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Yusuf, S.T.

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Author: Yusuf, Shehu Tijjani

Title: 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

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CHAPTER 2: THE POLITICS AND CONSTRUCTION OF THE BARO–KANO RAILWAY

2.1 Introduction

Following the imposition of British rule, the colonial authority in Northern Nigeria was concerned about the state of the region, which it considered “unexplored” and underdeveloped. In official circles, a modern transport system, particularly a railway, was seen as the mechanism that would not only open up the territory, but also provide the critical link it needed to break away from its dependency on Southern Nigeria. The proposal to construct the rail line provoked a prolonged rivalry and controversy, pitting the Lagos and southern authorities against the Northern Authority.

This chapter does two things. First, it analyses the “great” longing for a railway on the part of the British colonial administration in Northern Nigeria and the rivalry and controversy among the provincial colonial administrators over the extension of the railway to Kano. The chapter argues that railway development is by its very nature a controversial project, because it is both a political and an economic endeavour. Second, it examines the construction of the railway and the reactions it generated. It argues that the local inhabitants along the rail line, because of their lack of familiarity with western technology, encountered the construction work with mixed reactions of fear, apprehension, and awe.

2.2 Diplomatic conflict and controversy

History records that in the early days of railroad building in all countries the pioneers met with considerable opposition. As in other countries, so it was in Nigeria.

Nigerian Railway Jubilee, 1911.

With the formal establishment of British rule, the colonial authority in Northern Nigeria—under Frederick Lugard, the High Commissioner (1900–1906)—focused on improving the existing transport system with the aim of expanding the economy. The subsistence society

over which Lugard superintended had a problem with overland transport.¹ At the time of the conquest, transport and communication were traditionally based, and pre-colonial Northern Nigeria had not developed wheeled transport. The existing transport was based on human and animal transport over narrow footpaths. This traditional transportation was considered inadequate owing to its low speed and low carrying capacity. It may have satisfied the traditional function of transport in pre-colonial days, but under the new dispensation such transport was considered primitive and inadequate to satisfy the main objective of colonialism. Besides their numerous limitations, including low speed and capacity, which Lugard noted, he disliked the carriers' transport services for their tendency to steal and to charge high rates.² Although the region had two main rivers, the Niger and Benue rivers, which could be used to further its development, these were not navigable for large vessels all year round, owing to natural impediments such as sand bars. In view of the existing inadequacies, the opening of the territory to British goods, capital, and trade—to which Lugard's administration was committed—might be jeopardized.

Lugard considered the situation as requiring urgent attention. He believed that a modern transport system was required, not only to open up the region which he considered unexplored to British trade and the civilizing influence of modern commerce, but also to extend his influence, because some enclaves were yet to be brought under effective control. Added to his anxiety was the financial position of his administration. The region over which he ruled was landlocked and insolvent and barely survived on the imperial treasury and annual grants in aid from the more buoyant Lagos and Southern Protectorates, a situation which Lugard resented, in spite of the fact that being landlocked can be an advantage to levy tariffs on cheap imports.³ Modern transport was considered essential, Lugard felt, not only to develop the commercial potentials of the region, but also to enhance its revenue capacity and make it less dependent on grants. The trade routes that could have added to the state coffers also were not safe, due to the high tolls and the activity of robbers, which he considered inimical to free trade and the *Pax Britannica* to which his administration was committed.⁴

¹ F. Shelfdord, "Ten Year's Progress in West Africa", *The Royal African Society*, 6/24, (1907): 341-49, 348.

² Colonial Report-Annual, Northern Nigeria, Report for 1902, 56-7; Colonial Report-Annual, Northern Nigeria, Report for 1904, 103.

³ P. Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can be Done About it*, (New York: Oxford Press, 2007), 56/57.

⁴ H. H. Bell, "Recent Progress in Northern Nigeria", *Journal of the African Society*, X/XL, (1911): 377-391, 385.

In order to expedite the opening up of the region and to strengthen his administration's influence, Lugard proposed an improvement to the transport facilities. As he asserted, "the material development of Africa may be summed up in one word—Transport".⁵ That is to say, a modern transport was required to fast track Africa and in this regard Northern Nigeria development. He envisioned a modern transport system that would dislodge the caravan trade routes and divert the trade to the new centres of administration, while also preventing Britain's rivals (the French and Germans) from diverting the trade to their own colonies.⁶ Lugard considered railway the most practical solution and the only means that could serve the major objective of colonialism more satisfactorily and more conveniently than other transport methods. W. W. Rostow has asserted that railways were the single most important cause of industrial take-off in Europe, the Americas, and elsewhere.⁷ Unlike other forms of transport, rail had the advantage of discounting space, and it could do the work of 13,000 carriers at one time.⁸

Lugard could not recommend road transport, for it required good roads, which were lacking in the country. Although a road could be built cheaply and quickly with local materials, it was not a viable option because it could not withstand the large-scale economic activities envisioned by the authorities. While roads could aid the export economy, they could not act independently.⁹ Besides, road transport was still in its infancy at this time even in Europe. It was not until after World War I that American Ford trucks began to make their appearance in the country.¹⁰ Also, Lugard did not propose river transport, for, as mentioned earlier, the existing rivers in the country were not navigable for large vessels all year round.¹¹ In view of the advantages the railway had over other forms of transport, Lugard therefore proposed building a railway, not only because he believed the economic development of the region depended on it, but also because he saw it as the critical link to the sea, a link which Northern Nigeria needed in order to break away from its dependency on Southern Nigeria.¹²

⁵ F. D. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1922), 5.

⁶ Colonial Report-Annual, Northern Nigerian, Report for 1900-1901, 18-20; Colonial Report-Annual, Northern Nigerian, Report for 1903, 12-3.

⁷ W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*, (Cambridge, 1960/1991).

⁸ Hopkins, *Economic History*, 192; Lugard, *Dual Mandate*.

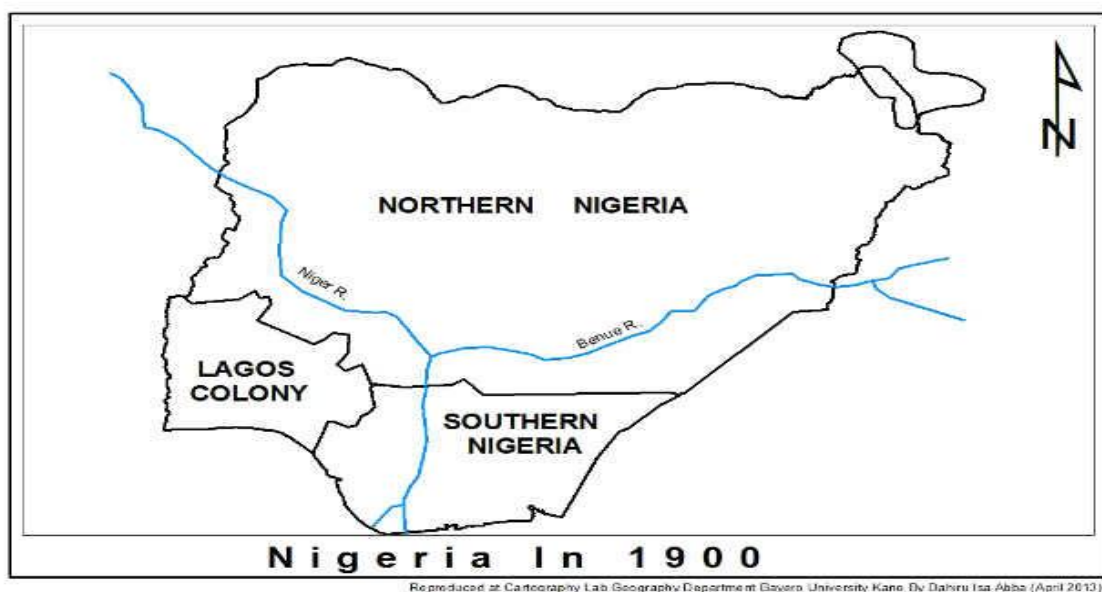
⁹ A. Gutkind, "The Development of African Road Transport in Western Nigeria, 1919-1939", (MA Thesis, McGill University, 1977), 12.

¹⁰ Ibid.; Anjorin, "Politics", 3.

¹¹ Anjorin, "Politics".

¹² Colonial Report-Annual, Northern Nigerian, Report for 1900, 18.

From the outset, the call for the railway came from the colonial authority and not businessmen or speculators who wanted government guarantees. Although railways were expensive to build—as the permanent ways, rolling stock, and other facilities had to be imported and had to be made strong—this was the best economic option, because railways were always built ahead of demand, unlike roads.¹³ Even before Lugard’s posting to Northern Nigeria, the Niger Committee constituted by the Colonial Office in 1898 had recommended the construction of railways as the most practical mechanism for developing the three British Niger territories.¹⁴ The General Act of the Brussels conference, to which Britain itself was a signatory, had also imposed upon member countries an obligation to construct railroads as evidence of effective control.¹⁵ However, Lugard’s proposal was for a separate railway, one which would be independent of the Lagos Government Railway—or put another way, a rail–river transport system from port Baro on the Niger to Kano, the northern *entrepôt*. He also proposed a tramway (though in a separate proposal from his railway proposal).



Map 2.1 Map of Nigeria in 1900

¹³ Gutkind, “African Road Transport”, 9.

¹⁴ Anjorin, “Politics”.

¹⁵ Ibid., 8, 19-20; Colonial Report-Annual, Northern Nigerian, Report for 1900-1901, 19; Colonial Report-Annual, Northern Nigerian, Report for 1901, 4-5; H. J. Pedraza, *Borriboala-Gha: The Story of Lokoja the first British Settlement in Nigeria*, (London: Oxford Press, 1960), 91; Tamuno, “Railway I”, 279.

Although it has been often claimed that Lugard opted for a tramway because his railway proposal was rejected, this common view is somewhat misleading¹⁶ and needs to be corrected. The evidence indicates that he proposed the two systems almost simultaneously—even though he confused readers of his annual reports and correspondence as to what exactly his preferences were, because they give the impression that his interest in a tramway was only secondary. I argue that both the railway and tramway were at the heart of his administration, although he had different motives for the two. The problem with Lugard was that he was somewhat difficult to understand. His first interest and reference to the tramway dated back to 1900, which was when he formally assumed office and began to propagate his “railway idea”, though he did not push the tramway proposal as forcefully as the railway one.¹⁷ The tramway was merely a temporary expedient, meant to obviate the administrative difficulties at his new headquarters at Zungeru *dungurun*, while the railway was for “opening up” the region as a whole.¹⁸

The need for a tramway, as Lugard articulated it, was for administrative purposes. The line, according to him, would obviate the transport difficulty between his new proposed headquarters at Zungeru and Wushishi on the Kaduna River. This line would facilitate river navigation during low water volume while also allowing bulky stores to be brought with little difficulty during the flood season.¹⁹ He argued that connecting the new headquarters with Barijuko by a short tramway would facilitate the complete pacification of the belt between the Niger and the hinterland.²⁰ Lugard was anxious to extend his full control into the hinterland simultaneously with the relocation of his headquarters. As far as he was concerned, the tramway and relocation of his headquarters were inseparable. Lugard’s hatred for Lokoja stemmed from its unhealthy condition, which he considered was unsuitable for European habitation.²¹ The tramway, a short ten-mile run from Zungeru to Barijuko, was approved by the Colonial Office late in 1900 and was completed in 1901.²²

The proposal for the railway, on the other hand, was mooted in the same year as the tramway, though differently. The rail line was conceived as a separate line, independent of the Lagos Government Railway. As studies indicate, the Baro–Kano railway or the rail–river

¹⁶ Anjorin, “Politics”, 6

¹⁷ Nigeria, Correspondence, cd.2787, 31-2.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Nigeria, Correspondence, 31-2; Colonial Report-Annual for 1900, 8.

²⁰ Colonial Report-Annual for 1900, 8 and 19.

²¹ Ibid. 6; Pedraza, *Borrioboala-Gha*, 91.

²² Colonial Report-Annual, Northern Nigeria Report for 1901, 4-5; Nigeria, Correspondence, 32.25

proposal was not Lugard's original idea; it was the Niger Committee's idea. This committee was set up by the Colonial Office to consider the future development of the British Niger Territories. Lugard was just an army officer then under the Royal Niger Company (RNC), an imperialist company that was mandated to rule over the Northern Territory at that time on behalf of Britain.²³ Having assumed control of the region, he was fascinated by their report. He believed that a vast region such as Northern Nigeria, which occupies approximately two-thirds of the total land mass of the country (see Map 2.1 above), could not be developed except by having its own railway. Lugard asserted that the commercial development of the region was dependent on a separate railway and not on a connection with the Lagos Government Railway. He noted that since Northern Nigeria had waterways of its own, a railway should be developed for the benefit of the region. As far as he was concerned, the Lagos Railway has nothing to offer the North, and he emphasized that every yard of the railway from Niger to Kano would supersede caravan transport and promote trade.²⁴

This view differs from the one he had expressed earlier in 1899 and recapitulated in 1900, when he expressed the need for a general railway policy and the necessity for three separate lines. The first would be a western line from Lagos to Sapele- a good port town. He cautioned that the extension should be determined by a comparative cost advantage and called for its extension to Ilorin, but that its extension to Jebba should be determined by a survey. Should the Lagos Railway extend to Kano, he urged that the point at which it crossed the Niger be decided in view of the cost of bridging the Niger, while he also suggested a survey of alternative routes. Second, he proposed an eastern line from Old Calabar to Lake Chad. In addition to proposing a general railway policy for the country, Lugard proposed

²³ The Committee was composed of six members, two of whom were from the Colonial Office: Lord Selborne, Chairman Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, and Reginald Antrobus, Assistant Under-Secretary of State in charge of West African Business at the Colonial Office. The others were Sir Clement Hills, from the Foreign Office, and the local administrators at the time: Sir Henry McCallum, Governor of Lagos Colony, and Sir Ralph Moor, the Commissioner and Consul General, Niger Coast Protectorate (Southern Nigeria). The sixth was Sir George Toubman Goldie of the Royal Niger Company (RNC). The committee proposed the amalgamation of the three British territories in Nigeria, but it recommended the postponement of the amalgamation until the transport and communication system in the country had been improved. Among their many recommendations were the construction of a rail-river transport system from Baro to Kano, whereby goods could be conveyed by water to meet ocean-going vessels. The committee also recommended that the outlets for imports and exports of the country should be a southern port which could handle large ocean-going steamers—but definitely not Lagos, which required a huge financial input to improve before it could cope with large traffic. The Lagos port had shallow channels, which made it difficult to accommodate large vessels drawing more than nine feet of water. See: Nigeria, Correspondence, 20; Carland, *Colonial Office*, 140; Tamuno, "Railway I", 284, 285-6; Anjorin, "Politics", 3; Uzoechi, "Social and Political Impact", 75; HC Deb 19 July 1899 vol 74 cc1270-304, Second Reading, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1899/jul/19/second-reading#S4V0074P0_18990719_HOC_41.

²⁴ Colonial Report-Annual for 1900, 19-20.

surveys and road-making to prepare the way for these railways. This would help provincial administrators determine the line of development and progress. Third, Lugard crowned the proposal with his rail–river transport system, which, according to him, should be independent of the Lagos Government Railway.²⁵ This was the controversial Baro–Kano railway, which was to become a source of diplomatic rivalry and controversy with the other two provincial administrators.

In justifying the railway, Lugard based his arguments on political, administrative, commercial, and strategic reasons. He argued that railway construction was essential for the purposes of internal administration and communication, as government officials could move from one post to another with minimum difficulty. From the commercial and economic standpoint, he believed the railway would stimulate agricultural production, commerce, and movement of goods from inland to the coast, all to the benefit of the home country (Britain). The railway, as he further asserted, should be seen as part of the scheme of imperial defence, facilitating rapid concentration of troops and supplies if necessary, in view of the French and German presence on the Nigerian frontiers.²⁶

However, Lugard's proposal did not sail through as one might have expected. It provoked reactions of rivalry and controversy between Lugard and the other local provincial administrators' (i.e. Governor of Lagos Colony Sir William McGregor and High Commissioner of Southern Nigeria Sir Ralph Moor), pitting them against one another. Writers who commented on this rivalry and controversy—T. N. Tamuno, A. O. Anjorin, J. M. Carland, and others—expressed the view that it was fuelled by the lack of a general transport policy to guide the administrators. This popular argument, so consumed and accepted by many, is misleading and needs to be corrected. Although the argument sounds convincing, it is too simplistic to explain why a mere idea of a railway provoked such rivalry and controversy. I argue that regardless of the policy guideline, railway development worldwide is always controversial because it is a political as well as an economic matter. This is so because of the initial sunk costs, expected returns on investment, and the issue of control. The decisions to build a line, the choice of junctions and terminals, and the freight rate, etc. are all controversial matters which are determined by the financiers and not the promoters of a rail line. After completion, a rail line also requires government subsidies.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid. 19-20.

²⁶ Ibid. 19; Nigeria, Correspondence, 40-1.

²⁷ J. Monson, *Africa's Freedom Railway: How Chinese Development Project Changed Lives and Livelihoods in Tanzania*, (Bloomington IN, Indiana University Press, 2009), 16-7; R. E. Robinson, "Introduction: Railway

Hence, the rivalry among the administrators was based on their own regional interests, trade, and control, which were at cross purposes.

As Ronald Robinson argues, railroads are the cause of imperial rivalry. The idea or mere rumour of a railway in a sensitive place could generate conflict.²⁸ And, as Jamie Monson states, “[t]o construct a rail line was to command a region and [to] control a region [...] was to keep rivals out.”²⁹ As the evidence indicates, the idea of a railway, even within one political entity, was a matter of political rivalry and controversy.³⁰ And, as G. Pirie pointed out, a poorly managed railroad conflict could even result in armed struggle.³¹

It is against this backdrop that the rivalry and controversy may be seen, and the lack of a policy guideline was merely a contributing factor. As came to be seen, Lugard’s proposal conflicted with the other administrators’ agendas. McGregor, in particular, was against the proposal because he saw the proposed railway as a rival one, which would compete with his own agenda of extending the Lagos Railway to Kano and Lake Tchad. He saw the Northern Nigeria as his own natural hinterland and believed that Lagos should be the sole outlet of the country to the sea. Therefore, to suggest an alternative port, as Lugard did, would undermine Lagos’s pre-eminence.³² This was the same view his predecessor Sir Henry McCallum had expressed while as a member of the Niger Committee. Right from the inaugural ceremony of the railway at Ibadan in 1901, McGregor had proposed its extension northward as far as Kano for strategic reasons, owing partly to the parallel railway development in the French Territory of Dahomey, and for the commercial development of Lagos and Northern Nigeria.³³

Ralph Moor, on the other hand, though somewhat neutral and more objective than the other two, cleverly avoided reference to Lugard’s proposal. Instead, he proposed a general railway policy for the country. He noted that any attempt to develop the country by railroads should be comprehensive from the start so as to determine the number of trunk lines required

Imperialism”, in: Clarence Davies and Kenneth E. Wilburn, Jr (eds), *Railway Imperialism*, (New York: Green word Press, 1991), 1-6, 3; G. H. Pirie, *Aspects of Political-Economy of Railways in Southern Africa*, (Johannesburg: Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, University of Witwatersrand, 1982), 24-25; S. Soeters, “Tamale 1907–1957: Between Colonial Trade and Colonial Chieftainship”, (PhD Thesis, Leiden, 2012), 52-3; K. Tsey, *From Head Loading to the Iron Horse: Railway Building in Colonial Ghana and the Origins of Tropical Development*, (Mankon: Langa Research and Publishing CIG, 2013).

²⁸ Robinson, “Introduction”.

²⁹ Monson, *Africa’s Freedom Railway*, 17.

³⁰ Monson, *Africa’s Freedom Railway*; Pirie, *Aspects of Political-Economy*; Tsey, *From Head Loading*; Soeters, “Tamale 1907–1957”.

³¹ Pirie, *Aspects of Political-Economy*.

³² Nigeria, Correspondence, 69.

³³ Tamuno, “Railway I”, 282.

for the proper opening up and development of the country. This was the same view he had expressed three years earlier as a member of the Niger Committee. Like Lugard, he believed the country required more than one trunk line. However, he proposed two main railways, namely, a western and eastern railway, with the Niger and Benue rivers playing important roles. First, he proposed a western line from Lagos and Sapele to Kano, to be joined by branch lines to Bauchi and Sokoto from Zaria. Second, he proposed another line from Old Calabar to the upper waters of Cross Rivers, and thence to Ibi, Benue, and Bauchi, with a branch line to join up with the mainline and extend as far as Kuka near Lake T Chad.³⁴³⁵ However, he suggested that the financial cost of the project should be borne by the Colonial Office, because the colonial state itself could not afford the project. While indirectly spiting Lugard, he called for the provincial administrations to be self-supporting.³⁶

With regard to the extension of the Lagos Railway northward, Moor suggested that it should be determined by the suitability of the Lagos port and the fitness of Lagos itself. He discouraged the extension of the line beyond Oshogbo, however, until the main depot for the interior had been determined—since, according to him, the extension of the line to Oshogbo would determine the course of the line to the interior.³⁷ On the question of the main port or harbour for the country, Moor recapitulated the views he had expressed in 1897, when he opposed the choice of Lagos as gateway to the country. He pointed out that of the nine coastlines in the country, Lagos was “distinctively the worst” terminus of any railway, as it could not accommodate a large vessel drawing more than nine feet of water, owing to a sand bar. Instead, merchandise had to be taken by branch steamers to Forcados, a deeper port. Unlike Lagos harbour, the other harbours could accommodate large vessels, with Forcados and Warri drawing 20 feet, Sapele 18 feet, Akassa 14 feet, Brass 14 feet, Bonny 21 feet, Opobo 14 feet, and Old Calabar 20 feet. And, he pointed out, “in all of these ports, the steamers lie in still water”. While admitting that the Lagos sand bar could be removed at a great cost, he pointed out that Lagos did not have a suitable depot. The Lagos depot, situated as it was on Lagos Island i1nstead of the mainland, was not a suitable depot for the country. Besides its low-lying, insalubrious conditions and lack of drainage facilities, it lacked a good water supply.³⁸ Based on a comparative assessment of the various harbours, Moor

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Nigeria, Correspondence, 35, 42.

³⁶ Ibid. 43-4.

³⁷ Ibid. 38, 42.

³⁸ Ibid. 35-37.

recommended Old Calabar as the best port on account of its ability to draw 20-foot steamers, ample accommodation for large vessels, ample space for a town or city of any size, good water supply, and sanitary conditions which were lacking in the other ports, including Lagos.³⁹

Looking at the debates, it is obvious that Lugard's proposal was not only controversial, it also pitted the three administrators against one another. Neither McGregor nor Moor supported Lugard; they did not see the Baro port as capable of opening up the northern region. Although they agreed that the Lagos Railway should go to Kano, each of them saw their own region as the best outlets for the opening up of Northern Nigeria. While Moor and Lugard believed that the country required more than one trunk line, they differed in the actual number required; but they were united in opposition to the idea of Lagos being the sole outlet for the country. The three also subscribed to a unified rail network but wanted regional control of the lines. They could neither arrive at a consensus nor come up with an acceptable alternative proposal. The Colonial Office was aware of the rancour and always acted as a bridge between them. It should be noted that this same rancour occurred during the sittings of the Niger Committee, as the provincial administrators on the committee at the time were campaigning for their respective regions. The members could not collectively reach a consensus, though some *en bloc* unanimously proposed the rail–river railway (which was to become the subject of controversy) and also opposed the idea of Lagos as an outlet for the country. As is clear from the above, the rivalry continued even after the end of the Niger Committee's activities.⁴⁰

Despite the several meetings organized to resolve the rivalry, it dragged on for six years. Part of the reason it lasted for so long was the lack of funds. The Colonial Office had reduced its financial commitment to the colony, and the Northern government that wanted the railway was not in a position to finance the project. As mentioned earlier, the administration was poor and barely survived on an imperial treasury and annual grant from the more buoyant Southern Protectorate. Southern Nigeria (already merged with Lagos Colony), which wanted the extension of its own railway northward, could not afford it either. The Colonial Office did not consider it creditworthy enough to warrant a loan for its extension project. The Lagos Railway, already extended as far as Ibadan, had yet to pay its way, as a half-constructed line rarely pays its way until finally completed. It is also clear that from the start

³⁹ Ibid. 36-37.

⁴⁰ Tamuno, "Railway I", 284-5; Carland, *Colonial Office*, 140-1; Anjorin "Politics", 3; Uzoechi, "The Social and Political Impact", 75; HC Deb 19 July 1899, vol 74 cc 1270-304, Second Reading.

the Colonial Office had made up its mind to push the line to Kano but had yet to issue a policy statement on the matter. Another important reason for the delay was the insufficient knowledge about the Northern Provinces at that time and the projected routes through which the railway would pass. Between 1900 and 1905, no less than five surveys had been carried out under Lugard to determine the course of the railway, in addition to the boundary and other forms of surveys.⁴¹ At one such survey, the parties were even driven back at Bebeji, which led to the death of one of their carriers.⁴²

When Lugard realized that the Colonial Office was not ready to commit itself to the project, he allied himself with the British Cotton Growing Association (BCGA) in 1904. Established by a consortium of British merchants with vested interests in textiles and the British government, the BCGA's aim was to further cotton imperialism in British West Africa.⁴³ As Arthur Hutton, the Chairman of BCGA in Manchester, asserted, any effort to broaden the basis of the supply of cotton was true imperialism. Disappointed by its experience in Southern Nigeria, the BCGA was on the lookout for a new source of cotton in the North. Lugard wanted to use his new-found romance with the BCGA to curry favour for his pet project. He assured the BCGA of the cotton potentials in the region and of his administration's assistance. He pointed out to them the inadequacy of the transport situation; and unless it was improved, Lugard warned, cotton could not be exploited in commercial quantities.⁴⁴ In the same manner, his Forestry Officer, W. R. Elliott, also noted that cotton could be exported in large quantities only if the transport system could be improved.⁴⁵ Kano and Zaria, particularly the close-settled zone between Kano and Zaria (where the studied communities are situated), attracted the attention of the colonial authority owing to its cotton potential.⁴⁶ Impressed by Lugard's support, the BCGA assured him of its readiness to promote cotton and of its support for the railway, with a promise to take the matter up with the home government.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Colonial Annual Report-Annual: Northern Nigeria, Report for 1904, 103; Colonial Annual Report-Annual: Northern Nigeria, Report for 1905–1906, 6-7.

⁴² Nigeria, Correspondence, 101.

⁴³ C. A. Bristwistle, "Cotton Growing", 124.

⁴⁴ HC Deb 28 March 1905 vol 143 c1372, German Railway to Lake Tchad—British Railway in Northern Nigeria, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1905/mar/28/german-railway-to-lake-tchad-british#S4V0143P0_19050328_HOC_110 [accessed on 15 November 2011].

⁴⁵ Colonial Report-Annual, Northern Nigeria Report for 1904, 98.

⁴⁶ C. A. Bristwistle, "Cotton Growing", 102-25, 111-2.

⁴⁷ J. S. Hogendorn, "The Cotton Campaign in Northern Nigeria, 1902-1914: An Example of a Public/Private Planning Failure in Agriculture in Agriculture", in: Allen Isaacman and Richard Roberts (eds), *Cotton*,

In 1906, the BCGA together with the Chamber of Commerce of the United Kingdom sent a powerful deputation to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Joseph Chamberlain, concerning the Northern Nigerian Railway and why the government should support it. By 1907, Parliament had approved the construction of a railway, known in official parlance as the “pioneer railway”, from Baro to Kano, bringing to an end six years of rivalry and conflict. The approval was justified on the basis of administrative and military difficulties and for the purpose of opening up trade as well as the development of cotton.⁴⁸

The transfer and construction of this imperial railway technology was to be carried out by the Northern Nigeria’s Public Works Department (PWD), restructured to become the Public Works Department and Railway (PWD&R), under the supervision of Sir Percy Girouard, a Canadian Royal Engineer who had previously built inexpensive railways in the Sudan, South Africa, Central South Africa, and East Africa.⁴⁹ Girouard was specially recruited in 1906 to draw up a general railway policy for the country and to determine the standard gauge, method of construction, and the cost. He was also made a High Commissioner following Lugard’s departure, a departure that bore the mark of Lugard’s frustration over his pet project. Girouard was to be assisted by J. E. Eaglesome, another railway engineer, who himself was Lugard’s Director of PWD. The Zungeru–Barijuko tramway mentioned earlier was built under his supervision.

During this prolonged rivalry, the Southern Provinces lost out, as its Eastern Railway was not approved, although the extension of the Lagos Railway to meet up with the Baro–Kano railway was approved. Funding for the Baro–Kano railway was to be provided by the Southern Protectorate, since the Northern Protectorate could not afford to fund the project. Simon Heap pointed out that the railway was built with liquor money.⁵⁰ It was also recommended that the line, when completed, should be taken over by the Southern Protectorate. Also sanctioned was the improvement of the Lagos harbour, in view of the approved railway. Equally authorized was the amalgamation of the two railways and the administration of the two protectorates in principle when the projects were completed. From the colonial authority’s point of view, amalgamating the two railways and the administration

Colonialism, and Social History in Sub-Saharan Africa, (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1995), 5; Anjorin, “Politics”, 8; Carland, *Colonial Office*, 167,

⁴⁸ *The Scottish Geographical Magazine*, XXV, 1909, 353; Colonial Annual Report-Annual: Northern Nigeria, Report for 1906-7, 6; Colonial Annual Report-Annual: Northern Nigeria, Report for 1907-8, 20-21.

⁴⁹ A. A. Sikainga, “City of Steel”, 29.

⁵⁰ S. Heap, “Transport Liquor in Colonial Nigeria”, *The Journal of Transport History*, 21/1, (2002): 28-53; *Scottish Geographical*, 353.

of the two protectorates would provide a pool of revenue for financing the railway and might also rescue the Northern Protectorates from its treasury control.⁵¹

A fact not often recognized in the literature is that the railway was conceived as a “pioneer line”, to be built as cheaply as possible. The principle of a pioneer railway was to build a cheap railway that would be developed to standard when traffic developed. As Girouard himself asserted, a good pioneer line, with a hauling capacity of 20,000 to 30,000 tons a year each way, was adequate for developing the Northern Territories; and, as traffic developed, additional rolling stock and other facilities capable of handling 200,000 tons per annum would be required.⁵² This temporary nature of the system was to create difficulties later for the system when traffic developed. On this type of system, earthworks were of the lightest description, and not many stations were required, except at the more important centres where traffic was anticipated. The stations were to be a single building with simple platforms; otherwise, small iron sheds and rail-level platforms were the required structures befitting a pioneer railway. There would also be small stations at intervals of 12–14 miles and crossing stations every 35 miles.⁵³

Although the line had now been approved, construction had yet to commence because Girouard was yet to submit his report, and little survey and earthworks had been undertaken. By the time he submitted his report, it did not differ much from Lugard’s original plan, though he modified some aspects. Like Lugard, Girouard believed the North could be developed by a rail–river system, with the Baro River to serve as its main outlet to the sea—and not Lagos. The line was to be built at a cost of £3,000 a mile, a total cost of £1,230,000, and an additional £30,000 for a dredger to keep the river open all year round.⁵⁴ Also proposed was the construction of the railway by the PWD&R, to be assisted by government officials in

⁵¹ Colonial Annual Report-Annual: Northern Nigeria, Report for 1906-7, 6; Colonial Annual Report-Annual: Northern Nigeria, Report for 1907-8, 20-21; HC Deb 12 June 1906 vol 158 c814; Railway Extension in Northern Nigeria, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1906/jun/12/railway-extension-in-northern-nigeria#S4V0158P0_19060612_HOC_34 [accessed on 15 November 2011]; HL Deb 27 August 1907 vol 182 cc364-8, Public Loan Bill, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1907/aug/27/public-works-loans-bill#S4V0182P0_19070827_HOL_324 [accessed on 15 November 2011]; HC Deb 05 August 1907 vol 179 cc1534-6, Railway Extension in Nigeria, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1907/aug/05/railway-extension-in-nigeria#S4V0179P0_19070805_HOC_109 [accessed on 15 November 2011].

⁵² Nigeria, Further Correspondence Relating to Railway Construction in Nigeria, (London: HMSO, 1909), 28.

⁵³ “Baro–Kano Railway, Northern Nigeria”, *The Engineer*, 17 September 1909, 289; *Scottish Geographical*, 353.

⁵⁴ A pound (abbreviated as £) was the unit of British currency in the Britain and its colony in Nigeria. A pound contained 20 shillings (abbreviated as s.), and each shilling contained 12 pence (abbreviated as d.). A pound therefore contained 240 pence. The currency was written, for example, as £2.3s.4d. = two pounds, three shillings, and four pence. Since decimalization in 1971, a British pound contains 100 pence, and shillings are no longer used.

other departments. Integral to this was the use of local or political labour, a method conceived by Lugard. This method supposed that the line should be built by local labour recruited through the local authorities / traditional rulers. The thinking behind building the railway through the PWD&R and the use of local labour itself centred on economics. The best way to build a cheap and inexpensive railway was through the PWD&R.⁵⁵ Girouard also recommended the construction of a 3 ft. 6 in. line, which was the West African standard gauge at the time, as opposed to the 2 ft. 6 in., suggested by Lugard.

The Colonial Office accepted Girouard's report and sanctioned the immediate planning and recruitment of labour and experts for the work.⁵⁶ The Colonial Office also recommended a review of the existing land tenure system so that the region could benefit from any advantage resulting from building the railway. Right from the start, Girouard nationalized the land to prevent land speculators reaping the benefits of increased land values, and the practice of leasing land to European traders or non-indigenous Africans for long periods was prohibited.⁵⁷

2.3 Fear, marvel and the construction of the imperial railway

Now that the railway had been approved for construction, how was it constructed and domesticated? How did the local population perceive it? What reactions did it generate? These are some of the questions this section will answer.

The main construction of the railway was performed by indigenous labourers, comprising peasants, slaves, and prisoners that were recruited through force. This labour recruitment was the first stage in the construction and domestication of the railway. Recruitment was conducted through the combined efforts of the European Political Officers and the local authorities, comprising the traditional rulers. Although the colonial authority referred to the labour as voluntary, in actual fact it was not. When labour was required, the European Political Officers instructed the traditional rulers on the numbers so required from each district. The local authorities in turn forced the labourers to go to the construction sites

⁵⁵ "Baro-Kano Railway", 92.

⁵⁶ Ibid.; Anjorin, "Politics", 11.

⁵⁷ Lovejoy and Hogendorn, *Slow Death*; HL Deb 27 August 1907 vol 182 cc364-8, Public Loan Bill; Colonial Annual Report-Annual: 1904, 8-9; Colonial Annual Report for 1907-8, 20-21; HC Deb 05 August 1907 vol 179 cc1534-6; HC Deb 17 April 1907 vol 172 cc974-5, Railway Extension in Nigeria; Northern Nigeria-Railway Schemes, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1907/apr/17/northern-nigeria-railway-schemes#S4V0172P0_19070417_HOC_99 [accessed on 14 August 2011]; HL Deb 27 August 1907 vol 182 cc 364-8; Public Works Loans Bill, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1907/aug/27/public-works-loans-bill#S4V0182P0_19070827_HOL_323, [accessed on 14 November 2011].

against their will. Whole villages and farms along the rail line were torn apart to recruit labour. Many were not paid, and many were underpaid. Forced labour was adopted for the Northern Railway partly because of labour shortages (both skilled and unskilled), partly because people were not willing to work for the white man (*nasara*), and partly because it was the best way to build a cheap railway.⁵⁸

In theory, the labourers were supposed to work for a few weeks, supervised and paid directly by the European Political Officers, after which they were to be replaced by another group. This, according to the colonial state, would save them from exploitation; but in practice, they worked longer than required and were paid a paltry sum, in addition to being forced.⁵⁹ This method differed from the one used on the Lagos Railway and its extension northward, namely the contract method, in which private contractors supplied the labour.⁶⁰ Right from the start of the work in the North, the local authorities there acted as the labour contractors. Instead of allowing labour to voluntarily come to the site, the villages along the line were raided to recruit labour for survey, earth, and construction works. This massive labour recruitment, the movement of high-tech construction materials, and the aura which marked the construction of the railway provoked mixed reactions of fear and awe, much more so than has been previously recognized.

The manner in which the construction of the railway has been represented in the literature says nothing about how the Nigerian communities along the rail line encountered or perceived and reacted to the work, or about how they appropriated the work. This inadequacy is understandable given the sources available to the writers at the time. Another reason is that, as Collin Dival and George Revill pointed out, transport historians rarely conceive of the railway as technology. “[I]f they do they conceptualize it as hardware, the development of which was a purely economic phenomenon and ignored its wider semiotic qualities”.⁶¹ This needs to be corrected, because new technologies are always accompanied by mixed reactions. Michael Mason and A. O. Anjorin discussed the reactions to the labour recruitment, and Mason in particular commented on the uprising (discussed later) connected with this

⁵⁸ Mason, “Working on the Railway”, 60; Oyemakinde, “Railway Construction”, 317; Tamuno, “Railway II”, 33; Colonial Annual Report for 1907-8, 21; Anjorin, “Politics”, 11; Colonial Annual Report-Annual: Northern Nigeria Report for 1910-11, 39.

⁵⁹ Oyemakinde, “Railway Construction”, 317; Mason, “Working on the Railway”, 60; Tamuno, “Railway II”, 33; Colonial Annual Report for 1907-8, 21; Colonial Annual Report-Annual: Northern Nigeria Report for 1910-11, 39.

⁶⁰ Oyemakinde, “Railway Construction”, 315; Mason, “Working on the Railway”, 63.

⁶¹ C. Divall and G. Revill, “Cultures of Transport: Representation, Practice and Technology”, *The Journal of Transport History*, 26/1, (2005): 99-111, 104.

recruitment; however, in their different analyses, the reactions they focused on did not go beyond flight. I will argue that during this period of technology transfer, when northerners first encountered or came into contact with the railway technology, their reactions were rather more mixed and profound.

Using an old Hausa poem entitled *Wakar Diga* (song of *diga*, or railway)—composed by Aliyu Dansidi, the first British-appointed Emir of Zazzau (1902–1924), and dating to 1908/9—a poem translated and analysed by Sani Umar, Yusuf Nadabo, and Brian Larkin,⁶² I argue that the domestication of the railway was perceived as colonial sublime and produced mixed reactions of fear, terror, and awe, as well as anti-colonial feelings. Umar’s work on Muslims’ intellectual responses to colonialism and Larkin’s work on northerners’ reactions to Western technology have been invaluable in this respect. Couched in allegorical form to give force and urgency to the message,⁶³ *Wakar Diga* is a discourse on colonialism, the psychological and economic effects of the domestication of railway technology, and Muslims’ encounter with Western railway technology during the colonial period, “when eyes had not opened”. The poem was composed at the onset of the railway construction.

To understand why the domestication of the railway provoked mixed reactions, it is useful to think of it as colonial sublime. The colonial sublime is a mixed reaction of anxiety, fear, and awe, as well as the struggle the mind experiences when confronted by grand, man-made objects which it cannot comprehend.⁶⁴ Under the British colonial regime, the sublime was produced through infrastructural development. The essence of this was to arouse feelings of the sublime and to demonstrate the power of Western civilization and modernity to the colonized.⁶⁵ In this regard, the massive labour recruitment, the building of the tracks, roads, viaducts, and bridges, the ability to reclaim rivers and streams, and the levelling of rocks and hills, as well as the tearing apart of villages to make way for the railway were some of the ways the sublime was produced as a spectacle of colonialism.⁶⁶ Brian Larkin argued that the colonial sublime sought to create feelings of total submission to colonial rule.⁶⁷

⁶² NNPC, *Wakokin Aliyu*; M. S. Muhammad, *Islam and Colonialism: Intellectual Responses of Muslims of Northern Nigeria to British Colonial Rule*, (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Nadabo, *Tarihin Garin Kaduna*; Larkin, *Signal and Noise*.

⁶³ M. Hiskett, *A History of Hausa Islamic Verse*, (London: SOAS, 1975), 86.

⁶⁴ Cited in D. Nye, *The American Technological Sublime*, (USA: MIT, 1999), 3, 6; Larkin, *Signal and Noise*, 35.

⁶⁵ Larkin, *Signal and Noise*, 15–40.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 36; S. M. Aminu, “The Colonial State and Colonial Economy in Northern Nigeria: A Case Study of the Zaria Native Authority, c. 1902–1945”, (MA Thesis, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 1991), 109–10.

⁶⁷ Larkin, *Signal and Noise*, 36.

Right from the start of the work in Bida Province (the first province on the rail line), it was obvious that the whole work required close political attention, and High Commissioner Percy Girouard personally toured the districts along the line. During the tour, he impressed on the emirs the importance the administration attached to the project and why they must support it. The support of the emirs was necessary because the recruitment and organization of labour rested squarely on their shoulders.⁶⁸ As Michael Mason pointed out, the emirs were remunerated for their services.⁶⁹ The districts on the rail line were reorganized with resident district headmen appointed for the purpose of labour recruitment. A new district of Baro was created for the purpose of labour supplies by merging Baro and Katcha under the Makum of Bida.⁷⁰ Nupe Province itself was renamed Niger Province, and the districts of Kuta and Kwongoma under Zaria Province were transferred to Niger Province in 1908.⁷¹

This massive labour recruitment, administrative reshuffling, and the penetration of construction materials which marked the period were not only novel by local standards; they also provoked deep reactions. For instance, the Assistant Resident of Nupe Province, E. G. Dupigny, reported that the labour recruitment “was not popular, as the Nupe is intensely attached to his house, and does not like leaving it even for two or three months”.⁷² The Director of PWD&R, J. N. O. Eaglesome, recognized the fright and suspicions of the labourers.⁷³ The emirs and their officials were also terrified by the situation, but they could not complain, for to do so would amount to protest which might lead to removal from office. On a broader level, whole towns and farms were torn apart for labour and construction work. The presence of high-tech construction materials and the aura which filled the air combined to produce great reactions of fear (*tsoro*) and awe (*mamaki*).

The *Wakar Diga*—a 70-verse poem composed after Dansidi’s visit to the construction site—captured the fright and terror of the time. Dansidi represented the advent of the railway as sublime. He showed that the domestication of the railway evoked fear and terror. People were pressed to work on the railway against their wills. Contrary to the smooth collaborative narratives in previous analyses, the poem indicates that the local authorities, from the emirs to the village headmen themselves, were terrified by the massive labour recruitment and

⁶⁸ E. G. M. Dupigny, *Gazetteer of Nupe Province*, (London: Waterlow, 1920), 27-8, 131.

⁶⁹ Mason, “Working on the Railway”, 76, fn. 8.

⁷⁰ Dupigny, *Gazetteer of Nupe*; Mason, “Working on the Railway”.

⁷¹ Dupigny, *Gazetteer of Zaria*, 26.

⁷² Ibid. 31,

⁷³ Nigeria, Further Correspondence, 135.

construction work because they were not familiar with Western technology. They had been compelled to produce the labour, whole towns and villages disrupted and farmers compelled to leave their farms for railway work, thereby causing population dislocation. Dansidi's sense of fright can be seen in the following verses:

- 4) *O Allah protect us, we pray morning and evening,
Against the [railway], indeed we were terrified by the advent of the railway.*⁷⁴
- 6) *Indeed we were frightened and terrified*⁷⁵
- 23) *District and village headmen were frightened and
terrified by the railway.*⁷⁶

During this period of transformation by railway technology, people perceived the construction work differently because they did not understand its import. Rumours were generally making the rounds that towns, villages, and farms would be dispersed to make way for the railway, and that Muslims should have nothing to do with it, for it was an alien innovation brought by non-believers (*kafir*). It was also rumoured that working for the white man is forbidden (*haram*) in Islam and that colonialism itself was a sign of the end of time.⁷⁷ These rumours had strong effects on Muslims, for they appealed to their religious sensibilities. Brian Larkin pointed out that the construction site was a climate of anxiety in which rumour flourished.⁷⁸ Michael Adas argued that Africans always resort to superstitious

⁷⁴ *Ga Allah tutur duk nufi ke tafe,
Ina bisa roko maraice da safe,
Shi tsarshe mu sharrin da duk ke tafe,
Da munka ji ance yana nan tafe,
Kwarai mun ji tsoron sa aikin diga.*

⁷⁵ *Da munka ji labara zumai 'yan uwa,
Kwarai munji tsoro muna kaduwa,
Abin ga ashe ba wurin rabakawa,
Ciki na kadawa jiki na rawa,
Mukan ce ba ma iya aikin diga*

⁷⁶ *Ina addua'a Jalla domin fiyayye,
Ka ban sahibi wanda ya zama tsayayye,
Ya taimake ni duniya ko da ya janye,
Dada hakimai har saraki na kauye,
Fa sun firgice bisa aikin diga.*

⁷⁷ Nadabo, *Tarihin Garin Kaduna*, 101-1.

⁷⁸ Larkin, *Signal and Noise*.

and religious belief to explain the situations they cannot comprehend.⁷⁹ It should be noted that British colonial rule was not very popular, and resistance to British rule was widespread and came in different forms. During this period, Muslim intellectuals used Islamic legal discourse to incite people against the colonial authority. The Satiru and Hadejia's revolts were popular examples of Muslims' reactions to colonialism.⁸⁰ As M. S. Umar pointed out, *Wakar Diga* was a discourse against colonialism.⁸¹ Northern Nigeria, Yusuf Nadabo noted, was divided between those who understood and those who did not. Those who understood were the traditional rulers—like Dansidi, who tried to calm everyone despite being frightened himself.⁸²

As the poem also indicates, while some were terrified, others marvelled in wonderment. They perceived the elaborate construction materials, the train, and the tracks with a sense of awe and wonder. Dansidi says that he himself marvelled at the construction materials, the trains, and the rail line. He marvelled at the large amount of iron offloaded from trains; and the sight of long trains and tracks and the ways the iron were cut and processed instilled awe in him, for he had never seen such thing before. Dansidi's sense of wonder and awe can be understood against the following verses:

- 18) *O Brother, what a wonder I saw:*
*Steel cutting steel (...)! [train carrying steel]*⁸³
- 19) *Here trains without limit,*
*More limitless was the cutting of steel for railways.*⁸⁴
- 20) *Steel for constructing bridges,*

⁷⁹ M. Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men, Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1989, 3.

⁸⁰ The earliest uprisings against British colonialism in Northern Nigeria.

⁸¹ Umar, *Islam and Colonialism*.

⁸² Nadabo, *Tarihin Garin Kaduna*, 101-1

⁸³ *Dadā ka ga an kama aiki safe,*

Ana bisa yi wansu na nan tafe,

Jiragen kasa ga su dauke da karfe,

Fa ya ajaban dan uwa na ga karfe,

Yana yanke karfe ga aikin diga.

⁸⁴ *Fa ya Rabbi kai ne kayi babu shakka,*

Nufin duk da kai yi garai sai shi dauka,

Fa komi ya so dole ne babu shakka,

Dadā ga jirage daba su iyaka,

Bare yanke karfe ga aikin diga.

*And another steel for striking.*⁸⁵

Dansidi recognized the mixed reactions and commotion, which was why he decided to visit the construction site himself. As for the rumours that were making the rounds concerning the Europeans, colonialism, and their railway, Dansidi enjoined the public to disregard the rumours as baseless and unfounded. Concerning the rumour that the railway would disperse towns, Dansidi himself downplayed the power of the colonial state by assuring the public that the presence of British army cannot move the forest, “much less for the rural areas to be dispersed because of [the railway]” (verses 24–25).⁸⁶ He calmed everyone by assuring them that all was well and appealed to them on why they should participate in the work. He particularly encouraged everyone to participate in the work so as to acquire the colonial coin. In verse 49, he states that everyone desired the coin (*kowa yana sonta matar diga*), including himself. He likened the coin to a woman (*matar diga*) who, according to him, was everyone’s desire, and he said that the only way to acquire it was to participate in the work. In this period of major transformation by cash, the importance of the colonial coin cannot be overestimated. It was the legal tender and the medium for paying tax. Dansidi described the coin as shiny and silver-like and said that people engaged in all sorts of work, such as trade, farming, and hard labour like railway work, just to acquire it. In Dansidi’s account, the railway construction facilitated the circulation of the colonial coin.⁸⁷

However, the reactions to the railway work were temporary, for as David Nye pointed out, a technology that instilled fear and awe at one time soon lost its novelty as it was domesticated.⁸⁸ The people were not passive recipients of transport innovation: after the initial reactions, and having discovered the advantages or benefits of colonial modernity in the form of wages, they quickly participated in the work of their own accord. After all, Dansidi had appealed to them to participate in the work in order to acquire the coin. This did not mean the absence of resistance, for this was part and parcel of construction work,

⁸⁵ *Iri duka sun taru an kewaye su,
Ana nazari su ka aiki da kansu,
Suna ta dibara ana taimakon su,
Ƙaraƙan da za a kadarko dasu,
Daɗa ga wadansu da za a buga.*

⁸⁶ NNPC, *Wakokin Aliyu*, 28-29; Larkin, *Signal and Noise*, 37-8; Aminu, “The Colonial State”, 109-110; Umar, *Islam and Colonialism*, 133.

⁸⁷ NNPC, *Wakokin Aliyu*, 29.

⁸⁸ Nye, *American Technological Sublime*, 38.

especially where exploitation and exactions were the case. Dansidi and his counterparts in Sokoto, Kano, and elsewhere ensured that the requirements for labourers and food supplies were met without the construction work having to suffer.

Besides the free labour that found employment on the railway, slaves, former slaves, and domestic servants also found employment. As studies by H. J. Pedraza, Paul E. Lovejoy, J. S. Hogendorn, and several others have demonstrated, railway work offered large numbers of slaves an opportunity to earn cash to gain their freedom.⁸⁹ When the British arrived, they abolished the institution of slavery alongside the legal status of slaves. New relations whereby slaves could sell their labour to earn their freedom and raise cash for tax emerged.⁹⁰

A fact not often recognized in the literature is that prisoners also found employment on the railway. Prisoners whose sentences were commuted to hard labour terms were also employed, because earthwork was considered hard labour.⁹¹ Contrary to the popular impression that only men worked on the line, *Wakar Diga* suggests that women and even children also engaged in some types of work on the railway.

The initial survey and earthwork was hampered by the lack of working tools, owing to the financial conditions of the PWD&R and the late arrival of the experts and construction materials. For instance, locally made hoes and tin basins were used for earthworks, as locally made baskets were difficult to obtain.⁹² Some preliminary surveying had already started in 1906, but it was not until late 1907 that the real surveying began. In practice, it was not necessary to undertake a great deal of surveying, as the engineers were able to make use of the report of previous surveys undertaken under Lugard. At the start of the surveys, only one surveyor was on site; but as the work progressed, more surveyors and engineers and auxiliary crew arrived on secondment from Canada, South Africa, Benguela, Chile, the War Office, and the Marine Workshop in London. A reconnaissance survey started from Zungeru to Moya valley with a small quantity of earthwork for a road at Baro.⁹³ The building of Baro, also known as Gidi, some 130 miles below Jebba on the Niger River also began at this time. The village was moved downstream below 0.0 mile for sanitary reasons. This was the proposed outlet of Northern Nigeria to the outside world as proposed by Lugard, and it was

⁸⁹ Lovejoy and Hogendorn, *Slow Death*, 219-221; Pedraza, *Borrioboola-Gha*, 105.

⁹⁰ Lovejoy and Hogendorn, *Slow Death*, 201-2.

⁹¹ Colonial Annual Report-Annual: Northern Nigeria, Report for 1908-9, 12.

⁹² Nigeria, Further Correspondence, 134; Colonial Report-Annual, Northern Nigeria for 1907-8, 21.

⁹³ Nigeria, Further Correspondence, 132; Dupingy, *Gazetteer of Nupe*, 27.

the starting point of the rail mileage in the Northern Provinces (i.e. below 00 on the plan, or Bar 0, corrupted to become Baro).⁹⁴

Besides the hot climate and sometimes rain in which the Europeans and the labourers worked, the indigenous labourers also felled trees and cleared forest to make way for the railway. Villages were broken up and dispersed. The earthworks passed through flat, rocky, and mountainous as well as swampy landscapes, all of which had to be reshaped.⁹⁵ In cutting through the rocky landscape, explosives were used, as was the case in Tartabu. The rock flecks were used for ballasting. Rivers were bridged and swamps reclaimed. A forest which might have proved useful for a sleeper industry was discovered and expert lumbermen were brought in from Canada to develop the industry. The labourers were taught how to cut the sleepers, and a railway sawmill was planned at Baro.⁹⁶ The timber sleepers were not used in the end, however, because they were of low quality.⁹⁷

Type camps also were built for the indigenous labourers and the European experts at five-mile intervals up to mile 120. The camps consisted of thatched huts with mud or thatched walls and proved invaluable as a refuge from sun and rain for the survey and construction parties.⁹⁸ The camps not only served as sleeping places; they also served as a place of social interaction and trading points for the communities along the line. Prostitutes, gamblers, and criminals also took refuge in the camps. As Wale Oyemakinde pointed out, the camps were temporary and were abandoned to make new ones as construction work moved inland. The abandoned camps later provided accommodation to track maintenance gangs before quarters were built all over the system.⁹⁹

Construction followed closely on survey and earthwork. The real construction work commenced in 1908, from two opposite directions in Niger Province. South of Baro, the construction of the Lagos extension started from Ilorin, to cross Jebba and link up with the Baro–Kano railway near Minna. This study does not concern this section. From the opposite direction, which is the focus of this study, the work was officially inaugurated at Bedegi on 5 January 1908, with the Emir of Bida, Mallam Muhammadu, laying the first sleeper linking

⁹⁴ Colonial Report-Annual, Northern Nigeria for 1907/8, 21, 135; Nigeria, Further Correspondence, 73; Pedraza, *Borrioboola-Gha*, 105.

⁹⁵ Nadabo, *Tarihin Garin Kaduna*, 105.

⁹⁶ Colonial Annual Report-Annual: Northern Nigeria, 1907-8, 21-22.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Nigeria, Further Correspondence, 136; Colonial Annual Report for 1907-8, 22.

⁹⁹ Oyemakinde, "Railway Construction", 307.

Baro with Badeggi at a colourful ceremony in the presence of the High Commissioner, the Resident, Emir of Zazzau Aliyu Dansidi, political officers, and railway officials. The laying of the first sleepers by Emir Muhammadu carried an important message, which was to reassure the labourers that what they were doing was right after all and for the benefit of all. A bridge was supposed to be built to connect Badegi with Bida but was postponed owing to the necessity of pushing the work further.¹⁰⁰

A fact not often mentioned in previous analyses is that immediately a section of the line was completed, it was declared an open line. The assumption previously was that the line was opened only when completed at Kano. This popular assumption is not correct and need to be corrected. As the evidence shows, a simple passenger freight service of 3d was charged for travelling by construction or work trains over each section of 15 miles. Although the open line was a strategy to familiarize people with trains, it also facilitated the transport of goods, construction materials, government stores, and commercial firms' consignments.¹⁰¹

The first gangs of labourers from Niger Province were organized under the Superintendent of Police. Most of them were of Nupe and Gwari origin.¹⁰² The claim that labourers from Southern Nigeria were not employed on the Northern Nigerian Railway, and that the northern administration preferred to delay the work rather than allowing southerners participate, is misleading.¹⁰³ As the evidence indicates, Yoruba were employed on the railway, even if on a small scale. As Director of the PWD&R J. N. Eaglesome reported, the initial work "originally began with about 1,200 men comprising Yoruba, Hausa and Nupe". There is no indication to suggest they were from within the province.¹⁰⁴ The labourers worked long hours under strenuous conditions, from 6 a.m. to 8.30 a.m. with an hour's rest, and then continued from 9.30 a.m. to 3 p.m.. Another gang worked from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. with an hour's break, and then continued from 8 p.m. to 12 p.m.. The gangs had only one day off a week, and all this work was at the expense of farm work.¹⁰⁵

At the start of the work in January 1908, approximately 2,426 labourers were working on the line, rising to 3,820 in April. By November, about 5,146 labourers were already working on the line (see Table 2.1). The construction work proceeded slowly owing to the

¹⁰⁰ E. G. M. Dupingy, *Gazetteer of Zaria*, 28; Nigeria, Further Correspondence, 135; NNPC, *Wakokin Aliyu*, 27; E. G. M. Dupingy, *Gazetteer of Nupe*, 28; Mason, "Working on the Railway", 63.

¹⁰¹ Colonial Annual Report-Annual, Northern Nigeria, Report for 1908-9, 17.

¹⁰² Mason, "Working on the Railway", 62.

¹⁰³ Oyemakinde, "Railway Construction", 315.

¹⁰⁴ Nigeria, Further Correspondence, 134.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 134, 154.

lack of familiarity with construction work. The training of labour for track laying also proved difficult, with a slow rate of 1/5 mile a day, reaching mile 120 in the middle of the year.¹⁰⁶ The Bako River, one of the many rivers through which the line passed in the first 120 miles, was reached by the middle of the year and cleared of obstruction for at least 60 miles, which proved invaluable in the transport of construction materials by canoe. Owing to the prevalence of tsetse flies, animal transport was not used in transporting construction materials from the river. Most of the materials were carried by head. Even horses belonging to the European staff died of tsetse attacks. One of the areas where the construction party faced enormous challenges was the Bako and Bakogi valleys, owing to the nature of the terrain. The work had to be abandoned for some time, partly owing to the terrain and partly to a delay in the arrival of cement. Temporary and permanent bridges were constructed over the rivers.¹⁰⁷ One of the steamers carrying construction materials even sank, which resulted in the loss of 785 tons of sleepers, foundation bridges, and cement.¹⁰⁸

It should be noted that in constructing the railway, many problems and challenges were encountered at the beginning. Many mistakes were also made; some were technical, while some were due to poor information about the environment and failure to recognize the local requirements of a situation. Most of the work was at first based on trial and error, as the engineers did not understand the terrain and its hazards; but as the work progressed, the knowledge of the terrain and of the local situation improved. After all, it was in making mistakes that good engineers and technicians were made—working out problems based on local requirements and conditions as they went along.

¹⁰⁶ Colonial Report-Annual for 1907-8, 22; Nigeria, Further Correspondence, 154.

¹⁰⁷ Colonial Report-Annual for 1907-8, 22.

¹⁰⁸ Nigeria, Further Correspondence, 151, 136.



Figure 2.1 Setting out for earthworks at Patatifi

Source: *The Engineer*, 17 September 1909.



Figure 2.2 Earthworks in progress at Patatifi Bluff

Source: *The Engineer*, 17 September 1909.



Figure 2.3 Survey party No. 1, camp type

Source: Flickr Photo stream

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/31575009@N05/5415949913/in/photolist-9fAadM-9fDiHb>



Figure 2.4 Railway construction in Nupe Province

1. The Emir of Bida Muhammadu in white robes, standing at the laying of the first sleepers at Badeggi in January 1908.
2. The Sarkin Paiko in white robes, turning the first sod at the start of the Gwari section in Nupe Province in 1909.
3. Labourers at work at the Gwari section in Nupe Province in 1909.

Source: Flickr Photo stream

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/31575009@N05/5415949209/in/photolist-9fAa1D-9fAadM-9fDiHb>



Figure 2.5 Levelling of rocky landscape in 1908

Source: *The Graphic Newspaper*, 25 July 1908



Figure 2.6 Reclaiming of swamp in 1908

Source: <http://www.liveauctioneers.com/item/1985580>



Figure 2.7 Temporary bridge over the Bakogi River

Sources: *The Engineer*, 17 September 1909.



2.8 Testing of the Emir Class engine on a steel bridge

Source: *The Engineer*, 17 September 1909.

As the construction work entered Kuta Division—the last district on the rail line in Nupe Province—in 1909, it encountered major resistance from the Gwari people of Gussoro, owing to labour recruitment and the fact that the work undermined agricultural production. By this time, labour demand has reached its peak, with more labour required to complete the remaining length of the line in the province. Before the line entered Gwari country, the labours employed on the line were mixed, comprising Nupe, Gwari, Koro, Yoruba, and Hausa. As the line entered Gwari land, more and more Gwari labour was required to complete the remaining length of the line in the district. Unlike the Nupe, the Gwari had no well-organized political and coercive structure. They were independent village communities without an established political structure.¹⁰⁹ It was to this village community that the British called for labour. The Gwari people deserted the construction site at the beginning of the rains and refused to return or pay their tributes for the previous year.¹¹⁰ The revolt in Gussoro was one of the popular uprisings against British colonialism, after the Satiru and Hadejia revolts of 1906.¹¹¹

Although the provincial administration gave the impression that the revolt was due to domestic intrigues over chieftaincy, it led to the killing of a European Political Officer, Mr. Venrenen, and 11 indigenous police. The revolt had its origin in what the labourers perceived as their forced conscription, extortion, and failure to release them ahead of the wet season, as well as in allegations that the recruiting officer slept with their wives while on site. Earlier in that year, their kin of Paiko and Fuka districts deserted the construction site at the beginning of the wet season and refused either to show up for work or pay their tributes. The Gwari people plotted to kill their chief, whom they perceived as a collaborator with the white men. Having got wind of the plot to attack him, the embattled chief ran to the Political Officer. The latter and his 11 indigenous police were ambushed and killed on their way to restore the embattled chief. In two massive retaliatory attacks, the whole village was destroyed, with heavy casualties, and the culprits were apprehended.¹¹² Despite the uprising and its disruption, the work progressed rapidly and entered Zaria, the second province on the

¹⁰⁹ Mason, “Working on the Railway”, 67-8.

¹¹⁰ Figures are not available on deserters.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 68; Dupingy, *Gazetteer of Nupe*, 53.

¹¹² B. K. Audu, “The 1909 Gussoro Revolt”, (BA Dissertation, Bayero University, Kano, 2000), 62; Mason, “Working on the Railway”, 68-70; Dupingy, *Gazetteer of Nupe*, 53.

railway, in March 1909. By this time, the Lagos extension had reached Gudu, mile 43 from Jebba.¹¹³

However, as the construction party entered Zaria, more and more labour was required owing to the magnitude of the work in the province. Of the total 400 miles of rail line, 141 miles, “the stiffest portion”, was in Zaria.¹¹⁴ As in Gussoro, the work was not popular in Zaria, due to the magnitude of labour required from the province. Besides the labour required for this particular section of the line, the province was to provide additional labour for building another, narrow-gauge line known as Bauchi Light Railway, from Zaria to the tin mines on the Jos Plateau, later in 1911. This was in addition to the labour required for the tin mines on the Jos Plateau itself. The European Political Officers, the Emir, and his chiefs were fully occupied with labour recruitment and supervision, as well as with supplies of food for the construction work.¹¹⁵ The Emir, Aliyu Dansidi (mentioned earlier for his poem), threw his whole weight behind the work, to the satisfaction of the Resident. His district and village heads also responded energetically, to the delight of the colonial state.¹¹⁶ Earlier in January, Governor Sir Percy Girouard had toured the villages on the line, where he was met by the Resident, the Emir, and his chiefs at Likoro in preparation for the work. The purpose of his tour was to see for himself the level of preparation and to impress on the Emir and his chiefs the importance the state attached to the project.¹¹⁷

Labour was short at the start of the work. In Zaria, as in Nupe, labour recruitment rendered administrative and political work handicapped owing to shortage of staff. The railway work imposed a considerable burden on the Emir and his chiefs, a situation which provided opportunity for abuse, as they diverted some of the labour to their personal farms and trade.¹¹⁸ As Safiyanu Aminu and Shoyebi Abayomi asserted, villages were raided to procure labour for the construction work.¹¹⁹ Besides the organization of labour, which fell on shoulders of the Emir, he also carried out administrative work on behalf of the Resident, who was pre-occupied with the railway work. The work also resulted in an administrative reorganization, leading to the creation of the Western Division specifically to meet the requirements of the situation caused by railway work and the building of Kaduna (the

¹¹³ Dupingy, *Gazetteer of Nupe*, 29.

¹¹⁴ Aminu, “The Colonial State”.

¹¹⁵ Dupingy, *Gazetteer of Zaria*, 31.

¹¹⁶ NAK ZarProf, Zaria Province Report No. 1910.

¹¹⁷ Abayomi, “Consequences”, 31.

¹¹⁸ NAK SNP/10/105P/1921, Zaria Province Annual Report for 15 months, ended 31st March 1921.

¹¹⁹ Abayomi, “Consequences”, 106; Aminu, “The Colonial State”, 108-9,

proposed administrative headquarters). The Southern Division and the Gwari Division, previously administered separately, were also merged for the railway work in August 1909.¹²⁰

The construction work was not popular in Zaria and resistance was both passive and active. At the start of the work, south of the province, desertion among the Gwari was between 300 to 800 labourers due to the Gussoro episode. As the Resident pointed out, an exaggerated account of the Gussoro uprising in Nupe Province had reached them. Those already mobilized on the construction site armed themselves and wanted to make trouble. Before the troops dispatched to quell the rebellion had arrived, the situation was tactfully prevented from escalating, and so construction continued.¹²¹ By March, about 300 men comprising free and unfree labour, were already working on the line. This rose to 3,191 at the end of the year, with 22½ miles of heavy earthworks recorded. North of Kaduna, construction work began at Zaria in July with 470 men, rising to 4,100 men by the end of the year (see Table 2.1 below). A motor road was also constructed from Rigachikum to Naraguta, the location of the tin mines in Jos. The total work for the whole nine months was 50 miles, involving a little over 17,268 labourers, as the table indicates.¹²² As the construction work moved away from Zaria City to Kano in 1910, more and more labourers were required north of Zaria (where some of the studied communities are located). The Emir further tightened his grip to ensure the required labourer quotas were met to complete the extent of the line in the province. Not only did he organize the supply, he also supervised the construction. John Raphael, a British journalist and editor of *African World*, who was on a tour of Nigeria at that time, writes that Dansidi was always in the habit of sitting on the embankment with his officials watching how the tracks were laid.¹²³ As the record indicates, Likoro suffered severely from having to supply huge numbers of labourers for the construction work.¹²⁴ Stations were established at Likoro, Gimi, and Faiki.¹²⁵ The construction work proceeded rapidly, with the earthworks reaching Kano border in May 1910.¹²⁶

¹²⁰ Secretary Northern Province (hereafter referred to as SNP) SNP7/950/1911, Zaria Province Report Annual; NAK SNP7/986/1910, Zaria Province Report Annual, 1909; NAK SNP7/975/1912, Zaria Province Report Annual, 1911.

¹²¹ NAK SNP/986/1910; also see Mason, "Working on the Railway", 70-1.

¹²² Dupingy, *Gazetteer of Zaria*, 31.

¹²³ J. R. Raphael, *Through Unknown Nigeria*, (London: 1914), 300.

¹²⁴ Auchan (or Auchang) Station was established shortly afterward. Faiki Station was later closed in 1918, and a new station, called Dangora, was established a little further from Faiki. NAK ZarProf 5380 Makarfi District Note Book 1943..

¹²⁵ NAK SNP7/2227/1912 Baro Kano Railway, 13; F. Jaekel, *The History of the Nigerian Railway: Network and Infrastructures*, vol. 2, (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 1997), 626.

¹²⁶ Jaekel, *Nigerian Railway*, vol. 2, 62.

It needs be pointed out that the massive labour recruitment in Zaria created widespread tension and resistance. For instance, approximately 1,100 labourers deserted the construction site, while 639 families emigrated to Kano, Katsina, and Bauchi for fear of conscription. Those who stayed behind were either conscripted or handed over two-thirds of their income to their headmen as exactions.¹²⁷ Construction work also undermined agricultural work. Although railway work exposed labourers to exploitation and exactions, it had the educative value of facilitating the spread of the colonial coin and bringing the pagan subjects of southern Zaria and the Hausa together for the first time. Previously, they had been hostile to and suspicious of one another.¹²⁸

As the construction work entered Kano, the last province on the line, in 1910, those communities along the rail line likewise supplied the labourers for the work. As with Zaria, the labour requirement in Kano was high, due to building of the rail line and the Challawa bridge (the longest on the system), as well as building of Kaduna, the new administrative headquarters. As the study by Mohammad Gwadabe indicates, many peasants and slaves were forced to work on the railway, which led to population dislocation.¹²⁹ With the Emir and his chiefs ready to supply the labour, there were no complaints of a labour shortage as there had been in Zaria. The work initially started with 500 men, and increased to over 11,000 at the end of June. Before the end of the year, thousands of labourers were toiling on the line.¹³⁰ The speed in track laying was also phenomenal; it proceeded very fast, at a rate of 25 to 40 miles a month, 12 miles a week, and 6½ miles a day. The earthworks finally entered Kano metropolis at mile 356, the great northern terminus, in June 1910.¹³¹

The track itself, however, did not enter Kano until March 1911, owing to the washing away of the temporary bridge over the Challawa River. Kano Station was moved backward to mile 354, owing to the ample space required for trading and residential quarters.¹³² The whole work spanned a period of three years and eight months altogether and was completed earlier than anticipated. It was a great success, being the first such project to be built by any PWD&R in the country. The success was due to the combined efforts of European experts and the indigenous labourers. As Aliyu Dansidi himself rightly acknowledged in verses 27–37 of his poem, the success was due to many people: the labourers, the labour recruiters who watched over them day and night to ensure they remained on site, and the emirs and their

¹²⁷ Mason, “Working on the Railway”, 70-3; Abayomi, “Consequences”, 114-5.

¹²⁸ NAK NP7/950/1911; NAK NP7/986/1910; NAK NP7/975/1912.

¹²⁹ M. M. Gwadabe, “Land, Labour and Taxation in Kano Native Authority: the case of Kumbotso District”, (PhD Thesis, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria: 2007), 210-217.

¹³⁰ Mason, “Working on the Railway”, 71.

¹³¹ Colonial Annual Report-Annual: Northern Nigeria, Report for 1911, 32-33; Bell, “Recent Progress”, 390.

¹³² Colonial Annual Report for Northern Nigeria, 1911; Hogendorn, *Nigerian Groundnut*, 25.

chiefs, who ensured that labour poured onto the site, as well as the women and children who fed them. Dansidi thanked every one of them, including the European Political Officers for their role in ensuring that the work was completed ahead of time.¹³³

Table 2.1 Number of labourers recruited, January 1908–March 1911

Month	Year	Number
January	1908	2,426
February	1908	4,364
March	1908	3,820
April	1908	3,820
May	1908	4,264
June	1908	4,362
October	1908	4,798
November	1908	5,146
December	1908	2,827
January	1909	2,426
February	1909	3,364
March	1909	4,822
April	1909	3,820
May	1909	4,264
June	1909	4,362
Quarter ending 31 March	1910	14,879
Quarter ending 30 June	1910	11,911
Quarter ending 30 September	1910	3,727
Quarter ending 31 December	1910	3,638
Quarter ending 31 March	1911	8,804

Source: These figures are collated from the Northern Nigerian Annual Reports for 1907–1911.

¹³³ NNPC, *Wakokin Aliyu*, 28-9.



Figure 2.9 Construction work near Kaduna in 1910

Source: Ijaw Nation, <http://www.unitedijaw.com/amalgamation.htm#Notes>



Figure 2.10 Construction work near Kano

Source: *The Engineer*, 17 September 1909.

It is important to mention that none of the stations in the studied communities south of Kano were established at this time; they were established after the line was completed. The only station south-west of Kano City at that time was Rafingora. This was closed down with the establishment of Madobi station in 1913.¹³⁴ A fact often ignored in the literature is that the railway construction led to the establishment of Dangora (one of the studied communities), which became an important railway hub south-west of Kano. Oral account has it that Dangora was created out of the necessity to prevent theft of construction materials. According to this popular tradition, when the construction party arrived at the present location of the town, theft of construction materials was prevalent. In order to ensure safety of the materials, the colonial authority ordered the village headman of Kyarana (a hamlet three miles away) to move to Dangora so as to keep an eye on the materials. Since then, Dangora became the seat of a village headman, while Kyarana remained the seat of a ward. When the railway system was being expanded in the post-World War I period, Dangora was made a railway town. Prior to this, it was essentially an unimportant centre.¹³⁵

As mentioned earlier, the Baro–Kano railway had been conceived and built as a temporary line to be upgraded as traffic improved on the system. On the system as a whole, 24 stations, both permanent and temporary, had been established, with a plan to establish more as traffic improved. Of the eight communities considered in this study (see Map 2.2), only two actually had stations at this time. The remaining ones were established during and after World War I (Table 2.2). The station structures were generally temporary, made of wood and iron pending the erection of permanent structures. On the whole, there were no passenger platforms and none of the stations was signalled, partly because of the low speed of the trains and the fact that night journeys were not anticipated at that time.¹³⁶ This temporary nature of the system was to create difficulties after the system began operations.

¹³⁴ Jaekel, *Nigerian Railway*, vol. 2, 626.

¹³⁵ Interviews with Alhaji Adamu (village head or Sarkin Fulanin Kyarana) and Malam Shehu Yusuf, both interviewed on 4 March and 13 March 2011.

¹³⁶ Colonial Annual Report for 1911, 32-3; NAK SNP7/2227/1912; NAK SNP7/2322/1912.

Table 2.2 List of stations from Baro to Kano

Station	Distance from start of line	Distance from preceding station (km)	Date established
Baro	0	0	Open line 1912
Katcha	14.50	14.50	“
Bakogi	26.50	12.00	“
Baddegi	42.50	14.00	“
Ebba	59.00	16.50	“
Katerigi	72.50	13.50	“
Lafiagi (proposed)	91.25	13.50	“
Shappa (temporary)	97.00	5.75	“
Minna	111.25	14.25	“
She	130.00	18.75	“
Guni	147.00	17.00	“
Kogi Serikin Pawa	169.00	22.00	“
Godani	185.50	16.50	“
Bakin kasua	197.00	11.50	“
Kaduna	215.00	18.00	“
Rigachikum	228.50	13.50	“
Birinin Yero	239.50	11.00	“
Dumbi	254.50	15.00	“
Zaria Cantonment	266.00	11.50	“
Likoro	275.00	9.00	Open line 1912
Gimi Dabosa/ Gimi	287.00	12.00	“
Faiki/Paki	310.50	23.50	“ (closed in 1918)
Anchau/ Auchang	306.00	23.50	1913
Rafingora	334.00	23.50	1912 (closed in 1913)
Dangora	n.a.	n.a.	Established 1918
Yako	n.a.	n.a.	Established in 1918
Madobi/Maidobi	322.75	n.a.	Established in 1913
Kwankwaso	322.75	n.a.	Established in 1918
Challawa/Challowa	337.00	n.a.	Established in 1914
Kano	335.00	21.00	Open line

Note: n.a.= not available

Sources: NAK SNP7/2227/1912, 13; NAK SNP7/6/9/1913, Railway Station naming of...; Jaekel, *Nigerian Railway*, vol. 2, 102.

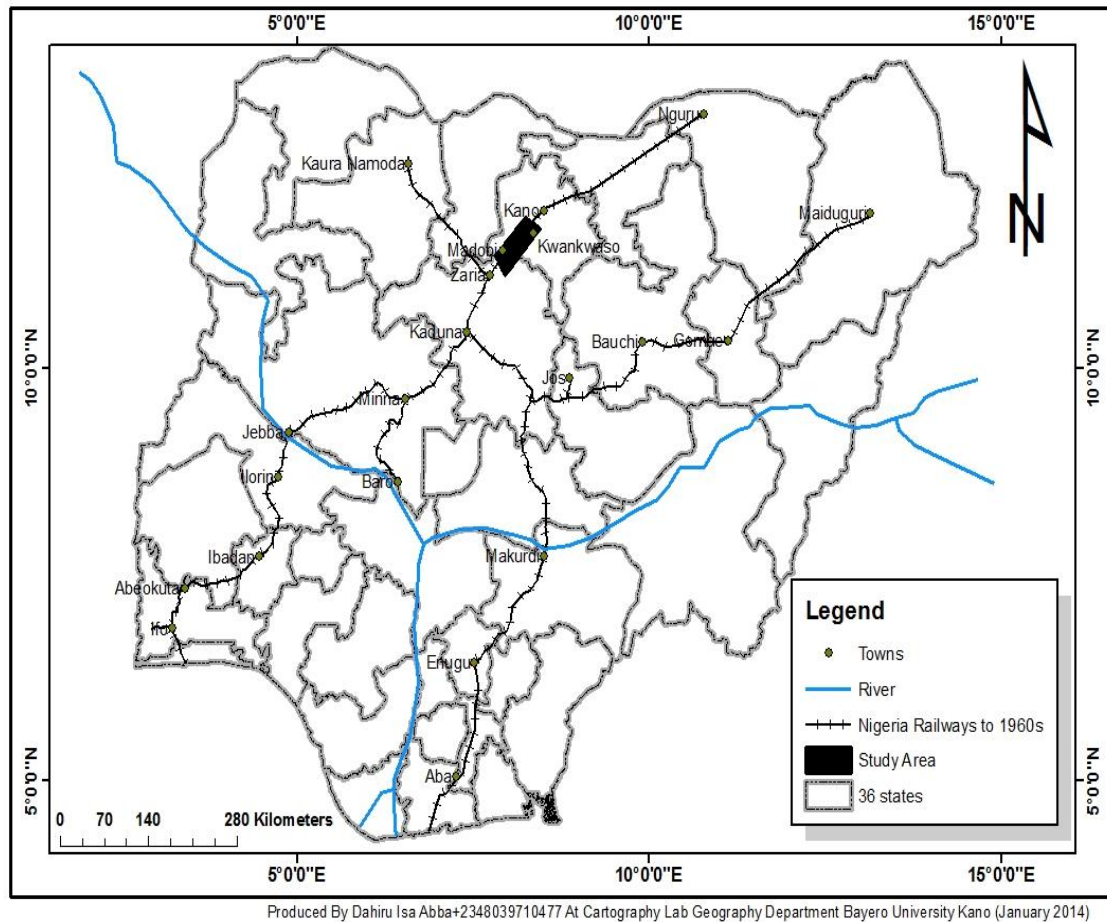
Although the railway had entered Kano metropolis, it was not open to traffic. Contrary to the popular claim that the traffic train entered Kano in 1911, there was no such

train; the first train was a work or construction train. The line was not open to traffic until 1912, owing to washouts and technical problems. The bridge over the River Niger had also not been completed, although the early trains were ferried across the river by a steam ferry named *Fabius*.¹³⁷ This was a temporary arrangement, and the bridging of the north channel of the river was completed in 1910. The south channel, the most difficult part, although started in 1911 was completed only in 1916.¹³⁸ It should be noted that the opening had been deliberately delayed until the amalgamation of the two railways (i.e. the Baro–Kano railway and the Lagos Government Railway) which had been slated for 1 January 1912. As mentioned elsewhere in this chapter, the amalgamation was predicated on the need to unify the debt incurred in building the railway. As with the railway, the essence of unifying the administration of the Southern and the Northern provinces was to rescue the North from annual grant-in-aid and treasury control. Unifying the two administrations would provide a pool of resources that would be used in administering the railway and the country, while also doing away with barriers that might hinder national integration.

Now that the railway had been completed, it remained to be seen whether it would achieve the goal for which it was constructed. As the next chapter will show, initial encounters with the locomotive, as with the construction process, were marked by strong, mixed reactions owing to lack of familiarity. As familiarity with the locomotive increased, it was appropriated and domesticated in distinctive ways.

¹³⁷ The *Fabius* had a length of 160 ft and a beam of 33 ft 6 in and accommodated between four and six coaches, depending on their length. Crossing the river involved lowering and raising at both ends, which took a little over an hour to complete, a novel experience by local standards. John R. Raphael writes that the carriages were run to the head of an inclined plane and a wire rope attached to each coach, the other ends encircling a winding drum. Another rope bound to the further end of the carriage drew it onto the slope of the plane, and the winding machine let it down. The plane carried the carriages to a trolley bridge fitted to the steam ferry, which took four carriages, so that the entire train was taken over in two journeys. At Jebba Island, the reverse process was followed, and, a freight engine being coupled up, the train proceeded over the north channel bridge and thus onwards. See NAK 299/S. 3 vol. 1, Railway Publication 1949-1956, 7; Tamuno, "Railway II", 37; Raphael, *Through Unknown Nigeria*, 17; Bell, "Recent Progress", 390.

¹³⁸ Jaekel, *Nigerian Railway*, vol. 2, 96; Tamuno, "Railway II", 37.



Map 2.2 Map of Nigerian Railway in the 1960s

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the Baro–Kano railway was a “troubled railway”, from its conception to its construction and completion. It was shown that the idea of the Northern Authority to build the railway provoked a prolonged rivalry and controversy among the other provincial administrators. As the chapter shows, the lack of a countrywide policy guideline, often assumed to be the source of the conflict, was merely a contributing factor rather than the cause. This is because railway development is always controversial, because it is a political as well as an economic matter, due to the initial sunk costs and the expected returns on investment, as well as the issue of control. The decisions to build a line, the choice of junction, terminal, and freight rates, as well as control are issues which bred controversy. After a rivalry which lasted a period of six years, the Northern Authority won and the others lost.

As the chapter also indicates, the building of the line was influenced by an imperialist motive to exploit cotton. Right from its conception, planning, and construction, the line was conceived as an “economy line” to be built as cheaply as possible. The construction method itself was influenced by economic motives to save costs. Despite the challenges and difficulties, the construction work proceeded rapidly and was completed earlier than anticipated. The local authorities also ensured the required labour and food requirements were met. As the chapter also suggests, the construction work facilitated the spread of the colonial currency and undermined agricultural production.

Contrary to the popular claim that flight from forced recruitment was the only reaction to the railway’s construction, the chapter demonstrates that mixed reactions of fear, apprehension, and awe marked local communities’ reactions to the work. This is because this was their first encounter with the domestication of Western technology. The construction work and everything associated with it were novel experiences which provoked mixed reactions.