I have, & c.,  
(SGD) f. D. Luggard  
High Commissioner*

*T.S Jago Esq, I.S.O.  
H.H.M Consul General  
Tripoli [16]*

Earlier in 1901, the British administration in Northern Nigeria noted with alarm, the immense caravans that traversed the Sahara to North Africa and areas within the desert. The proportion, volume and value of the trade are captured in series of Colonial Economic Intelligence Report in 1901. The first report is about a caravan that was plundered in the Sahara desert by marauders, and the second report is about other kind of goods transacted by the Arabs. These indicate how disturbed the British were, regarding the Saharan commerce. The other issue was how to re-orient the merchants and peasantry to take on the production of the needed raw materials rather than grain which the colonial state took measures to denigrate. This is because, in the pre-colonial era guinea corn featured prominently as cash crop, especially in the Saharan trade. In addition, one can further comprehend the enormous wealth grain production and export brought to Northern Nigeria in the desert side trade, through the colonial estimate of the volume and value derived from a caravan in 1901. The caravan was attacked en-route to the desert side:

The caravan consisted of about 13, 000 camels, of which, about 700 laden with Ivory, Ostrich feather and Sudan skins, valued at about £35, 000, were destined for Tripoli, but the ownership of these goods is divided between Tripoli merchants and native Ghadames traders, the exact loss

incurred by the former is not yet known, but it is supposed that the greater share of the losses will fall on the Gadames traders. About 12, 000 camels were laden with guinea corn for 'Air' [Abzin], valued at about £10, 000. Taking the value of the camels £12, 000, the total amount of the losses incurred is not less than £165, 000. The loss of life is put down at 210 killed on both sides, amongst who are twelve Tripolitans, some of them the best known and most experienced caravan leaders of Tripoli [12].

In another instance, the Provincial governor of Kano, Dr. Cargill reported in 1907 on the enormous caravans of goods that continued to traverse the province towards the desert side:

Arabs imported burnouses, saddle clothes, and coloured threads, papers, spices, sugar and sent, and export feathers and skins. They also export Ivory to Tripoli, but they purchase this at Zinder,.....my figures regarding their imports are 1904, 164 tons value £7684; 1905, 117 tons value £8181, 1907, 151 tons value, £8003, from which it appears that their trade is fairly steady.... large caravans however, are reported to be on their way across the desert... [17, p.84]

The colonial state was worried particularly about the import trade, more especially the traffic of items they felt should have been monopolized by British companies. The colonial state not only wanted to re-orient and re-direct the desert side trade but also the consumption attitude of the Northern Nigerian society. It wanted to create a market for British goods, exclusively dominated by British merchant companies. The colonial government wanted British merchant companies to completely take over the commercial activities from the Arabs and by extension, the indigenous Northern Nigerian merchants, or at least reduce them to subordinate status. This agenda was achieved quickly through the colonial state's control over the resources of Northern Nigeria.

Further recorded measures towards re-orienting and re-directing the desert side trade was taken in 1907; for instance in Katsina, after the installation of Muhammadu Dikko Gidado as new emir, attempts were made to persuade the emir to encourage merchants to discard export through the desert routes. The first measure in 1907 was meant to re-direct the export of skins towards the coast. In this attempt the emir, who was a comparatively wealthy merchant, sent a consignment of skins in caravan to Lagos, in conjunction with other business associates like Mr. Birtwhistle a company agent for Messrs Ambrosini and some Katsina merchants. Mr. Birtwhistle acted as middleman, to negotiate the sale at Lagos. Though the caravan started late because the rainy season had set in and many skins were spoilt, yet the experiment proved successful. About 3700 skins were sold at price of -/11d, some fetched 1/11, the price for good skin was from 1/- to 1/6 per skin. Some items like bee wax were also sent along with the skins and they fetched a lot of profit. After deducting all expenses and allowances for transportation, the emir's profit was estimated at 100 %. Another caravan was simultaneously sent to the Royal Niger Company at Zungeru. However, the company insisted on paying only in cheap cloth for the goods instead of in cash<sup>2</sup> [17, p.82]. This experiment was supposed to be a pace setter in re-directing the exports of Northern Nigeria to the coast, all in preparation towards opening up trade with

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<sup>2</sup> Through the London and Kano Trading Coy levelled a protest to the colonial state against the trading operations of the emir of Katsina, Muhammadu Dikko, on the grounds that he was a salaried official and stood therefore in the position of subsidized trader, unlike an indigenous non-aristocratic trader who could be taken full advantage of.

British companies, and to attract more import of British manufactured goods into Northern Nigeria.

The British were apprehensive of the presence of Arab merchant communities in Northern Nigeria, because, to them they appear to be a stumbling block towards the introduction of British commerce. Beyond that, most of the Arab homelands in North Africa were already occupied by either the French or the Italians. The continued flourishing of the trade across the desert for British colonial political economy therefore, meant risking enormous economic hazard. Nonetheless, the North African Arabs in Northern Nigeria continued to trade across the desert to the Mediterranean coast, rather than through the Atlantic coast, notwithstanding the colonial barrier.

### **The impact of British colonial measures in stagnating the trans-Saharan trade**

The colonial economic policies implemented in Northern Nigeria and its attendant impact on people, ensured the control of the British on production and trade in the region. This control culminated in increased dependency of Northern Nigerian populace on imported manufactured goods from Britain, rather than on traditionally manufactured goods. Actually the colonial state in Northern Nigeria, in conjunction with its colonial firms, pursued specific policies designated to subordinate the economy of the region to the colonial economy. These designs included monetization of the economy and taxation; heavy tools on traditionally manufactured goods; the enactment of various Native Authority Ordinances related to production, trade etc. The intention was pragmatically paralyzing, because it dealt a blow to the producers and traders in Northern Nigeria, instead of enhancing output. This is because; the policies ensured the concentration and centralization of the resources of Northern Nigeria in the possession of the colonial state and its companies. Also the policies led to the destitution of the peasantry and the merchant class, which culminated in absolute control of the colonial firms on production and marketing of commodities. Consequently, there was heavy decline in cottage based production. Similarly, the Northern Nigerian merchants who for generations had been exporting their products over long distances were gradually and systematically discouraged. First, it was through heavy tools on locally manufactured goods in Northern Nigeria. Secondly, they were edged out through competition from 'superior' imported goods from Britain. The new economic and commercial order of the colonial political economy was characterized largely by the export of raw materials and the importation of English manufactured goods.

To understand this new economic order, one must look into its effect on certain trades and products in Northern Nigeria. For instance, Tobacco was one of the principal exports from Northern Nigeria to the desert side in the pre-colonial era. Tobacco was largely produced in Katsina and Borno, and it was exported to several places in West Africa, particularly to Abzin, Zinder (Damagaram), Murya and the Volta side. Tobacco and its use went along side the natron trade.

Although the policies towards the exports of tobacco and re-orientation of its production and trade was gradual. The entire aspect was tied also to the importation of salt and natron, which were some of the products exchanged by the Northern Nigerian tobacco merchants in Abzin and Zinder (Damagaram). The importation of local salts

and natron from the desert saline also ebbed away. Similarly, the colonial state through its policies on foreign trade, availability of raw materials, slave labour and activities in agricultural production set the stage for the progressive destruction of not only food processing, cottage based industries, but also the production of even items like local liquor and tobacco. Information on this is scanty, but taxation was one of the yardsticks used to reduce the opportunity cost of the local producers, coupled with custom tariffs. In an attempt to discourage local production that the colonial regime deemed counter to its interest, items like locally produced liquor, were at the forefront among the prohibited articles that the colonial state was categorically keen to stop. "The Native Authority Ordinance on the native liquor in 1917 effectively made it a crime to brew, sell or even possess native liquor" [18, p. 181]. In the case of tobacco production and marketing the colonial state systematically discouraged its production. Salt and natron had lost their commercial values, through substitution by English salt, and the high tolls levied on local salt imported from Abzin. The merchants resorted to exchanging local tobacco with French cigarettes, which they smuggled into Northern Nigeria. In addition, the colonial state banned the importation of made in France cigarettes into British Territories [19]. Also local tobacco export was not lucrative, especially considering the heavy tolls levied on it. The colonial policies ensured the sterilization of local tobacco production. This policy started at the early days of colonial rule to the 1950s. In 1933 for instance, a hank of tobacco in Northern Nigeria cost 1d, and eight hanks 10 lbs, while one ton of groundnut in Northern Nigeria cost 1d, and eight hanks constituted 10 lbs, while one ton of groundnut cost £7 [20]. This clearly indicates that the prices of needed export crops (cotton and groundnut) were much more than that of local export commodities (like tobacco). Since the merchants and producers of tobacco also paid taxes they were compelled to discard its production and trade to other more lucrative ventures. By the late 1940s and 1950s, the Nigerian Tobacco Companies (NTC), had already started its campaign on introducing British tobacco seed [19]. This dealt the final blow to the production of tobacco in Northern Nigeria, and by implication the days of the local producers and merchants were numbered. This is because, the merchants were not even considered as either marketing or buying agents for the tobacco company, and this devastated their economic positions.

The policy of levying heavy tolls on trans-Saharan caravans conveying articles of indigenous manufacture only, not only retarded the desert side traffic, but it also had negative implications on the regional trade. The policy had in addition paralyzed the cottage based industries, which mainly produced for the trans-Saharan traffic. Taxation and custom duties in relation to trans-Saharan trade and other forms of long distance commerce increased the importation of salt, sugar and clothes from Britain. As aptly summarized by Bello; "taxation and custom duties in relation to long distance trade, facilitated the increasing importation of salt, sugar etc." [18, p. 181]. The imported salt through the desert side traffic was for instance substituted by English salt, supplied by British merchant companies. Generally, there were four categories of salts in the markets of Northern Nigeria, in the early colonial era: (i) Beza salt (ii) English salt (iii) Mangul salt (iv) Awe salt in Benue areas. The Abzin salt came largely from Kawar, Fachi, Bilma and Durku, Beza salt, which by 1907 was estimated to have cost 25/- per camel load; Kantun Bilma, six to eight tons per camel was much preferred to the than the English salt, which the people described as sour in comparison with Abzin or any of the above salts [17]. The table below shows the relative

value of different kind of salts in the first and second decades of the colonial hegemony in Northern Nigeria.

**COMPARATIVE PRICES OF SALTS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA  
[HAUSA LAND] IN THE EARLY COLONIAL ERA [17; 21]**

Prices per Ton	Type of salt
£30	Beza
£19	Kantun Bilma (Salt bars from Bilma)
£15	Kaltun Fachi (salt bars from Fachi)
£9–10	Mangul salt
£30	Awe salt
£31	English salt

Despite the expensive price of English salt, and the preference for other salts, the colonial state systematically forced it to be integrated within the domestic economy of Northern Nigeria. The gradual ebb of the desert side trade also culminated in the progressive decimation of a great proportion of the North African merchants. This precarious commercial position was exemplified especially among the three professional long distance trading groups who dominated regional and continental trades, i.e, the Agalawa, Tokarawa and Kamarin Barebari. Also adversely affected were the great proportion of the Tuareg (from Abzin) and other merchants from the dessert side. These groups of merchants were dominant largely in importing salts, and exported other commodities like tobacco to Abzin. They were also the ones who exported natron, salts and tobacco to as far as the Volta region. Considering the volume of the trade, the multi-generational families who built up wealth in the trade for several decades, the degree of the financial implication of British policies was enormous. There was also an immense increase in the importation of English products. For instance, there was encouragement given to caravans conveying English manufacturers across the Saharan desert, like leather wears, clothes, beads, threads, sewing machines, kitchen utensils, “all of which were an imitation of, and hardly to be distinguished from those made by Kano local traditional manufacturers.” [17, p. 84]

The implication of the British colonial policies were, however, not sudden, but a piecemeal affair. For instance, despite the initial measures taken in the early part of the colonial era, local manufacturers from Northern Nigerian cottage based industries continued to penetrate distant markets. By implication this also reduced greatly the propensity of importing more British manufactures, since local products were much favored because there were affordable and cheap. Thus continued measures had to be maintained up to the 1920s. Nevertheless, the colonial state and their companies further ensured that local manufactures by cottage based industries were crushed or reduced to the level of producing semi processed or raw materials for export to England. Secondly they ensured that the trans-Saharan trade stagnates, and the merchants, producers were subordinated to the colonial merchant firms. In this respect, a number of policies measures were further undertaken on agricultural raw materials production and commerce. The impact

of such policies retarded production specifically for desert side exports. For instance, the *Tukurdi* cloth production ebbed away. There were several thousands of such cottage based production factories particularly in Kano and its peri-urban districts. In Kano city alone, it was reported to have 2000 dye pits for the production of *Tukurdi* cloth [3, p. 511–512]. Barth estimated the value of exports of Kano manufactured clothes in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century at 300 million cowries (worth 120, 000 dollars). Similarly, Robinson said that more than half of the population of Central Sudan used the Kano manufactured clothes, and that any European traveler who took trouble to ask for it (Kano manufactured cloth, *Tukurdi* or *white-sakar fari*), would find no difficulty in purchasing Kano-made cloth at Alexandria, Tripoli, Tunis or Lagos [22, p. 113; 23, p. 12–13, 159]. These once famous production centres, particularly for the desert side trade (Kura and Kano), ebbed away.

## Conclusion

For any meaningful consideration on factors for the stagnation of trans-Saharan trade in Hausa land (Northern Nigeria), one has to consider the British economic policies and their attendant impact on the day to day economic activity of the people of the region in relation to their traditional economy. Structurally, the British colonial economic policies impacted greatly on the mode of production, manufacture, and free economic choice of the people of Northern Nigeria by creating massive export expansionism of raw material in favor of Britain and its merchant companies. This export expansion was marked by an extensive commoditization of the Northern Nigerian economy of goods they deemed exportable. These commodities demanded by the colonial state were concentrated and centralized in the hands of colonial firms and their agents. The implication of these policies provided the basis of capitalist commodity production and accumulation of surplus agricultural and mineral resources in the custody of the colonial state and its companies.

These points are visible by observing that barely two decades after the establishment of colonial rule in Northern Nigeria, the trans-Saharan trade was stagnated; the cottage based production in most areas in Northern Nigeria ebbed away; there was also the re-orientation of the consumption habit of the people of Northern Nigeria; also agricultural raw materials for export assumed an integral position in the economy. At this level consideration need to be given to the various measures taken by the colonial state. First, there was monetization of both the economy and taxation. This measure entails the replacement of pre-colonial currencies and taxes in kind by direct taxation payable in the newly introduced colonial currency. The implication is taxation and the new colonial currency introduced, restricted the opportunity cost of the people of Northern Nigeria, and this effectively compelled them to embrace the new colonial economic order, which is marked by discarding their traditional economy of long distance trading (Regional and trans-Saharan trade) and cottage based production of export oriented commodities. Secondly, the sum total impact marked an increase in output and thus, surplus appropriation. The once great Northern Nigerian production centers ceased to serve the trans-Saharan trade and became part of the periphery of British colonial economy. The multi-generational merchant families involved in the trans-Saharan trade, transporters, hostellers, bankers, brokers, financiers of the desert side trails became subordinated to the new economic

order as agents for colonial merchant companies. In a nutshell, the trans-Saharan trade could not withstand the challenges ushered in by the new colonial economic order.

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**«Британская и транссахарская торговля»:  
политика колониальной администрации по подрыву  
транссахарской торговли в Северной Нигерии, 1890–1920-е годы**

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В исследовании рассматривается влияние британской политики на подрыв транссахарской торговли в Северной Нигерии. В статье переоценивается положение экономики Северной Нигерии по отношению к новому экономическому порядку, введенному англичанами. Автор статьи поднимает в тексте такие вопросы, как переориентация торговцев; основные понятия колониальной экономики, как они были определены англичанами в Северной Нигерии. Кроме того, в статье подчеркивается, что колониальная экономика развивалась неравномерно и характеризовалась чрезмерным ростом определенных секторов, необходимых для колониального государства, а именно внешней торговли. Секторы экономики, связанные с местными рынками, например производство строительных материалов, а также местная, региональная или транснациональная торговля на территории Сахары не получали должного внимания. Автор приходит к выводу, что виды деятельности, которые могли конкурировать с колониальной торговлей или производством, а их примером и была транссахарская торговля, не поощрялись или запрещались — прямо или косвенно. В этом отношении транссахарская торговля между Центральным Суданом и Северной Африкой находилась в застое в период колониального правления и была на том же уровне, как и торговля внутри западноафриканского субрегиона. Отличительной чертой в этом контексте стало то, что колониальное государство в определенных пределах создало формальные рамки для экономического развития в Северной Нигерии. Эти формальные рамки диктовали отношения между торговцами, крестьянством и крупными фирмами-экспатриантами, которые были поддержаны колониальным государством и получили монопольное положение в торговле сырьем.

*Ключевые слова:* Северная Нигерия, транссахарская торговля, колониальная политика.

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