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The Socio-Economic Impact of the Railway

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**The Socio-Economic Impact of the Railway in Northern Nigeria:
A Study in Transformation of the Rural Communities
along the Rail Line between Kano and Zaria, 1908–1970s**

Proefschrift

Ter verkrijging van
de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,
op gezag van Rector Magnificus Prof. Mr.C.J.J.M. Stolker,
volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties,
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geboren te Kano, Nigeria in 1972

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Dedication

For my late father, Malam Yusuf Aliyu,
and my children,
Yusuf, Al-Amin and Aliyu

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GLOSSARY OF HAUSA AND ARABIC TERMS

Burukutu	Locally brewed beer made from fermented sorghum
Dungurun	Zungeru (Lugard's initial headquarters before its relocation to Kaduna)
Eid al adha	Greater Eid or festival of sacrifice
Fadamomi (sing. Fadama)	Flood plains
Fatake	Long-distance trader
Fulani	Pastoralist
Gandaye (sing. Gandu)	Plantations
Gayya	Collective farm work
Gidan magajiya	Brothel
Hajj	Pilgrimage
Haram	Forbidden
Injin mazarkwaila	Brown sugar crushing machine
Kafir	Non-believer
Karuwai (sing. Karuwa)	Prostitutes
Karuwanci	Prostitution
Kirari	Praise song
Kofofi (sing. Kofa)	Gates
Kulle	Purdah practice
Kulli Kulli	Groundnut cake
Leburori	Labourers
Magajiya	Leader of prostitutes / madam of a brothel
Maguzawa	Non-Muslim Hausa population
Makarantun boko	Western-education schools
Mamaki	Wonder
Man shanu	Cow butter / ghee
Masu unguwanni (sing. Mai unguwa)	Ward heads
Mazarkwaila	Brown sugar / jaggery
Mukuli	Keys

Nasara	Whiteman
Osomalo	Ijesha women traders
Pito	Locally brewed beer made from fermented millet or sorghum
Rumada (sing. Rinji)	Slave farms/villages
Sabon Gari	New town / strangers' quarters
Sabulun sallo	Local soap from Bida
Sarkin kofa	Gate chief
Sikwati	Sleepers
Soro	A rectangular mud house with a flat or round roof
Tasha	Station
Tashi	Forced migration
Tsoro	Fear
Tudun Wada	Strangers' quarters for northerners
Turkudi	Local woven cloth
Wakar diga	Song of <i>diga</i> or railway
Wakar jirgin kasa	Train song
Wakar reluwe	Railway song
Wakilin tasha	Representative of station settlement
Yanbita	Labourers
Yandoka	Native Authority police
Yan mirgine	Train bandits (the phrase <i>yan mirgine</i> was coined from the way they rolled down their loot from trains)
Yan kwadago	Migrant labourers
Yan tauri	Vigilantes or tough people
Yan ture	Train bandits (the phrase <i>yan ture</i> was coined from the way they threw or rolled down their loot from trains)

ABBREVIATIONS

AHAK	Arewa House Archives
BCGA	British Cotton Growing Association
CFAO	Compagnie Française de l’Afrique Occidentale
CMS	Christian Missionary Society
CO	Colonial Office
DO	District Officer
GBO	G. B. Ollivant
GCL	Gimi Community League
HMSO	Her Majesty’s Stationery Office
KSHCB	Kano State History and Culture Bureau
LBA	Licenced Buying Agent
NAK	National Archives, Kaduna
NNDC	Northern Nigerian Development Company
PRO	Public Record Office
PWD	Public Works Department
PWD&R	Public Works Department and Railway
SNP	Secretariat of Northern Provinces
UAC	United African Company
USA	United States of America

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PREFACE

Using extant literature, archives, oral interviews, and new tools of historical analysis such as songs, poems, and photographs, this study describes the experience of railway development in the rural communities between Kano and Zaria, from 1908 to the 1970s. Also subsumed in this study is a history of these communities seen through the lens of the railway. Built with the imperialist motive to transport cotton for the metropolitan industries, the railway had enormous effects on the social and cultural landscape of the local communities. The effects not only differed among the communities; some of the outcomes also differed from what the British had anticipated.

The railway was the single most important innovation for change and gave rise to initial encounters marked by mixed reactions of fear and awe, owing to lack of familiarity; but as familiarity increased and people came to understand its benefits, they quickly appropriated the railway in distinctive ways. It transformed the experience of travel and trade in the communities and gave them direct access to markets and the sea, connecting them more closely to the world economy than was previously possible.

Not only did the line affect mobility, it also activated production in traditional agricultural products that previously would not have entered the world market. As the study shows, the anticipation that people would grow cotton did not materialize, as the local producers appropriated the railway to grow other export crops not contemplated during the planning process. Export trade started at the initiative of local merchants who had been contacted by commercial firms. The activities of these firms also had enormous effects on the local economy; but the effects differed among the communities, as the firms concentrated at the main centres, contributing to these centres' expansion and popularity. The railway also had limitations: it stimulated production in distant areas but could not intensively exploit it. This limitation was circumvented by professional donkey transporters, who exploited the new production to their own advantage. The export trade benefited producers, though not everyone prospered.

The railway also influenced the emergence of new settlements and the intermingling of Nigerian cultures along the rail line. These settlements were established by the colonial authority to house migrants attracted by the opportunities presented by the railway and the

export trade. As the study shows, the migrants concentrated at the main centres with high economic opportunities, thereby contributing to those centres' expansion. Despite attempts by the colonial authority to isolate the migrants into rigid compartments, social relations brought them into direct contact with locals, a development which not only eroded official barriers but also led to integration of some of them into the communities. As the study shows, the migrants were agents of change in the localities.

The railway is something of a paradox. It opened new frontiers of opportunities to the locals and at the same time indirectly endangered many, most especially those engaged in the indigenous crafts. It forced some operators into criminality, such as stealing of iron from the rail lines and train robbery. As the study also shows, this criminality was a reaction to the poverty and unemployment engendered by the advent of British colonialism and their transport innovation.

Though there have been many works on the railway, there is no critical and comprehensive work on its social and cultural effects. Despite their importance in highlighting the effects of the railway and the economic history of Kano and Zaria, previous works have totally overlooked most of the studied communities. This study is an attempt to fill in the gap and to indicate the communities' importance.