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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 4: TRANSPORT ADVANCE, MARKETING AND REACTIONS OF LOCAL PRODUCERS

It is interesting to note that at that time the purpose of the railway was to evacuate the cotton and to carry building materials and trade goods in the opposite direction. There was then no thought of groundnuts, which is now the biggest export crop from Nigeria.

Nigerian Railway Jubilee 1901–1951

4.1 Introduction

It is a shared opinion among scholars that the large-scale agricultural expansion which took place in West Africa during the last century was achieved by bringing underutilized factors of production into optimum use and that labour was too scarce for there to be any market for labour. According to this theory, the construction of the railway infrastructure was the vent that activated agricultural production, and this agricultural expansion was accomplished without reduction in domestic food sufficiency. This is the ‘vent for surplus’ theory, popularized by the Burmese development economist Hla Myint.¹ Scholars who applied the same theory to analyse Northern Nigeria’s agricultural exports have recounted the same old story, although with slight modifications. They asserted that large-scale agricultural expansion was constrained by land and labour. While some of the assumptions of the vent for surplus theory are correct, not all are applicable to the studied areas. Although cotton was a complete failure in Kano, it was a marked success in Zaria and most especially in northern Zaria, where some of the studied communities are located. Throughout this chapter, I shall be testing these popular patterns of general agriculture in Northern Nigeria’s history in the studied communities. The chapter examines the role of the railway in the development and expansion of cash crops production and trade in the communities. It also looks at how food production was maintained in the face of such cash cropping.

¹ Hla Myint, “The Classical Theory of International Trade and the Underdeveloped Countries”, *Economic Journal*, 68, (1958): 317-337.

4.2 Development of the cotton export trade

The railway was completed in 1911 but was not open to traffic immediately owing to the wash-out of tracks and bridges around Challawa. Having entered Kano, the train had to wait until the amalgamation of the two railways, which had been fixed for the following year. While the opening of the line was being awaited, both the colonial authority and the BCGA focused on propaganda to step up cotton production against the coming season.² The BCGA among other things sent out agricultural experts to farmers living along the rail line to explain to them what they stood to gain by growing cotton for export, in addition to distributing seeds to them. The close-settled zone between Kano and Zaria, to which the studied communities were integral, evinced much attention from the BCGA and the colonial authority. As indicated in Chapter 1, the zone was the main cotton and textile belt in the Sokoto Caliphate in the nineteenth century, and hence the BCGA's interest in this area. They also opened a ginnery at Maigana in Zaria in anticipation of a bountiful harvest.³ The colonial authority also engaged in similar propaganda, by way of encouraging farmers to grow cotton for export and of establishing experimental farms.⁴ In 1911, provincial administrations suggested to farmers the improved methods of cultivation that should be adopted. Expectations were high that farmers would grow cotton when they realized there was a ready market for it.⁵ Also, in what appeared as a fine display of indirect rule, the emirs and their headmen were instructed to influence farmers to grow the crop. Such a directive coming from the local authority was likely to influence farmers into growing the desired crop. For instance, in Katsina, the Emir instructed four of his district headmen to ensure every adult male in their districts devoted at least one acre of their land to cotton.⁶ This official propaganda continued well into the

² For elaborate discussion on this, see among others: A. O. Anjorin, "European Attempts to Develop Cotton Cultivation in West Africa, 1850-1910", *ODU*, 3/1 (July, 1966): 3-15, and also "Cotton Industry"; Hogendorn, "Cotton Campaign"; J. S. Hogendorn, "The Origin of Groundnut Trade in Northern Nigeria", in: Carl Eicher and Carl Liedholm (eds), *Growth and Development of the Nigerian Economy* (East Lansing: Michigan University Press, 1970), 31-51; Hogendorn, *Nigerian Groundnut*, 16-35; M. Candotti, "Cotton Growing and Textile Production in Northern Nigeria from Caliphate to Protectorate c. 1804-1914: A Preliminary Examination", being a paper presented at the African Economic History Workshop-London School of Economics-May 2009, 1-15; Okediji, "Economic History", chapter 4, 139-179; Bristwistle, "Cotton Growing", 106-7; S. Onyewu, "Deceived by African Cotton: The British Cotton Growing Association and the Demise of the Lancashire Textile Industry", *African Economic History*, 28, (2002): 92; E. de C. Duggan "The Cotton Growing Industry of Nigeria", *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 21/83, (1922): 199-207.

³ Colonial Annual Report for 1910-1911, 8

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Colonial Annual Report for 1911, 28

⁶ Hogendorn, *Nigerian Groundnut*, 25-28; Candotti, "Cotton Growing" 7-8; Anjorin, "Cotton Industry", 122-3; Okediji, "Economic History", 149-50.

farming season, with anticipation that cotton would pile up by the time the line was officially opened to traffic.

Farmers' response to this state-directed cotton promotion was quite the opposite of what the authorities had anticipated. The propaganda made little or no impact. Although they had everything required to expand production, on their own initiative they did what they thought would most benefit their own objectives. I argue that the transition to cash crop expansion was gradual rather than spontaneous, contrary to what has been previously assumed.

Food security is at the heart of every farmer's thinking; they could not afford to import food, for to do so would be too expensive and uneconomical. The farmers were like businessmen, who take into account prices and market trends. When the cash return on a crop was attractive, they increased their acreage; but when prices fell, they decreased their acreage.

Land was definitely not an issue, contrary to the vent for surplus model's contention that land was scarce. In fact, land was available in abundance, but it was difficult to exploit intensively in some cases owing to soil type and the prevalence of trypanosomiasis.⁷

On the eve of the export trade, farmers grew food crops and groundnuts on their own initiative. During E. H. B. Laing's tour of Sarkin Yaki district in 1912, he observed that large amounts of land were devoted to food crops, mainly guinea corn and pepper. He observed that "[c]otton and ground-nuts are not mostly cultivated, as farmers devoted their energies on food crops", while some combined it with cash crops.⁸ Of course, cotton was grown; but, as earlier indicated, it was used in the indigenous textile crafts.

The claim by the vent for surplus proponents that labour was scarce during the transition to cash crop production is misleading, as a recent study indicated that labour was scarce only during the wet season.⁹ At the start of the cash crop production, the labour shortage was remedied by recourse to a combination of family, slave, and forced labour. Although production was largely household-based, the aristocracy and merchant classes relied on slave labour. Contrary to the claim by Hogendorn that slave labour did not

⁷ G. Austin, "Resources, Techniques and Strategies South of the Sahara: Revising the Factor Endowments Perspectives on African Economic Development, 1500-2000", *Economic History Review*, 61/3, (2008): 587-624, 7-9; NAK ZarProf 2900 Sleeping Sickness Existence in Christian village of Gimi 1920-1923; NAK ZarProf C.7/1919 Church Missionary Society of Zaria-Audu of Gimi Question of Inheritance of 1919.

⁸ NAK SNP 10/268P/1913, Zaria Province Annual, Sarkin Yaki District Assessment Report by E. H. B. Laing 1912.

⁹ Austin, "Resources, Techniques and Strategies", 12.

contribute to cash crop expansion, slave labour did expand production.¹⁰ As indicated in Chapter 1, when the British abolished slavery they criminalized wholesale desertion of slaves, as they feared it would ruin the estate owners with whom they had forged alliances. British colonialism actually promoted slavery by enhancing slave owners' ability to use slave labour; therefore, slavery and slave dealings continued clandestinely until the 1930s. Since slaves could not access land even if they had left their masters, many continued to live with their masters, while many others were forced to remain.¹¹ Migrant or hired labour, which was so central in the cocoa expansion in south-western Nigeria, was not popular in the case of groundnuts until the 1930s.

As the new evidence indicates, besides the slave labour, the Emir of Zaria, Aliyu Dansidi, and his district heads also relied on forced labour. Large amounts of labour intended for railway work were diverted to their own private plantations without paying for it.¹² This was at a time the railway work was at its peak, and the Emir and his chiefs were given a free hand to recruit labour.¹³ Bashir Salau and Safiyanu Aminu argued that large amounts of the labour so used on farms of the aristocrats were recruited through communal work (*gayya*). The communal work, according to their different interpretations, was supposed to be voluntary, but in practice during much of the colonial period it involved force. And it was only those in positions of authority that sanctioned such labour.¹⁴ Hence, the transition to cash crop production was achieved by a combination of family, slave, and forced labour.

By the time the railway was officially opened in 1912, its economic consequences diverged dramatically from the official expectations. The colonial authority found that in spite of the efforts they had invested in cotton promotion, not much was realized; instead, farmers appropriated the railway to grow groundnuts, a crop which did not feature during the planning of the railway. It is generally agreed that cotton was a complete failure in Kano and that it was quickly embraced in Zaria Province. Jan Hogendorn and Florence Okediji's claim that the crop was quickly grown for export in northern Zaria, where some of the studied

¹⁰ Hogendorn, *Nigerian Groundnut*, 103.

¹¹ See J. Hogendorn, "The Economics of Slave Use on Two 'Plantations' in the Zaria Emirate of Sokoto Caliphate", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 10/3, (1977): 369-83, 382; Lovejoy and Hogendorn, *Slow Death*, 145-8, 221; C. N. Ubah, "Suppression of the Slave Trade in the Nigerian Emirates", *Journal of African History*, 32, (1991): 447-470; Watts, *Silent Violence: Food Famine and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); Lovejoy, "Plantations", 353-4; NAK ZarProf 5280 Makarfi District Note Book 1943.

¹² NAK SNP7/950/1911, Zaria Province Annual Report for 1910

¹³ SNP/10/105P/1921, Zaria Province Annual Report for 15 months, ended 31st March 1921.

¹⁴ M. B. Salau, "The Role of Slave Labour in Groundnut Production in Early Colonial Kano", *Journal of African History*, 51, (2010): 147-65; Aminu, "The Colonial State", 127-131.

communities are situated, is misleading.¹⁵ Okediji misrepresented the real situation of cotton export from the area. This can be understood given the nature of sources available to them at the time, which did not give the real picture at the district and village levels. The new evidence indicates that although cotton was grown, it was not offered for export. The amount so realized from the area was too low, although it became popular and increased over time. As the record indicates, cotton purchases in the Kano area were the lowest. When the BCGA representative visited Madobi during his tour of the Kano areas in 1913, he was disappointed to find that groundnuts were grown instead of cotton.¹⁶ As the Nigerian Railway annual report indicates, the raw cotton was consumed by the indigenous textile industry.¹⁷ The BCGA lamented that its free distribution of seed could not guarantee it a preferential advantage over the Hausa traders, who secured most of the raw cotton. The BCGA wanted the government to influence farmers to sell the raw cotton to it.¹⁸ Their purchase from the areas up to 1914 was quite disappointing. The crop did not feature prominently on rail-borne export lists from the communities. As the evidence suggests, the bulk of the cotton so produced was exported to Kano for use in the local textile industry.

One reason farmers refused to sell to the BCGA was that cotton from their areas, as elsewhere in Hausaland, was meant for the local textile crafts and not for export. Another reason was the low price the BCGA offered for the produce. It is quite likely that farmers would have sold to the BCGA had the price been higher than that offered by the Hausa traders.¹⁹ In addition, cotton impoverishes the soil, which makes it unsustainable over a long period, whereas groundnuts add nitrogen to the soil.²⁰

A further factor was that the economic specialization, which dated back to the nineteenth century, between Kano and Zaria also worked against BCGA's demand. Zaria had always specialized in growing cotton, while Kano specialized in making cloth. Most of the cotton from Zaria has always been transported to Kano, "where the purchasing power of local weavers was much greater".²¹ Beside traders from Kano who purchased the cotton fibre, there were also many at centres such as Meyere, Kudan, and their environs who purchased

¹⁵ Hogendorn, *Nigerian Groundnut*, 110, 112; Okediji, "Economic History", 151.

¹⁶ Hogendorn, *Nigerian Groundnut*, 112; NAK KanProf 95/1914, Annual Report 1914.

¹⁷ Public Record Office (hereafter referred to as PRO), PRO 657/7, Nigerian Railway and Udi Coal Mines, Administrative Report for the Year Ending 31st March 1918, 64.

¹⁸ NAK KanProf 270/1913, Annual Report for Quarter Ending 1913.

¹⁹ Dupigny, *Gazetteer of Zaria*, 31; NAK KanProf 270/1913.

²⁰ Hogendorn, *Nigerian Groundnut*, 41; Okediji, "Economic History".

²¹ Candotti, "Cotton Growing", 5; Anjorin, "Cotton Industry", 122-3.

cotton and transported it to Kano.²² Hence, when the cotton trade started, these traders used their capital to purchase most of the crop—at a rate a little higher than what the BCGA offered—and transport it to Kano at a low cost by railway.

The outbreak of the war in 1914 affected the cotton trade, but it favoured the indigenous textile crafts. During the war, imports of goods were seriously restricted owing to the wartime restrictions. This condition of scarcity stimulated a corresponding demand for products from the local looms. The raw cotton was diverted to the craft, which was a positive development. From the start of World War I onward, the BCGA was determined to dislocate the local textile mill through the importation of cheap European textiles into the local markets and the revival of the cotton propaganda. The idea was to flood the local markets with cheap cotton goods with a view to reducing local demand for raw cotton. The BCGA also distributed an exotic variety of seed called the Allen Middling American Exotic, which they distributed to farmers free of charge, and they offered to buy the fibre at 1¾d per lb.²³ From the colonial perspective, the local variety was of low quality compared with the Middling American variety, which was of a higher yield.

As if the authority anticipated that the local variety would be grown to the exclusion of the exotic, it prohibited the growing of other varieties in the districts where the exotic was grown. The colonial authority also prohibited touting or sales of cotton outside the established markets, with the aim of improving the quality.²⁴ By the end of the war, the American variety had replaced the local variety, but it did not destroy the local textile craft, as most of the fibre was still directed to local crafts.²⁵

By the end of the war, the old cotton promotion policy was revived, this time around with more vigour, as the government was determined to see the American variety extended to the studied communities. The emirs and their headmen were actively enlisted to influence their subjects to grow the crop, and the seeds were distributed through them. The extension of this variety was gradual; and as the scheme was widely taken up in one district, it was extended to another. Buying stations were established at the main centres, and cotton examiners (*mallams*) were posted to such centres by the Agricultural Department.

²² NAK MLG 22289 Makarfi District Reassessment Report.

²³ Dupigny, *Gazetteer of Zaria*, 37.

²⁴ Ibid. 38-9.

²⁵ PRO 657/7, 100, appendix IV.

Although the Nigerian annual report indicated that the American variety had replaced the local variety by 1916, evidence from the studied areas suggests otherwise.²⁶ From 1919 through 1921, large amounts of the American variety were distributed to farmers across the studied communities. In 1919, all the districts in Zaria Emirate were brought under the Middling American variety, with 1,200 bags distributed at Makarfi, 1,050 bags at Ikara, 842 at Auchan, and 600 bags at Kudan. As the evidence indicates, in all the districts where the seeds were distributed it was the farmers themselves who requested the seeds.²⁷ Gimi, Dabosa, and Auchan were selected as buying stations and rail heads for the American seeds. Kudan, though not a rail head, was also made a buying station.

Despite the free seed distribution, the quantity realized was much lower than the authority anticipated. During the 1919 buying season, only 35 tons were realized by the Niger Company at Gimi. As usual, the Kano traders purchased most of the crop; the local variety was sold at 3d per pound²⁸ as against 2¾d per pound for the American cotton. Again, the annual report suggests that the American variety had replaced the local variety, but the evidence suggests otherwise, as the local variety was still popular. All this goes to confirm that cotton export was not as popular in this part of Zaria as previously assumed, although it became popular over time. In Madobi, south-west of Kano, the result was the same as only a little over a ton was realized in that year.²⁹ ³⁰ As records indicate, large amounts of the cotton produced, including the American variety, were consumed internally by the local textile crafts.³¹

By 1921, the American variety has been extended to the Kano area, with Kura, Karaye, Tudun Wada, and Gwarzo joining the American seed cotton areas. Dangora and Madobi were made buying and seed distribution centres as well as rail heads for cotton from those districts.³² Similarly, cotton examiners were also posted there to inspect and grade the crop to ensure that quality was maintained. At first, there was a misunderstanding, as the cotton examiners thought farmers had to sell to the BCGA. This was remedied by explaining

²⁶ Colonial Report-Annual, Nigeria Report for 1930, 2.

²⁷ NAK SNP10/273P/1919, Zaria Province Report no. 74 for half year ending, 30th June 1919.

²⁸ In this case, pound represents a British pound weight and is abbreviated as lb. (2.2 lbs is approximately equal to 1 kg). This is not to be confused with the British currency pound.

²⁹ PRO 657/7, 100, appendix IV.

³⁰ A ton is a unit for measuring weight in Britain and the colonies. A ton contains 2,240 pounds.

³¹ NAK SNP/273P/1919, Zaria Province Report no. 74 for half year ending, 30th June 1919; KSHCB SNP17/2, Kano Province Annual Report 1929.

³² KSHCB 123, Kano Province Annual Report for 1921.

to farmers that it was up to them to decide to whom they wanted to sell.³³ As Table 4.1 indicates, the quantity realized from some of the areas in 1923 was not impressive. The table also indicates that the seed was freighted from Auchan for the first time, evidence of its growing popularity.

Table 4.1 Ginned cotton freight in tons, 1923

Gimi	Anchau	Madobi
220 tons	7 tons	27 tons

Source: PRO 657/7, Nigerian Railway and Udi Mines Administrative report for the year ending March 1923.

A number of developments took place at the end of the war which need highlighting here. As can be seen from the discussion so far, the railway opened new markets in distant locations and also areas far removed from the line; but there was a limitation, as the railway could not intensively tap the new sources. This was circumvented by donkey transporters, who exploited the situation to their advantage by charging higher rates for their services, even though short-distance traffic was all they could capture. During his tour of markets in Zaria Province in 1918, the District Officer II, Mr. Porch, observed that prices in remote areas were lower than those along the line. He suggested linking such areas to the railways. The colonial authority also stimulated production in such far distant areas through road development projects.³⁴ Right from the start, the colonial authority envisaged an integrated road network that would feed the railway with traffic. A couple of cart roads in areas far removed from the line were improved to feed the railway with traffic, but efforts were made to ensure they did not compete with the railway itself. By the 1918/19 season, the railway also operated a motor service which connected centres like Kudan, Giwa, and Tsibiri with the ginnery in Zaria.³⁵ The cotton-producing areas south-west of Kano were improved and linked with the BCGA

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ SNP10/273/1919, Zaria Province Report no. 74 for Half Year Ending 30th June 1919.

³⁵ NAK SNP/273P/1919; NAK SNP 72322/1912, Construction and Open Lines, 18; NAK KanProf 3884A Trunk Road.

station at Challawa. The roads were mere feeders to the railway and were capable of carrying a three-ton lorry to evacuate the crop.³⁶

It is also to be noted that despite the efforts taken to ensure the quality of the Middling American seeds, they were adulterated. Adulteration was prevalent among the firms, which resulted in the introduction of cotton grading. This was carried out by the cotton examiners, who issued certificates to farmers, indicating the grade. Cotton unaccompanied by a certificate was not accepted for ginning.³⁷ The old system whereby farmers sold directly to the BCGA was also abolished, and the BCGA received it from the firms who bought directly from farmers or acted as middlemen.

Another important development was the establishment of a new ginnery at Challawa in 1924. The inadequacy of the one at Zaria necessitated the establishment of a new one to take care of cotton from the Kano area. The Kano ginnery itself was closed down and its equipment was sent to Gusau, because the conditions in Kano were against cotton export, as the local loom continued to compete with British demand.³⁸ By this time also, European textiles had increasingly made inroads into the rural space.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, cotton trade suffered from the fluctuating influence of the global economy. Cotton export was affected by factors such as price falls, droughts, food shortages, and locust and hopper invasions (which occurred intermittently during the crisis). Although prices were lower generally, exports did not decline, as farmers had to sell three times what they had been selling in the pre-Depression era to raise cash for tax. In most of the communities, farmers cut down or stopped cotton production altogether, while many focused on food and groundnuts. Although the groundnut price was also lower at the time, unlike cotton it could still finance tax payments, be eaten as food, or be processed into oil which could also fetch cash.

³⁶ NAK ZarProf 431 Vol. IV, Cotton Market: Erection, gazetting, opening and closing of 1947-51; NAK ZarProf 510, Cotton Market: Control of Cotton Examiner 1946-1956; NAK/MKT/55, Gazetted Cotton Buying Stations.

³⁷ Okediji, "Economic History", 159-60.

³⁸ NAK MLG 9117/1929, Kura District of Kano Emirate Reassessment; Hogendorn, *Nigerian Groundnut*, 138.

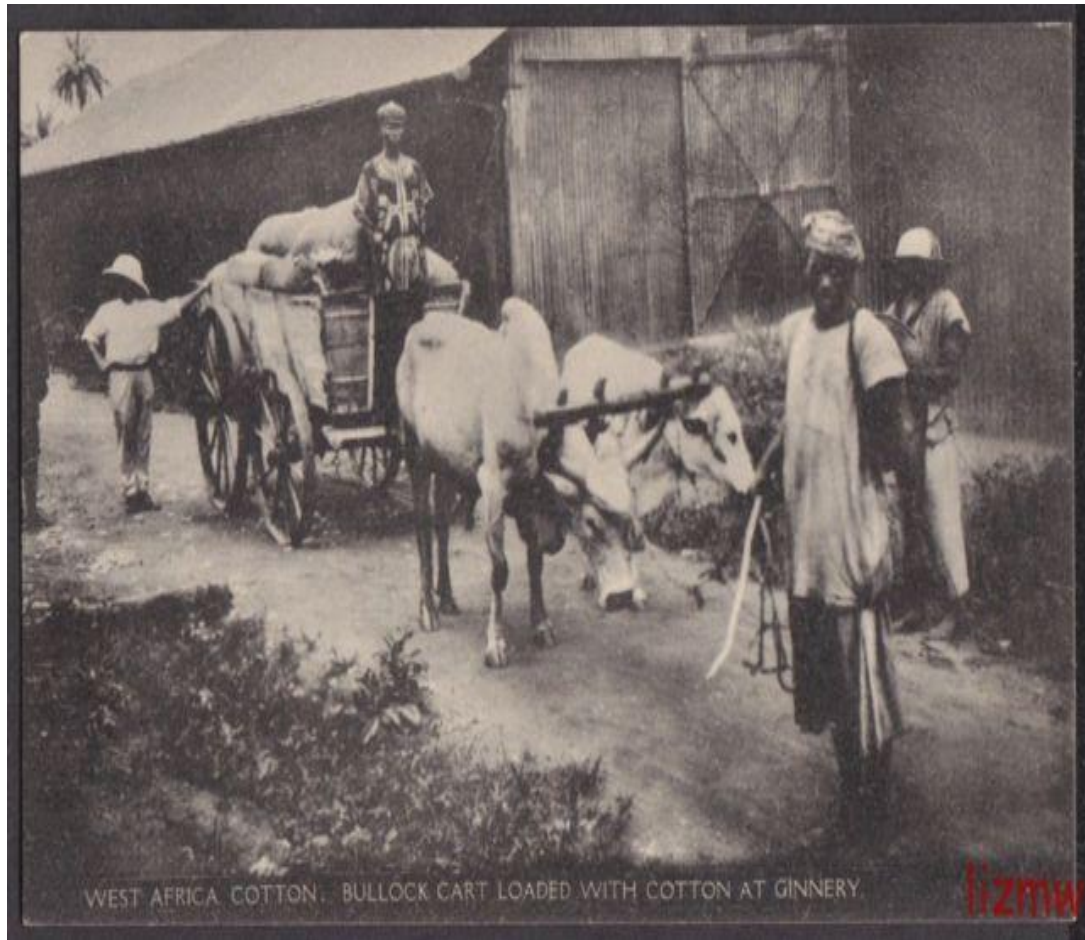


Figure 4. 1 Transport of cotton by bullock in Funtua in the 1930s

Source: The Nigerian Nostalgia 1960–1980 Project

Evidence indicates a general marked reduction in acreage under cotton. For instance, of the 24 representative farms assessed in Ikara District during the 1933–1934 tax seasons, only four were under cotton cultivation; the rest were under food and groundnuts.³⁹ In Paki District also, groundnut expansion had taken over land previously under cotton.⁴⁰ The exception was Kura, where the record suggests a large acreage under cotton.⁴¹ In order to stimulate exports during this time, a special rate was introduced for ginned cotton booked from Zaria and Challawa to Baro.⁴²

Although the British undermined the indigenous textile crafts through import of cheap textile goods and prohibition on sales of cotton outside the official market, the industry benefited from the economic slump, as import was restricted. Evidence indicates that local industries such as weaving (*turkudi*), dyeing, beating, and tailoring (*dinkin turkudi*) flourished during the Great Depression. Farmers continued to weave in the dry season, and their low costs offered them a competitive advantage over the imported cloth. The record also suggests an increase in the indigenous cloth trade with the Beriberi (in Bornu and Jos) and the Tuaregs in what is now the Niger Republic.⁴³

By the end of the economic crisis, cotton trade recovered and serious trade resumed at the buying stations. By this time, Kudan had emerged as a popular cotton market, serving not only farmers from the environs but also from Kano Emirate. Cotton had become popular over time, as evidenced from the data on cotton freight (Table 4.2). As the table shows, cotton purchases from Kudan were higher than those from the rail head at Gimi. The record itself is problematic; for instance, data on cotton purchase does not tally with the quantity freighted. Similarly, some of the purchase by the firms and middlemen which ought to be reflected on the list appears separately, and one is left wondering whether it had been added already or not. For instance, 120 tons purchased by the Niger Company in 1937 and 6 tons in 1938, and another 30 tons by a Hausa merchant—Mallam Kampa from Makarfi—in 1937–1938 are mentioned only in passing.⁴⁴ Two important observations also arise from the records. First, there is the large quantity of cotton seeds that were offloaded annually at Gimi, Madobi, and

³⁹ KSHCB 438C Kano Province Annual Report for 1930; Colonial Report-Annual, Nigeria for 1930, 14; NAK ZarProf 1712, Ikara Assessment of Representative of Village Area 1933-4.

⁴⁰ NAK ZarProf 395, Paki District Affairs 1930.

⁴¹ R. N. Onyewuenyi, "Railway Development", 104, 109; KSHCB Acc. No. 68 Kura Inspection Notes vol. 1.

⁴² Colonial Report-Annual, Nigerian Report for 1930, 45.

⁴³ NAK ZarProf 1712; NAK ZarProf 395; NAK ZarProf 5280; KSHCB Acc. No. 68; NAK ZarProf 1706, Makarfi District Assessment of Representative Village Area; NAK Prof MLG 22289, Makarfi District Reassessment Report; KSHCB MLG 16490/1932 Kumbotso District Kano Emirate Reassessment.

⁴⁴ NAK ZarProf 5280.

Dangora for distribution to farmers across the localities, evidence of cotton's increasing popularity. For instance, 367.5 tons of cotton seeds were offloaded at Gimi Station in the 1935/6 season, 346 tons in the 1936/7 season, and 117 tons in the 1937/8 season. Second, European textiles such as grey baft, shirting, and cotton hanks had increasingly made inroads across the communities. As the records highlight, the products were expensive but were nevertheless popular among the locals.⁴⁵

Table 4.2 Cotton purchases and exports in tons, 1932-1938

Year	Gimi	Kudan	Cotton seed freight from Gimi Station (lbs Grade I Cotton)
1932-33	538	n.a.	n.a.
1934	564	n.a.	n.a.
1935	1,451	n.a.	1935–36: 367½ tons
1936	480	538	1936–37: 346 tons
1937	280	505	1937–38: 117 tons
1938	73	284	n.a.

Note: n.a.=not available

Source: NAK ZarProf, 5280 Makarfi District Note Book 1943.

When the Second World War broke out, the cotton trade suffered again owing to the wartime policy. During the war, the colonial authority stepped up production to prosecute the war, and the colony was expected to bail Britain out, but official attention favoured groundnuts and not cotton. For instance, the propaganda for maximum groundnut production was increased in Ikara District in 1944.⁴⁶ In the Kano area, all the cotton markets were closed down from 1940 to 1943 because of the propaganda.⁴⁷ Even the annual cotton seed distribution was suspended to avoid competition with groundnuts. The implications for cotton farmers were enormous; its selling price was lower, while food prices and taxes were higher.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ NAK ZarProf 3930 Zaria Province Annual Report for 1945.

⁴⁷ NAK KanProf 6991/S.5.

At the same time, export of cotton was higher, as in order to raise cash for tax, farmers produced three times what they had produced in the pre-war period.⁴⁸

One important development of the wartime policies in the areas under study, as in most places, was the reorganization of the cotton trade. The marketing and export of the crop previously handled by the firms was taken over by a new statutory monopoly board, known as the Cotton Marketing Board. The reason was that prior to the war, increase in prices were not being passed on to farmers. For instance, when prices were high, local prices did not rise proportionately; and, when prices were low, the effects of low prices were passed on to the farmers. The board was established to stabilize prices, protect farmers from exploitation, and use profits accrued from cotton export for research and developmental purposes. As Peter Bauer pointed out, however, the marketing board weakened rather than strengthened farmers' position. Their statutory power over the intermediaries in the trade, as Bauer noted, destabilized rather than stabilized prices.⁴⁹ Under the new arrangement, the board purchased cotton through the Licenced Buying Agents (LBAs). At first, the LBAs were predominantly the European firms who controlled the trade in the pre-war era. This was reversed in the 1950s to include Nigerian entrepreneurs, most especially politicians with links to the government. The board gave them bank guarantees and capital to become LBAs. The crop was purchased at the same gazette cotton stations which had existed before the war.

From its numerous interventions in the studied communities, the board stimulated production through the establishment of markets where the crop was purchased at a set price. The prices were always announced at the beginning of the season, so farmers knew beforehand how much their product would be worth. The board also intervened in road development to connect distant producing centres with the rail line. The roads were built and maintained by the board through a special allocation to the native authorities.⁵⁰ Although the roads were motorable in the dry season only, they played an important role in stimulating production and in bringing distant farmers closer to the markets. In the 1950s, when road development became high on the government's agenda, they were linked with the old Kano–

⁴⁸ Ibid.; KSHCB Acc. No. 68; NAK ZarProf PLT/4, Makarfi District Affairs; NAK KanProf 5467, Railway Employee Complaints of Short Food Supply; NAK KanProf 6033, Provision of Passes on the Railway; NAK KanProf 6395 Kano Provincial Annual Report for 1946.

⁴⁹ P. T. Bauer, *West African Trade: A Study of Competition, Oligopoly and Monopoly in a Changing Economy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 263-280.

⁵⁰ NAK ZarProf 431 Vol. IV, Cotton Market: Erection, gazetting, opening and closing of 1947-51.

Zaria road which the railway followed and which had been converted to an all-season road.⁵¹ The road did not follow the same route followed by the railway; instead it followed a new route previously isolated from the rail line. These roads generally became important in the 1970s, when road transport became popular.

It would be interesting to know what the effects of the roads were; unfortunately, this is not possible due to lack of data. As the evidence indicates, cotton purchases from the communities were lower than the previous years. For instance, only a little over 187½ tons were realized at Gimi, 448 tons at Kudan, and 1 ton at Challawa in 1951, and 2 tons at Dangora in 1953/4.⁵²

It also appears that the export trade had reached its limits, as production dropped. The records suggest this was as a result of low yields. In the 1950s, an attempt to improve crop yields through the application of fertilizers was introduced. At first, farmers resented the idea; but following the official propaganda, they gradually embraced the practice.⁵³

By the 1970s, cotton export fluctuated owing to the Sahelian famine and the shift in government priority in regard to the agricultural sector. Increased wealth from oil exports shifted government attention from agriculture to the productive sector. The existence of modern textile mills in the North from the 1950s also meant that much of the raw cotton previously exported was consumed internally. Firms continued to buy the crop and resell to the industry. By the end of 1970s, the local loom and its subsidiaries such as weaving, dyeing, and tailoring were in continuing decline.

From the discussion so far, it is clear that the anticipation that the railway would activate cotton export failed owing to the low prices and the fact that the crop was not meant for export. The Hausa traders competed with the firms for the raw cotton by offering higher prices than the firms offered. The Hausa traders continued to dominate the trade until their hold over the trade was undermined in the 1920s. As was shown above, cotton export from the areas was not as significant as writers have previously speculated. Until the 1920s, cotton did not feature prominently on the list of rail-borne exports from the communities. The colonial government also tried to improve the quality of the crop by introducing an improved variety. Although the improved variety was intended for export, much of it was consumed by the indigenous textile industry. As noted above, the railway opened new frontiers, but it could

⁵¹ NAK KanProf 431 vol. V Cotton Markets, erection, Gazetting Opening and Closing of 1947-51; NAK KanProf 2/54 RDS/101 Kiru-Bebeji Zaria; NAK KanProf 2316 vol. I. Road General Policy; NAK ZarProf 5280; KSHCB Acc. No. 68.

⁵² KSHCB KanProf History of Kumbotso, KanProf 1/1/3 Kiru History; NAK ZarProf 31 vol. IV.

⁵³ KSHCB Acc. No 86; NAK ZarProf 4844A Zaria Province Annual Report for 1950.

not intensively exploit them. This was circumvented by donkey transporters who exploited the situation to their advantage by charging higher rates. The colonial authority also stimulated production in such areas by building access roads to connect farmers in far removed areas to the rail line. By the 1950s, much of the cotton previously exported was internally consumed by the emerging textile mills.

4.3 Development of the groundnut export trade

It is clear from the above that cotton export was not the marked success proponents of the railway had anticipated. Instead, groundnuts, which had never featured during the planning of the railway, became an important export crop. The crop had been grown since pre-colonial times, but it did not become an important cash crop until the completion of the line. Some officials had indeed speculated that it might likely form part of the rail-borne traffic when the line was completed. For instance, the Agricultural Commercial Officer of Southern Nigeria, C. A. Bristwistle, speculated that groundnuts would take a second position to cotton as an export crop.⁵⁴ But despite these speculations, it did not attract the attention of the colonial authority.

It is not entirely clear why the British did not accord groundnuts the special attention their counterparts did in Senegal.⁵⁵ Part of the reason groundnuts did not attract attention was that cotton promotion distracted attention from other crops. The absence of groundnut-processing mills in Britain at that time also discouraged official interest. Until the World War I period, when groundnut-crushing and margarine plants were established in Britain, Nigerian groundnuts were processed in the Netherlands, Germany, and France, with Germany and France being the main markets for the nuts. Another reason for lack of interest was that European commercial firms, especially the Niger Company, were not interested in groundnuts because they considered the crop inferior both in yield and price compared with cotton.⁵⁶

This general anticipation that cotton would form the main traffic for the railway was proved wrong, and there was a general shift to groundnut production. Farmers, on their own

⁵⁴ Bristwistle, "Cotton Growing".

⁵⁵ For discussion on peanut expansion and trade in Senegal, see for instance B. Moitt, "From Pack Animals to Railways: Transport and the Expansion of Peanut Production and Trade in Senegal, 1840-1940", *Revue Francaise d'histoire d'outre-mer*, 88/1, (2001): 241-67; B. Moitt, "Slavery and Emancipation in Senegal's Peanut Basin: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 22/1, (1989): 27-50

⁵⁶ Hogendorn, *Nigerian Groundnut*, 48-9; Okediji, "Economic History", 183-4.

initiative, appropriated the railway to grow groundnuts, using the combination of family, slave, and forced labour. As indicated earlier, production was largely conducted by households, but the aristocrat and merchant classes relied on slave and forced labour. Migrant labour was not so popular until very much later.

The price returns on groundnuts were more attractive than cotton. Unlike cotton, groundnut is a food crop and has always been planted alongside food crops. Groundnuts could be eaten as food or cake (*kulli kulli*) or processed as oil which could be sold in the event of a price fall.⁵⁷ Hence, farmers grew groundnuts and food crops instead of cotton, the officially favoured crop.⁵⁸ The conditions in the studied communities were also well suited to groundnut expansion. Rainfall was adequately distributed, and land was fertile and in abundance, though difficult to exploit in some places.⁵⁹

As Hogendorn and Okediji argued, “a new demand” from Europe for fats and oils stimulated a corresponding demand for Nigeria’s groundnuts. Although the vent for surplus theory ignored the role of African entrepreneurship in cash crop expansion, studies by Hogendorn and Okediji indicated that groundnut exports began at the initiative of Hausa traders. As a result of this new demand and the cash returns on the crop, Hausa merchants responded energetically by ensuring that large amounts of the crop were grown for export.⁶⁰ As Paul Lovejoy and Jan Hogendorn asserted, the Hausa merchants themselves had been involved in the old caravan kola nut trade to Ashanti for many years. As the railway was nearing completion, the caravan trade was dying, and many of the traders reoriented their trade southward. Some of them reoriented their entrepreneurial skills, networks, and capital to the new groundnut trade. At the start of the trade, many of them were contacted by the European firms to help them reach out to farmers.⁶¹ The firms relied on these traders to buy the nuts, partly because of their knowledge of the local trade and their well-established networks in the kola trade, contacts which were suited to the new export trade. Using their client networks, propaganda, finance, and incentive goods, the merchants sent their agents to communities along the rail line to inform rural dwellers of the profits they stood to gain by

⁵⁷ Arewa House Archives (hereafter referred to as AHAK), AHAK 3/3/16 Report of the Groundnut Trade in Kano Province, 9-10.

⁵⁸ NAK SNP10/268P/1913.

⁵⁹ Austin, “Resources, Techniques and Strategies”, 7-9.

⁶⁰ Hogendorn, *Nigerian Groundnut*, 48-9; Okediji, “Economic History”, 183-4.

⁶¹ Lovejoy, “Plantations”, 358; Hogendorn, *Nigerian Groundnut*, 82-6.

growing the nuts. They also enlisted the services of traditional authorities, most especially village headmen, to persuade people to sell the nuts to them.⁶²

By the time the line was opened to traffic during the harvest of 1912, large amounts of groundnuts from the studied communities and their environs were made available for export. Compared with the low price of cotton, the £5 per ton offered for groundnuts was attractive enough to encourage farmers to sell their nuts, even though prices were always lower in the countryside. At the start of the trade, groundnut buying was handled by the agents of the Hausa merchants and the firms. The firms were not physically established in the areas until 1924, but they stationed their middlemen at the more important centres like Madobi, where they purchased the nuts directly through their Yoruba middlemen.⁶³ The combined activities of the firms and the middlemen stimulated production, as farmers from the communities and environs brought the nuts for sale using personal and hired private and hired animal transport.

The railway stimulated production by opening up new distant markets, and caravans of donkeys and bulls and in some cases camels were employed in conveying the nuts to railway stations.⁶⁴ Though figures are not available on groundnut exports before 1916, the impression from records suggests the tonnage was relatively high. Studies by Hogendorn and Okediji demonstrated that the groundnut exports in 1912 generally exceeded the capacity of the railway, requiring the firms to temporarily discontinue buying. The increased price in 1913 saw farmers selling again, which resulted in an accumulation of groundnuts at the stations, causing embarrassment to the railway authority.⁶⁵

It should be pointed out that during the planning of the railway, a once-a-week train was thought to be adequate for developing the region at the time of the opening of the line; but in less than five months after the start of the trade, this was found to be inadequate, necessitating an expansion in rolling stock. The much talked about ‘groundnut pyramid’,⁶⁶ often assumed to be a result of surplus production, was in fact a result of transport difficulties. Had the railway lived up to expectations, there would have been no need for the nuts to pile up at stations.⁶⁷ In any case, the nuts accumulated and continued to accumulate until the 1950s, though not in a such a way that it embarrassed the authorities.

⁶² Hogendorn, *Nigerian Groundnut*, 96-100.

⁶³ Yusuf, *Impact of the Railway*, 131, and “New Approaches”, 214.

⁶⁴ NAK MLG 9117/1929, Kura District of Kano Emirate Reassessment.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 97-99; Okediji, “Economic History”, 191-3.

⁶⁶ It is common for writers to use the word “groundnut pyramid” to make reference to the large-scale groundnut export from Northern Nigeria during the colonial period.

⁶⁷ Colonial Annual Report for Northern Nigeria 1912, 28.



Figure 4.2 Camel transporting groundnuts to a buying station in the 1930s
Sources: The Nigerian Nostalgia 1960–1980 Project.

Although men's role in the development of the groundnut trade has been recognized, women's role also was important and should not be overlooked. While women generally did not participate in farm work, they did take part in harvesting of certain crops, such as cotton and groundnuts, as well as food crops. A large amount of women's labour was employed in shelling the nuts, as they had to be shelled before they were exported. Due to transport costs, it was important to shell the nuts to reduce the weight. The shelled nuts also attracted better prices than unshelled ones. Shelling could be done by hand or with a mortar and pestle. The task, although it looked simple, required some degree of patience and skill to ensure the nuts themselves were not crushed. This task was ideally adaptable to women's labour and the practice of *purdah* (*kulle*), as it could be done within the comfort of the home. Hogendorn has argued that shelling nuts promoted the practice of *purdah* and offered women a steady income.⁶⁸ Two women could produce one ton of shelled nuts in less than 27 hours, at a fee which ranged from 8s to 10s.⁶⁹

By the planting season of 1913/14, there was again a general shift to groundnut production. Farmers who had not grown the nuts the previous year decided to do so in the new season. As usual, the Hausa merchants were offering gifts to encourage them to grow the crop.⁷⁰ And, as expected, farmers increased their acreage using a combination of family, slave, and forced labour. A bumper harvest was anticipated that year; this hope was severely dampened, however, by a famine, a drop in rainfall, and, more importantly, by the rumour that groundnuts would attract a special tax and that increased production would force down prices. The result was that farmers uprooted their groundnuts, and there was a consequent shortage of food, as they had neglected food production. Kano area was the hardest hit. An appeal by the Emir that more food be grown was ignored. As Michael Watts pointed out in the case of Kano, the area was not sufficient in foodstuffs even in the nineteenth century. Increased cash cropping had deflected attention from food production, and the bad harvest that year resulted in the necessity of food imports to feed the population.⁷¹ Foodstuffs were sold at famine prices, and mortality was high in the Kano area. The railway played an important role in the distribution of relief supplies, as the rates for grain freight were

⁶⁸ AKAH 3/3/16.19-20; Hogendorn, *Nigerian Groundnut*, 103-4.

⁶⁹ AKAH 3/3/16.19-20.

⁷⁰ Okediji, "Economic History", 193; Hogendorn, *Nigerian Groundnut*, 99; Colonial Report-Annual, Nigeria Report for 1914, 11.

⁷¹ Watts, *Silent Violence*, 163; A. Adamu, "The Food Economy in Colonial Nigeria: A Study of Food Production and Distribution in Zaria Metropolis c. 1902-1960", (PhD Thesis, Ahmadu Bello University, 2001); A. Adamu, "Government and Food Distribution in Zaria, 1902-1966", *FAIS Journal of Humanities*, 1/4, (2001): 145-156.

lowered.⁷² Lovejoy and Hogendorn pointed out that the famine also had a significant effect on slavery, as some slave owners let their slaves go free because they could not afford to feed them.⁷³

The outbreak of the war in 1914 further jeopardized the groundnut trade, as prices were falling. Farmers refused to sell because of the price fall, and large quantities of the nuts were consumed internally or used for making oil. The groundnut trade suffered closure for months owing to the war.⁷⁴ The German and Austrian firms that had been the main buyers of Nigerian nuts had been ejected from the country with the onset of the war. The cessation of trade with the Germans strongly affected the trade in nuts, as the Germans were the main buyers and carriers as well as processors of the Nigerian nuts. The shortage of steamers during the war led to congestion of stocks of the nuts at the Iddo terminus.⁷⁵ Prices were low and the prices of imported goods went beyond the reach of the common people. Attempts to attract traffic through rate reductions on the transport of groundnuts, palm kernels, and shea nuts did little to improve the situation.⁷⁶ The railway itself faced a severe coal shortage and irregular services.⁷⁷

After about 15 months of trade cessation, the groundnut trade picked up again in late 1915, with prices rising between £4.10s and £6. The price rose again slightly in 1916, reaching a peak of £40 in the early 1920s, which resulted in increased exports, as Table 4.3 indicates. Although prices were lower in the countryside, they were still better than the cotton price. Groundnut export became steady owing to a new demand from Britain. By this time, Britain had started margarine production; hitherto, margarine was processed at Hamburg, as Britain had neither nut-crushing nor margarine plants. By the end of the war in 1918, the industry had become well established in Britain, resulting in demand for margarine, which in turn stimulated a new demand for Nigerian groundnuts.⁷⁸ The groundnut trade was generally remarkable in 1918, but the tonnage from the studied communities suggests otherwise. The annual report itself is problematic, as the purchased figures do not tally with the exported tonnage. As Table 4.3 reveals, groundnut exports were generally steady, with a slump in 1923. In 1924, the trade exceeded the most sanguine expectations owing to the price rise,

⁷² Hogendorn, *Nigerian Groundnut*, 118-9.

⁷³ Lovejoy and Hogendorn, *Slow Death*, 225-6

⁷⁴ Colonial Report-Annual, Nigeria Report for 1914, 8.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 30, 7; Hogendorn, *Nigerian Groundnut*, 126; Okediji, "Economic History", 195-6.

⁷⁶ Colonial Report-Annual, Nigeria, Report for 1915, 7, 21, 31.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 21, 31; Colonial Report-Annual, Nigeria, Report for 1917, 8, 21.

⁷⁸ Okediji, "Economic History", 196-8; Hogendorn, *Nigerian Groundnut*, 126.

which remained high through to the end of the 1920s.⁷⁹ The increased cash from the groundnut trade also stimulated the textile trade, as farmers spent their money on imported cloth, which as the record suggests was purchased at a higher price.⁸⁰ Table 4.3 also indicates that groundnuts were exported from Faiki despite the closure of its station in 1918.

As one of the annual reports indicates, shipment of nuts was constrained by the insufficient capacity of the railway, owing to shortage of locomotives and rolling stock. The railway was stretched and in need of an overhaul.⁸¹ As usual, animals continued to be used in transporting the nuts from remote areas to the stations. The colonial authority also stimulated production by building roads to connect farmers in outlying areas with the rail line. As earlier indicated, the colonial authority had envisaged a coordinated transport system, whereby the roads fed the railway with traffic, but at the same time an effort was made to ensure the roads did not compete with the railway.⁸²

Table 4.3 Groundnut exports in tons, 1916–1924

Year	GimiDabosa	Anchau	Faiki	Dangora	Madobi	Challawa
1916	160	39	420	n.a.	1326	31
1918	126	9	675	626	1236	n.a.
1919	531	n.a.	1500	1508	1626	1
1923	12	3	336	5	1217	14
1924	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	3000	n.a.

Note: n.a. = not available

Sources: PRO 657/7, Nigerian Railway Administrative Report for the year 1916; PRO 657/7, Nigerian Railway Administrative Report for the year 1918; PRO 657/4, Nigerian Railway Administrative Report for the year 1919; NAK 273P/1919; PRO 657/7, Nigerian Railway and Udi Coal Mines Administrative Report for the year ending 31 March 1923; AHAK 3/3/16.

⁷⁹ KSHCB SNP/9/12/1924, Kano Province Annual Report File 635; AHAK 3/3/16, Colonial Report-Annual, Nigeria, Report for 1928, 12; Colonial Report-Annual, Nigeria, Report for 1929, 11, 13; KSHCB 9043 Kano Province Annual Report 1928.

⁸⁰ NAK 273P/1919 SNP 10.

⁸¹ Colonial Report-Annual, Nigeria, Report for 1919, 6.

⁸² NAK SNP7 2322/1912; NAK KanProf 3884A.

Two important developments that took place in the groundnut trade industry at the end of the war, with implications for the studied communities, need highlighting here: first, the change in the composition of the buying firms; and second, the physical penetration of these firms into the studied communities. Prior to the war, the firms were not physically established in the studied areas. The post-war period saw the emergence of Lebanese and Syrian migrants who challenged the prominent role previously played by European firms and Hausa merchants. Some of these migrants had worked as middlemen for the European firms prior to the war. Their awareness of the demand for Nigerian groundnuts from Britain and the profits to be made motivated them to join the trade. Unlike the Europeans, who restricted their activities to the townships, the Syrians and Lebanese operated both in the townships and the countryside and so could determine their buying capacity. They operated in much the same way as the Hausa traders; but unlike the Hausa traders, they were willing to take risks by offering higher prices than the European firms. In addition, they had financial backing and were better organized than the Hausa traders. They also employed some of the Hausa as middlemen or agents.⁸³ The emergence of these newcomers coincided with a period of increased penetration of commercial trading firms into the countryside. The firms were motivated by a desire to tap into the groundnut trade directly at the source. The colonial state also established official trading centres at some of the areas where land was leased to the firms in 1924. For instance, in the Kano area in that year, approximately 129 certificates of temporary and permanent occupancy were granted to trading firms in the countryside, which had increased to 172 in 1930.⁸⁴

When the trading centres were opened in 1924, the firms established buying stations at the more important centres. As Table 4.4 indicates, the firms concentrated in Madobi, Gimi, and Dangora, a factor which accelerated their expansion and popularity. The table shows that Madobi was the only centre with a concentration of European, Lebanese, and Syrian firms, with the latter two being the pioneers.⁸⁵ Some of them had been purchasing groundnuts from the communities through the agency of the Hausa and Yoruba middlemen even before the trading outlets were officially established.⁸⁶

⁸³ NAK KanProf 3884A.

⁸⁴ KSHCB 14686, Kano Province Annual Report for 1930, vol. 1; KSHCB 120P, Kano Province Annual Report for 1921; KSHCB Acc. No. 68.

⁸⁵ KSHCB Acc. No. 68; KSHCB SNP/9/12/1924, Kano Province Annual Report File 635.

⁸⁶ AHAK 3/3/16 Report on the Groundnut Trade in Kano Province, 16.

As the firms became physically established, they employed a number of Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo as well as migrant and immigrant traders as middlemen to purchase the groundnuts for them. A number of firms even extended their buying stations to far-removed centres such as Ikara, Makarfi, Rogo, and Bebeji. By the 1940s, Madobi had become the centre with the highest concentration of trading firms, including indigenous Nigerian firms, making it the most popular railway town between Kano and Zaria (although the number of firms decreased over time).⁸⁷ As the table also indicates, a centre like Likoro was entirely without the presence of commercial firms, a factor which accounted for its decline in importance. Centres like Challawa and Kwankwaso which at one time had trading firms, but the firms closed down because business was not good there. For instance, since the establishment of trading outlets at Challawa, only the BCGA established there, even though no certificate of occupancy was granted. The famous Hausa merchant Alhassan Dantata also had his middlemen permanently stationed there, in addition to establishing buying stations at the other centres. The only firm which established at Kwankwaso closed down in 1933.⁸⁸ The physical presence of the firms and the activity of the middlemen stimulated production and also gave farmers more access to the markets.

Table 4.4 List of trading firms, 1924–1940s

Auchan	Challawa	Dangora	G/bosa	K/kwaso	Madobi	Yako
Niger Properties	BCGA	Niger Properties	Niger Properties	UAC	Niger Properties	Niger Properties
A/Dantata		Mc Ivers	Mc Ivers		W. B. Mc Ivers	GBO
		GBO	GBO		UAC	A/Dantata
		John Holt	John Holt		GBO	
		A/Dantata	A/Dantata		John Holt	
					CFAO	
					A/Dantata	
					M. A. Bugren	
					L. A.	

⁸⁷ NAK ZarProf 5280; KSHCB Acc No. 68; NAK ZarProf MKT/4 vol. 1.

⁸⁸ NAK MLG9117/1929, Kura Emirate Reassessment; KSHCB Acc. No. 68.

					Ambrosini	
					Manaise Brothers	
					Abdul Hussain Saleh	
					S. Raccah	
					Miller Brothers	
					Musa Tahir	
					S. J. Maxwell	
					Michael Nwankwo	

Sources: NAK ZarProf 5280; NAK ZarProf MKT/4 vol. 1; Yusuf, *Impact of the Railway*, 129; Yusuf, “New Approaches”.



United African Company Stores, Dangora



Alhassan Dantata Stores, Auchan



United African Company Stores, Auchan



Alhassan Dantata Stores, Madobi



John Holt Stores, Madobi



United African Company Stores, Madobi

Figure 4.3 Remains of commercial firm stores across the study areas

Sources: Personal collections

However, when the Great Depression set in in the 1930s, the groundnut trade suffered. Although the Great Depression caused prices to fall at abnormal rates, groundnut exports rose—not because the price was attractive, but because farmers needed to raise cash to pay taxes and to maintain the lifestyle they had become accustomed to in the pre-Depression era. As A. G. Hopkins asserted, the farmers’ strategy involved adjustments to the supply of produce.⁸⁹ Moses Ochonu pointed out that farmers sold their crop at a rate lower than its value, leaving them with no reserves for the difficult months preceding the harvest period.⁹⁰ As the evidence indicates, prices and taxes were high, while living conditions deteriorated. The situation was also compounded by locust and hopper attacks which destroyed food crops. In villages where crops other than groundnuts had been grown, there was a complete or partial extension of groundnuts to the exclusion of those crops because, despite the low price, groundnuts could still finance tax payments. It was also an easier crop to grow without imperilling food production. For instance, during the tax assessment in Paki District in 1931, the assessment officer observed, among other things, that large proportions of the lands were under groundnut and food cultivation. Prior to the economic crash, groundnuts, cotton, and sugar cane were “plentiful”. As the price fell, food, groundnuts, and sugar cane stole land previously used for cotton and tobacco cultivation.⁹¹ Also, during an assessment of crop yields at Ma’alikanchi in Ikara District in 1933, it was observed that groundnuts and food crops were mainly grown, as most of the crops were ruined owing to the early cessation of rain.⁹²

Farmers’ conditions deteriorated, and to be able to maintain an average lifestyle they had to produce three times what they had produced in the pre-Depression era. As Table 4.5 indicates, groundnut exports were high despite the price fall. As a result of this deteriorating condition, rural dwellers migrated in search of better livelihoods. Cases of inter-district, forced migration (*tashi*) were widely reported in the district records. The receiving points of the migrants were the railway towns and the tin mines, where the migrants sold their labour in return for cash. Migrant labourers (*yan kwadago*) were listed on the tax lists, which suggests that migrant labour was not only popular but was employed in cash crop

⁸⁹ Hopkins, *Economic History*.

⁹⁰ M. E. Ochonu, *Colonial Meltdown: Northern Nigeria in the Great Depression*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009), 56.

⁹¹ NAK ZarProf 395 Paki District Affairs 1930; NAK ZarProf 1712, Ikara Assessment of Representative of Village, Area 1933–34; NAK ZarProf 5280, Makarfi District Note Book 1943.

⁹² NAK ZarProf 1712; NAK ZarProf 395.

production.⁹³ Cases of embezzlements of tax funds by village and district heads were also common during the period.⁹⁴

Table 4.5 Groundnut exports in tons, 1930–1938

Year	Madobi	Yako	Dangora	GimiDabosa
1930	3,048	723	845	n.a.
1931	3,325	947	914	n.a.
1932/33	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	1,542
1933/4	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	2,053
1935-6	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	1,512
1936-7	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	3,846
1937-8	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	1,239

Note: n.a.= not available

Sources: KSHCB Kano Province Annual Report for 1930; NAK ZarProf 5280, Makarfi District Note Book 1943, Zaria Province Annual Report, 1939–40.

The commercial trading firms also circumvented the groundnut trade by exporting adulterated groundnuts. Most of the nuts tendered for export during the period were adulterated with stones and sand and included beans. Adulteration was a strategy to overcome the economic crunch. The prevalence of the practice, despite appeals by the authorities, led to enforcement of the Groundnut Inspection Regulations No. 37 in 1936. This policy aimed to ensure that the produce exported was of good quality. As the evidence indicates, the regulation was not effective in the studied communities, most especially at Gimi. The quantity involved was not significant; however, it shows the prevalence of the practice. For instance, approximately 15 bags of adulterated groundnuts and cotton were seized in the 1937–1938 season.⁹⁵ In 1938, a storekeeper of John Holt and an agent of GBO were caught with adulterated bags of the nuts at Gimi. Similarly, several bags of adulterated groundnuts were seized in 1939. Another 158 bags of adulterated groundnuts were seized at the premises

⁹³ NAK ZarProf 1712; NAK ZarProf 395; NAK ZarProf MLG 222289.

⁹⁴ KSHCB Acc. 68; NAK ZarProf 5280.

⁹⁵ NAK ZarProf ML 222289.

of Alhassan Dantata at Ikara, while another 14 were seized at the premises of Messrs W. B. MacIver (UAC) at Rogo and Gimi in the same 1939 year.⁹⁶

With the outbreak of World War II, the economy plummeted further. The unfavourable terms of trade and the price decline had effects on farmers. Groundnut prices fell with the onset of the war, picked up in 1944, and fell again in 1946.⁹⁷ Despite the price fall, groundnut exports were high because farmers needed cash to pay taxes. Food prices and taxes were high, while imported goods were scarce. Official propaganda to step up production was revived during the war. For instance, farmers in Ikara District were instructed to cultivate one acre of groundnuts in 1944. A minimum quota of two bags was also set per taxpayer.⁹⁸ The firms also influenced production by paying in excess of the minimum price. Since the firms bought only on quota, they competed among themselves to meet their quotas. Competition was most common at centres like Madobi where the firms concentrated. As the records show, farmers there got a better deal as the Lebanese, the Syrian, the UAC, and the Dantata firms paid in excess of the minimum price.⁹⁹ As usual, the railway motor service and donkey transporters continued to stimulate production by transporting the nuts from remote areas to the stations.¹⁰⁰ The donkey transporters in particular charged higher rates for their services. During the groundnut buying season at Ikara and Anchau in 1943–1944, the firms complained of the difficulty of hiring donkeys, owing to the charges.¹⁰¹

One development of the inter-war period was the reorganization of the groundnut trade. The marketing and export of groundnuts previously handled by the firms was handled by the Groundnut Marketing Board. As with the cotton board, it was established to stabilize prices, protect farmers from exploitation, and invest in research and development projects. The board also gave Nigerians bank guarantees and capital to become LBAs.¹⁰² At first the LBAs were predominantly the European firms who had controlled the trade in the pre-war era. This was modified to accommodate Nigerian entrepreneurs. As the names in Table 4.6

⁹⁶ NAK ZarProf AGR 7 Adulteration of Produce 1916–56.

⁹⁷ NAK ZarProf 3762 vol. I, Groundnut Production 1944–1945; NAK KanProf 6394, Kano Provincial Annual Report 1946–49.

⁹⁸ NAK ZarProf 3762 vol. I; NAK ZarProf 3930 Zaria Province Annual Report for 1945.

⁹⁹ NAK ZarProf 3762.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Dottridge, “Aspects”, 15.

indicate, a number of locals and migrants from the localities were appointed LBAs in the 1940s and 1950s.¹⁰³

The board also influenced production through the establishment of additional buying stations, fixing and announcing prices at the beginning of the farming season so that farmers knew beforehand what the prices would be.¹⁰⁴ The Native Authority also established smaller buying stations, known as buying or scale points, but without trading firms, though the LBAs had scale points there. The buying points served as bulking points in the groundnut trade. They were established 12 to 15 miles away from the buying station so as to protect the former. In the late 1940s, buying points were established at locations such as Makarfi, Kwankwaso, Daburau, and Kura. These buying points became important with the increased importance of road transport in the 1960s and 1970s. The board also invested in road development, to connect distant groundnut areas with the rail line and also to feed the railway with traffic. As with the roads financed by the cotton board, these roads were built and maintained through a special fund allocation to the Native Authority. Unlike the cotton board's efforts, the effect was widely felt because groundnuts were widely grown. As indicated elsewhere, the roads were linked with the Kano–Zaria road, which was converted to an all-season road in the 1950s.¹⁰⁵ The new all-season road did not follow the same route followed by the old Kano–Zaria road; instead, it followed a route previously isolated from the railway.

However, the railway had its own problems. Its active involvement in the war effort subjected it to enormous strains and the need for repairs. Rolling stock and indents ordered during the war did not arrive until the end of the war. The railway workshops were also unable to manufacture the required spare parts locally, thereby causing technical dislocation to the system and resulting in accumulation of groundnuts around the stations. The timber sleepers manufactured at the railway's workshop at Zaria also was discontinued, as the timber was found to be of low quality.¹⁰⁶ The weekly wagon allotment to groundnut shippers during the war did little to clear the huge groundnut pyramids around the stations. Industrial action embarked upon by railway workers in 1945 also aggravated the condition of the railway, by

¹⁰³ NAK ZarProf MKT/4 vol. I, Groundnut Buying Stations and Points.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ KSHCB Acc. No. 68; NAK ZarProf 5280; KSHCB 19/vol; NAK ZarProf 5240, Annual Report for 1953; NAK KanProf 3884A Trunk Road; NAK KanProf 3884 Kano-Zaria Road; NAK RDS/101, Kiru-Bebeji-Zaria Road Link.

¹⁰⁶ NAK ZarProf 3930.

holding up repairs when locomotives could have been taken out for service.¹⁰⁷ As the war came to an end, the situation deteriorated further and the nuts continued to accumulate, as the railway could not discharge its obligations. Groundnuts were crammed into passenger trains, and passengers were transported like goods.¹⁰⁸ Until the introduction of diesel electric locomotives on the Zaria–Kano route in 1954, the nuts continued to accumulate.¹⁰⁹

Table 4.6 List of Licenced Buying Agents at scale points, 1947–1955

Licence Number	Licencee	Firm	Buying Point
001001	Yakubu	P. Z.	Kudan
001002	P. H. Sawyer	P. Z.	Ikara
001003	Bawandozen	P. Z.	Ikara
001004	Mallam Koshe	P. Z.	Kaya
001006	Sule	Isa Makale	Ikara
001007	Abdu Mailafiya	Isa Makale	Ikara
001008	Alhaji Ibrahim Makarfi	G. B. Ollivant	Ikara
001009	Mr. E. C. Opufou	John Holt	Ikara
n.a.	Mr. S. A. Umoru	n.a.	Anchau
n.a.	Mallam Umoru	n.a.	Ikara
n.a.	Mr. T. E. Opufou	n.a.	n.a.
n.a.	Tanimu	P. Z.	Kaya

Note: n.a. = not available

Source: NAK ZarProf MKT vol. I, Groundnut Buying Stations and Points

The groundnut trade picked up at the end of the war owing to demands from Britain, which stimulated a corresponding demand for Nigerian groundnuts. Prices were high and continued to rise through the 1960s, with a corresponding increased export tonnage. The groundnut exports reached their peak in the 1960s and began to decline in the 1970s. Although the figures are not detailed for the most part, Table 4.7 on groundnut exports indicates that exports from the areas remained steady through 1962, with fluctuations every

¹⁰⁷ NAK KanProf 6179 vol. IV Buying Stations and Points; NAK 299/S.3 vol. I Railway Publication 1949–56.

¹⁰⁸ NAK KanProf 6394, Kano Province Annual Report for 1946.

¹⁰⁹ KSHCB 8655/S.1, Annual Report Kano Province 1954.

now and then.¹¹⁰ It is also clear from the record that the groundnut export had reached its limit, as it was interrupted by the Sahelian drought of the early 1970s. The increased wealth from oil exports also shifted government attention from agriculture to the productive sector. The emergence of crushing mills, which had become well established in the 1970s, also meant the disappearance of groundnut from the export list (the nuts were used in the local mills).¹¹¹ The railway also had its own problems, as it was in a decline condition and its role was challenged by the increased importance of road transport. The roads made new centres on the road more popular. The completion of the Kano-Zaria road in the 1960s had repercussions on the studied communities, as the road diverted traffic from the rail line and opened up new areas previously isolated from the railway.¹¹²

Before concluding the section, it is necessary to state that increased cash returns from groundnut trade put more cash at farmers' disposal, which influenced their upward social mobility. Not all farmers prospered, but many invested their money in their children's education, social networks, and building of elaborate houses with more permanent materials. The more prosperous ones invested in landed properties, especially the *soro* type, a rectangular mud house with a flat or round roof.¹¹³ Many also re-roofed their houses with corrugated iron sheeting, the symbol of modernity and prosperity at that time. A survey of Soba, Jere, Ikara, and Kudan districts by L. C. Giles in the 1930s revealed that farmers and traders invested their money in sewing machines, which they hired out to tailors.¹¹⁴

Table 4.7 Groundnut exports in tons, 1945–1961/2

Year	Anchau	Challawa	Dangora	Gimi	Madobi	Yako
1945	493	24	1,810	1,665	5,041	4,354
1946	765	n.a.	2,220	2,872	4,627	4,657
1947	1,673	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1948	573	580	1,652	1,790	2,533	3,115
1949	1,073	n.a.	n.a.	3,151	n.a.	n.a.
1950/1	402	98	1,240	1,456	1,310	1,149

¹¹⁰ Hogendorn, *Nigerian Groundnut*, 148-9.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 131.

¹¹² NAK ZarProf 4957, Zaria Province Annual Report 1951; NAK KanProf 3884A, Trunk Road; NAK KanProf 3884, Kano–Zaria road.

¹¹³ NAK ZarProf 395 Paki District Affairs; NAK ZarProf 5240, Annual Report for 1953.

¹¹⁴ A treadle sewing machine cost between £9 and £11 in 1937—cited in D. Forde, “The North: the Hausa”, in: M. Perham (ed.), *The Native Economies of Nigeria*, vol. 1, (London: Faber, 1946), 119-79, 136.

1951/52	n.a.	632	2,839	n.a.	10,154	1,889
1952/3	n.a.	738	3,097	n.a.	4,112	2,473
1953/4	n.a.	986	2,500	n.a.	12,712	1,966
1954-5	n.a.	561	2,545	n.a.	2,878	2,100
1955-6	n.a.	n.a.	3,116	n.a.	n.a.	2,963
1961-2	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	4,418	n.a.

Note: n.a. = not available

Sources: These figures were compiled from annual reports and the groundnut marketing board records for the period covered in the table.

From the discussion so far, it is evident that the railway was instrumental to the development of the groundnut export trade and that farmers on their own initiative decided to grow groundnuts instead of cotton, the officially favoured crop. The railway influenced groundnut production and trade and also offered farmers better cash returns for their products by guaranteeing them access to the market. As is obvious from the above discussion, the trade started at the initiative of the indigenous traders, who invested their funds, energies, and networks. Unlike cotton, the groundnut trade was popular due to the price and opportunities it offered many people. The railway also opened up access to new sources of groundnuts, but it could not exploit them intensively. This was circumvented by animal transporters. Sustained government investment in access roads also stimulated production, while assuring farmers of better prices. The groundnut trade reached its peak in the 1960s and began to decline in the 1960s.

4.4 Hides and skins production and trade

Hides and skins were another commodity that became important with the completion of the railway. The history of the trade in this commodity is a long one, dating back to pre-colonial times. The popular Moroccan leather, often assumed to have been produced in Morocco, was originally Kano-made. It was called Moroccan leather because it was exported to Europe via Morocco. The trade in this commodity at the time was constrained by weight and distance. Also, not all animals slaughtered were flayed and their skins turned into leather; instead, most were turned into food. At that time, leather was a mere by-product of the more lucrative meat trade. However, the establishment of British rule and the construction of the railway removed

the constraints on the hides and skins trade and provided the vent for moving the commodity over a long distance, while also stimulating production. The conditions in the studied communities supported breeding of livestock, despite the trypanosomiasis endemic in some of the areas.¹¹⁵

The establishment of British rule and the construction of the railway offered the European trading firms an opportunity to capture most of the raw hides previously used locally. As with other trades, the hides and skins trade developed at the initiative of Hausa traders, who ensured the commodity was produced for export. And, as with groundnuts, the commodity did not feature on the government's priority list during the planning of the railway. European firms were not interested in developing the trade, as they thought it was inferior to cotton in terms of cash returns.¹¹⁶ The Hausa traders' awareness of overseas demand for the commodity stimulated its production. Many of them had been involved in the trade since pre-colonial times but lost out to the European firms owing to lack of capital. Their services were indispensable, however, to the firms who relied on them for supplies of the commodity. As A. G. Adebayo pointed out, the trade in hides and skins thrived on cash advances. The practice had the advantage of ensuring the flow of the commodity; however, it also had the tendency to make butchers indebted to the firms.¹¹⁷ Using their own networks and cash or incentive goods provided by the firms, the Hausa traders visited the village markets to purchase raw hides and skins from professional butchers. This is important, because the way and manner in which the hides and skins had been flayed and treated previously, in the traditional way, left marks and blisters on the products, which reduced the quality and value. The colonial authority assisted the trade by improving the quality and value of the product.¹¹⁸

As with groundnuts, the hides and skins did not feature prominently as rail-borne traffic until the World War I period. The wartime demand affected the trade positively, as prices were high throughout the period. Goat skin (the most sought after) prices rose from 8d in 1914 to 20d in 1916 and declined in the 1920s. Prices varied considerably from town to

¹¹⁵ For discussion on the tsetse and trypanosomiasis problem in Northern Nigeria, see for instance T. A. Nash, "The tsetse fly and the trypanosome", *The New Scientist*, (June 1958): 21-34; P. E. Glover, *The Tsetse Problem in Northern Nigeria*, (Nairobi: 1961).

¹¹⁶ A. G. Adebayo, "The Production and Export of Hides and Skins in Colonial Northern Nigeria, 1900-1945", *The Journal of African History*, 33/2, (1992): 273-300; Hogendorn, *Nigerian Groundnut*, 48-9.

¹¹⁷ Adebayo, "Production and Export", 281-6.

¹¹⁸ Adebayo, "Production and Export", 277.

town and tended, as usual, to be much lower in areas far removed from the line. Most of the firms suspended buying in 1919, owing to shipping difficulties.¹¹⁹

Competition among the European firms stimulated production. In the 1920s, prices fell as a result of the post-war economic slump and the glut in export trade. The prices did not recover until the 1940s.¹²⁰ As with the trade in cash crops, animal transporters played important roles in feeding the railway with traffic. Donkeys were employed in transporting the products from remote areas to the stations, which indirectly stimulated production. Although data are not available for the whole period covered in this study, Table 4.8 indicates that the quantities of hides and skins exported rose steadily. The peak of the trade was 1919, with the highest quantity originating from Faiki, a very important commercial centre (despite closure of its station), followed by Gimi and Dangora.

Table 4.8 Hides and skins exports in tons, 1916–1923

Station	1916		1917		1918		1919		1923	
	tons	cwt*	tons	cwt	tons	cwt	tons	cwt	tons	cwt
Likoro	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	3
Gimi	1	2	1	3	19	6	36	8	1	n.a.
Anchau	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	8	3	17	n.a.	10
Faiki	1	7	10	19	n.a.	n.a.	9,945	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Dangora	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	3	10	19	11	14	9
Madobi	2	2	1	11	n.a.	18	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	12
Challawa	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	6	19	19	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Note: n.a. = not available

Sources: PRO 657/4; PRO 6577; NAK SNP 10/273P/1919.

* See footnote¹²¹

¹¹⁹ NAK SNP 10/273P/1919.

¹²⁰ Adebayo, "Production and Export", 281-6.

¹²¹ Cwt is an abbreviation for a hundredweight, a measurement used for weighing agricultural products such as grains and groundnuts. There are 20 hundredweights in one ton.

An important development occurred in the hides and skins industry at the end of the war, as the government began to intervene actively in the production process with the aim of improving its quality and attracting price increases. This intervention led to the introduction of an improvement scheme. The scheme had its origin in the wartime complaints from the buying companies in Britain that hides and skins from Nigeria were poorly flayed and tanned and were adulterated. A large proportion of the hides exported during the war, especially those showing flay marks, were from animals that had died of disease and whose carcass had been allowed to set before flaying. Many of the European firms were implicated in the misconduct. The government was concerned about the situation and wanted to see it improved. The improvement scheme was first introduced in Kano Province in 1928 after several years of campaigning. At a meeting held in Kano to decide the practical methods of achieving the scheme's objectives, the representatives of the Hides and Skins Sub-Committee of the Kano Chambers of Commerce opposed the idea of inspecting the commodity at the point of railing. Concerning the poor flaying techniques and disease, they proposed that butchers should be taught proper methods of flaying and drying and educated in detecting disease lesions. It was also suggested that some means of inspection be put in place to ensure that improper flaying was easily detected.¹²²

The scheme started in Kano City with the training of butchers on the proper methods of flaying and drying. The following year, the butchers taught others in the province and elsewhere. Also, hides flayed under this scheme were marked with letters indicating their point of origin, with an inscription which indicated whether it was properly flayed or not. Provincial administrations from other provinces also sent their officials to Kano to learn the improved methods.¹²³ To ensure compliance with the scheme, an ordinance which prohibited the old style of flaying and drying was enforced, with penalties stipulated for offenders. The ordinance was first implemented in the Kano area, with most of the studied communities falling into line in 1933. Similarly, special markets and drying sheds for flaying and drying of hides and skins were established at Madobi, Gimi, Yako, Likoro, Kura, Makarfi, Kudan, and Hunkuyi in 1934. The scheme prohibited the removal of hides and skins from such markets until they were properly dried. It also empowered veterinary and inspection officials to

¹²² NAK ZarProf AGR7; KSHCB 9043; KSHCB SNP/9/12/1924; KSHCB 123 Kano Province Annual Report for 1921.

¹²³ KSHCB 9043.

inspect the hides and skins at any premises where the buying and packing of the commodity was done.¹²⁴

However, the hides and skins trade was unstable in the 1930s, as prices declined. At the onset of the Great Depression in the 1930s, goatskin prices dropped from 23d in January to 14d in December. The price decline involved a substantial drain on producers' incomes. Despite the price fall, exports were stable as the product was forced on buyers, irrespective of demand and the price fall. Unlike groundnuts, skins and hides could not be kept or hoarded until a price rise. Even if they decided to tan and hoard these products, the price might not be worth the effort; hence, selling at the prevailing rate was better than nothing at all. As usual, donkeys continued to be used in transporting the product to the stations from areas far removed from the line. Detailed figures on export from all the studied communities are not available, except for Gimi (Table 4.9). The table includes figures from the buying centres in Ikara and Makarfi.¹²⁵

Adulteration of the hides and skins was also prevalent during the 1930s, which resulted in prosecution of offenders. Adulteration was a standard strategy to overcome the economic crunch of the time. As A. G. Adebayo pointed out, when prices were low, producers paid little attention to the improved method of flaying and drying.¹²⁶ Most of the defective skins rejected were diverted to the indigenous leather industry.¹²⁷ The hides and skins improvement scheme was frustrated by the combined activities of the middlemen and butchers and the African veterinary officers and the firms. The old habits of removing the skins from the shed before drying continued despite the prohibitions. Whenever a middleman was apprehended for flouting the order, the European firms often frustrated court proceedings by offering to pay the fines to get him off the hook. This practice continued well into the 1940s, when a new method of inspecting the commodity at the point of railing was introduced.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Adebayo, "Production and Export", 292; KSHCB Acc. No. 68; NAK ZarProf 5280.

¹²⁵ KSHCB 438, Annual Report Kano Province for 1930; NAK ZarProf 737 Hides and Skins Zaria Province; NAK ZarProf 5280.

¹²⁶ NAK ZarProf 737; Adebayo, "Production and Export", 284.

¹²⁷ NAK ZarProf 5280; NAK ZarProf AGR7.

¹²⁸ Adebayo, "Production and Export", 292-3.

Table 4.9 Goat hides and skins exports from Gimi Station in pounds weight, 1932–1937

Year	Lbs
1932-33	538
1934	554
1936	1,451
1937	280

Source: NAK ZarProf 5280.

In the 1940s, the leather industry received a boost owing to the wartime import restrictions and scarcity. Although the colonial authority intervened in stimulating production for the war effort, prices were lower to absorb the surplus. As the record generally indicates, demand was high while supply was low owing to the price decline. Most of the commodity was diverted to the indigenous leather industry because the wartime restrictions stimulated demand for a local substitute for imported skins.¹²⁹ As the war came to an end in 1945, hides and skins exports did not improve, and it remained poor through to the 1960s as prices declined.¹³⁰

Although the wartime measures did not lead to increased exports, they resulted in the introduction of point-of-export inspection of the commodity in 1941/2. Produce inspectors were posted to stations, with mandates to inspect railway premises and premises where production and tanning of hides and skins were carried out. They were also mandated to inspect vehicles and animals used in transporting hides and skins and to keep their eyes and ears open for signs of animal diseases.¹³¹ The old methods, whereby the veterinary *malams* instructed butchers on the proper method of flaying and drying, were revisited. The *malams* also helped in repairing drying sheds.¹³² Adebayo pointed out that in spite of the measures and stringent penalties against offenders, contravention of the hides and skins ordinances was rampant, as the butchers certified all sorts of hides and skins as good. The *malams* were also alleged to be taking bribes from butchers. The laws targeted only Africans and overlooked Europeans that encouraged the abuse.¹³³

¹²⁹ NAK KanProf/4737/Hides and Skins Marketing Board.

¹³⁰ NAK ZarProf 3930 Zaria Province Annual Report for 1945; KSHCB VET/10, Hides and Skins Report Kano Province, October-November-December 1955.

¹³¹ KSHCB Acc. No. 68.

¹³² NAK KanProf /4737; NAK ZarProf 3602, Hides and Skins Improvement Scheme-Staff for 1942-3.

¹³³ Adebayo, "Production and Export", 292-3.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the colonial authority focused on stimulating production through monthly inspection of hides and skins markets, building of slaughter slabs and drying sheds, and repairs of existing facilities in the countryside. Centres like Madobi became the headquarters for inspecting hides and skins in southern Kano.¹³⁴ It should be noted that although the quality of the products improved owing to periodic inspections, the prices fluctuated. The emergence of the modern tanning industry in the 1960s also meant that a large proportion of the commodity was tanned locally. The first tanning industry in the North was established in 1949, but it did not become well established until the 1960s.¹³⁵ The increased importance of road transport with the decline of the railway in the 1970s meant that large proportions of the commodity were transported to the factory by road.

From the above, it is clear that the railway had marked effects on the hides and skins trade. The trade in the communities was pre-colonial in origin, but development was constrained by weight and distance, owing to transport difficulties. The railway removed the constraints on the trade and provided a vent for moving the commodity. The combination of demand, better prices, and access to transport released for export much of the leather previously consumed locally. The export of the commodity in appreciable quantities began during World War I, declined in the 1930s, picked up again during World War II, and then declined again after the war. The colonial authority assisted the industry to grow by improving the quality of the commodity, with the aim of attracting higher prices. As indicated above, an attempt to improve the quality of the hides was frustrated by the combined activities of the Europeans and their middlemen and government officials appointed to inspect the commodity. Despite the campaign to stimulate production in the 1950s and 1960s, hides and skins exports dropped, while the quality improved. By the 1960s, more of the hides and skins were processed internally in the emerging tanning industry.

4.5 Development of sugar cane production and trade

Sugar cane is another cash crop which became important with the completion of the railway. As with the cash crops already discussed, it had been grown for decades before the advent of

¹³⁴ KSHCB VET/34 Erection and Maintenance of Slaughter Slabs.

¹³⁵ U. Ezenwe et al., *Technological Capability in the Nigerian Leather Industry: A Firm-Level Case Study*, (Kenya: African Technology Policy Studies Network, 2001), 5.

British rule.¹³⁶ Its cultivation on a large scale, however, was partly a result of cheap transport and better prices. The railway removed some of the geographical constraints and allowed the cane to be transported over a long distance. Compared with other crops, sugar cane is a dry season crop cultivated when agricultural work is generally slack. It was grown mainly for internal consumption, essentially for chewing and for making brown sugar (*mazarkwaila*). This was the case because sugar cane was not exported like the other commodities. It was processed the same day it was harvested, as it cannot be preserved or eaten months after harvest. As with groundnuts and hides and skins, the colonial authority was not interested in developing the industry, but it did support its growth. As with the cotton trade, Kano was the main market for the cane and brown sugar trade.

Sugar cane is a grass plant which belongs to the genus *saccharum*. The crop thrives on a variety of soils and in particular environmental conditions. It is grown in light and heavy clay soils, but thrives most in loamy clay or river floodplains (*fadama*). As the evidence indicates, rich *fadama* are not evenly spread, and the Emir of Zaria, Aliyu Dansidi, is recorded as having forcibly appropriated a large area of farmland for sugar cane production in Likoro.¹³⁷ Temperature also plays a role in the growth, ripening, and sucrose accumulation of sugar cane. The plant thrives most under a low night temperature of 7–10°C and a low day temperature of 18–22°C. The cane naturally ripens after 8–10 months, depending on the variety, altitude, and climate.

Sugar cane requires a plentiful amount of rainfall or water, both of which were readily available across the studied areas, most especially in Makarfi District, which was and is the main sugar cane centre between Kano and Zaria.¹³⁸ In this district, just as in Ikara, sugar cane was next in importance to groundnuts owing to its high cash returns. Its immense popularity was such that it often hindered extensive cotton production.¹³⁹ Compared with the other areas, Makarfi has the most fertile swamp land and is most suited to commercial sugar cane production. An average sugar cane farm in the district measured about 0.125 acres, with a yield capacity of 30,000 lbs per annum. In view of its immense sugar cane production, it was

¹³⁶ A. Busari, *Sugar-Cane and Sugar Industry in Nigeria: The Bitter-Sweet Lessons*, (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2004), 1, 24; N. Davies, *Sugar-Cane: Crop Production and Pest Control*, in: Andrew Speedy (eds) *Developing World Agriculture*, (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1990), 65.

¹³⁷ ZarProf C. 7/1919.

¹³⁸ Busari, *Sugar-Cane*, 35-6, 65-6.

¹³⁹ NAK ZarProf 1712; NAK ZarProf MLG 22289; NAK ZarProf 395; NAK ZarProf 1706; Ayandele, *Nigerian Historical Studies*, 157.

popularly praised (*kirari*) as *Makarfi garin karkafa, garin kara ba dawa* (“Makarfi the town of strong people, the town with sugar cane, but no sorghum”), indicating its importance.

As with cotton, sugar cane production is highly labour-intensive, but its dry season nature influenced its popularity among farmers. The crop did not feature on the government priority list during the planning of the railway; but when the line was completed, demand for sugar cane for chewing and for brown sugar production dramatically increased. Increased production was achieved largely by household and wage labour, although the aristocrat and merchant classes relied on slave and forced labour. As a matter of policy, the colonial authority made efforts to improve the yields of the crop by introducing improved varieties, as the indigenous variety was of low quality and yield. Between 1914 and 1915, no fewer than five different varieties were introduced. For instance, in 1914, the West Indies varieties B. 208, Ba. 376, B. 3,922, B. 6,308, and Ba 6,032 were distributed to farmers. These varieties were popular at the time on account of their size and yields, but fell out of favour as they were said to be too hard to chew. Another variety from Barbados was introduced in 1915.¹⁴⁰

As mentioned earlier, the crop was grown mainly for chewing and for making brown sugar. As with the other crops, the Hausa middlemen purchased the cane directly from farmers. They had no problem convincing farmers to cultivate the cane, as the cash return was attractive. Unlike the other cash crops, there was no standard market for sugar cane, and it was sold at the local markets such as Fillata and Nassarawa. The bulk, however, was consumed in Kano, where demand for chewing sugar was high. During the annual cane buying season, middlemen from Kano always came to purchase the cane and transported it to Kano by train. In places such as Dan Bami and Gwibi, there were sugar cane middlemen who purchased the cane as it stood on the farm, suggesting the trade was lucrative.¹⁴¹ Although detailed data on sugar cane output and rail tonnage are not available, the records indicate that three wagons of sugar cane were shipped to Kano daily from Gimi station in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s.¹⁴² This was in addition to the ones consumed locally and those transported to Kano by donkey by way of its border towns of Fillata and Rogo. As with the groundnut trade, donkeys also played an important role in transporting the cane from farms to markets and stations, from where it was shipped in bulk. It should be noted that besides the bulk of the product sold for chewing, quite a substantial amount was also used for making brown sugar.

¹⁴⁰ Dupigny, *Gazetter of Zaria*, 23, 35, 39; NAK SNP 10/273P.

¹⁴¹ NAK ZarProf 5280; NAK ZarProf MLG 122289.

¹⁴² NAK ZarProf 5280; NAK ZarProf MLG 122289.

The 1920s was good for the sugar cane trade generally, as the cash return was high and the decline in other crop prices saw farmers shifting to its cultivation.¹⁴³

The sugar cane trade also led to the development of the brown sugar industry. This industry developed almost at the same time as the sugar cane trade. The cane was crushed and processed into brown sugar or jaggery (*mazarkwaila*) in a simple mill or machine (*injin mazarkwaila*) powered by horse. The mills were established near sugar cane sources and markets. The technology itself was originally introduced by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) for its Hausa Christian converts in Gimi. Although the archival records date the development to 1916, R. K. Udo suggests it started in 1914, which suggests that the industry profited from a scarcity of white sugar during and immediately after the war. The industry started on a small scale among the Hausa Christian community and became popular over time, as farmers purchased the machines to make sugar for sale.¹⁴⁴ By the 1920s, the industry had become well established and spread to Ikara, Soba, and elsewhere, but Makarfi and Ikara districts were the main sugar centres. In the 1920s, a crushing machine was sold for £10 and for £8 in the 1930s.¹⁴⁵

The 1930s was bad for the sugar cane trade, owing to price and income decline. The general drop in income affected people's purchasing power, and they reduced consumption of the crop—after all, it was a luxury. Farmers reacted by growing food and groundnuts instead of sugar cane. Although many discontinued growing sugar cane, those in Makarfi and Gazara continued because it paid to do so in light of the demand.¹⁴⁶ In 1938, when sugar fetched higher prices, farmers in Makarfi and Gazara did not bother to grow food crops.¹⁴⁷ By this time, the markets for chewing cane and brown sugar had expanded considerably, partly because of expansion in rail services and demand. Sugar cane from Gimi was transported to Hadejia and Nguru in the north-east and as far as Lagos and Port Harcourt in Southern Nigeria by railway.¹⁴⁸

What was a disappointment to sugar cane farmers turned out to be a blessing in disguise to brown sugar makers, as the sugar cane was diverted to the brown sugar industry. Sugar cane cannot be withheld or stored until a price rise, so the cane was processed into

¹⁴³ NAK ZarProf 395; NAK ZarProf MLG 22289; NAK ZarProf 1712.

¹⁴⁴ Dupigny, *Gazetteer of Zaria*, 37; Busari, *Sugar-Cane*, 1; Udo, *Geographical Regions*, 124, 163,

¹⁴⁵ NAK ZarProf 1706; NAK ZarProf MLG 122289.

¹⁴⁶ NAK ZarProf 395; NAK ZarProf MLG 22289; NAK ZarProf 1712.

¹⁴⁷ NAK ZarProf 5280.

¹⁴⁸ NAK ZarProf 3296 vol. II Sugar Production 1943-1954.

brown sugar. Kano continued to be the main market for sugar, as it was for sugar cane. The industry also attracted new entrants, as both farmers and non-farmers invested in the trade, thereby contributing to its expansion. The awareness of the cash returns on sugar attracted many people into the trade. In the 1930s, there were no fewer than 45 sugar mills in Makarfi District alone. As the records indicate, sugar mills had spread to places such as Richifa and Kargi in Soba District and Wusasa. The Niger Company also made profits on importing the machines for sale.

Three important developments occurred in the sugar industry which are worth mentioning here. First, many people (both farmers and non-farmers) entered the brown sugar trade. As noted above, awareness of the cash returns on the trade attracted them. Second, there was the emergence of what may be termed sugar industrialists, with more than one mill. For instance, the Wusasa family in Zaria established mills at centres such as Nassarawa (in Makarfi District) and Kargi and Richifa (both in Soba District). The popular produce trader in Makarfi, Alhaji Ibrahim Makarfi, had two mills. Malam Abdu of Ikara had two, which increased to nine in the 1940s. Third, there was the emergence of larger mills (though few in number) powered by horses, different from the simple technology in use at the start of the trade. In this type of mill, the sugar crushing was done by three heavy rollers drawn by a horse. The juice from the cane was trapped and collected in a receptacle which was let into the ground, with the machine standing on the ground and held in position by long pegs or spikes. When the juice had been collected, it was boiled until a solid mass of brown sugar was formed. Powering the machine by horse enabled the sugar makers to crush cane as simply as possible while saving time.¹⁴⁹

In the 1940s, sugar cane production and trade witnessed an enormous boom, owing to the wartime scarcity. The scarcity of white sugar stimulated a demand for brown sugar. Sugar makers responded to the situation by charging higher prices for their product. The wartime exigency required brown sugar makers to assist Britain in the war effort by supplying sugar to the army. For instance, sugar makers in Makarfi and elsewhere in Zaria Province were compelled to supply 20 tons of sugar fortnightly to the army. Since the price offered by the army was lower, sugar makers flouted the order by selling to Kano traders, who offered better prices. For instance, of the 20 tons of sugar requisitioned from Makarfi District for the first

¹⁴⁹ NAK, ZarProf 1706; NAK ZarProf MLG 22289.

week of February 1944, only 12 tons were supplied. Even the district and village headmen flouted the order. The threat of prosecution against defaulters did not deter them.¹⁵⁰

The colonial state assisted the industry to grow sugar during wartime. Early in 1941, the Zaria Native Authority advanced loans to sugar cane farmers and sugar makers with the aim to expand production.¹⁵¹ The authority also imported crushing machines and distributed them to farmers and non-farmers on loan. Large numbers of the machines ordered during the war were delayed, owing to the wartime restrictions. By 1942, brown sugar began to be produced in southern Kano, as some crushing mills operated there.¹⁵² Owing to increased demand for the product, sugar makers were also given practical lessons on how to make crystal sugar at the Centrifuge Centre in Gimi. While the war lasted, the sugar cane and brown sugar industry expanded and reached its widest markets. Although figures are not available on sugar cane and sugar sales and tonnage, the Agricultural Officer of Zaria Province recorded in 1946 that the annual sugar cane transported to Kano stood at 1,000 tons per annum.¹⁵³ The sugar industry also supplied over 300 tons of sugar to the army in 1943–1944, in addition to the quantities sold to Kano.¹⁵⁴ As usual, Kano and Nguru continued to absorb the products. In 1946, brown sugar was sold at between 4d and 4½d per pound and in 1949 at between 4d and 6d per pound.¹⁵⁵ Brown sugar was also exported as far as the French Territory.¹⁵⁶ As the records suggest, most of the crushing machines that were distributed after the war were provided with the intention of undermining Makarfi's control over the sugar trade.

As the war came to an end, brown sugar was still in great demand, as scarcity of white sugar and high prices continued to stimulate production. In 1946, the Resident of Zaria Province reported that the increased demand for brown sugar imposed upon the industry a demand which could not be met at the lower prices offered by the army. The market for brown sugar in Nigeria meanwhile had continued to expand. As the Resident commented, “sugar is now found in all towns and village markets as far as Maiduguri and Sokoto, and it is

¹⁵⁰ NAK ZarProf 3296 vol. II; NAK ZarProf 3930 Zaria Province Annual Report for 1945; Busari, *Sugar-Cane*, 1.

¹⁵¹ NAK ZarProf 3296 vol. II.

¹⁵² NAK KanProf 6991/S.5.

¹⁵³ NAK ZarProf 3296 vol. vol. II.

¹⁵⁴ NAK ZarProf 3930.

¹⁵⁵ NAK ZarProf 3930; NAK KanProf 6394, Kano Province Annual Report for 1946–49.

¹⁵⁶ NAK ZarProf 3296 vol. II.

unlikely that any can be purchased unless the full local market price is paid”.¹⁵⁷ Between 1 November and 1 August in the 1947/8 season, approximately 5,000 tons of sugar cane were exported from Zaria Province, with 1,925 tons exported to Kano from Gimi, while 1,139 tons of brown sugar was exported to Kano.¹⁵⁸ In a survey of sugar cane farms in Makarfi District in 1948, it was observed that some 5,000 acres of land had been put under sugar cane production. The increased prices of between 4d and 6d per pound stimulated production, and farmers in the district did not bother to grow food crops because the sugar cane price was so high.¹⁵⁹ Expansion in sugar cane production continued to be ploughed into the brown sugar industry. By 1948, there were 54 sugar crushers in Makarfi District, each capable of producing about 1,350 tons of brown sugar. The number of crushers had increased to 90 in 1949.¹⁶⁰

It appears that the sugar industry reached its peak in the late 1940s, with diminishing returns on both sugar cane and brown sugar production. Although demand for sugar cane was still high, the limiting factor was farm fertility, with yield per acre being extremely low. In 1948, it was reported that about 60% farmers’ manure in Makarfi District was used on sugar cane farms. Fertilizers were unknown to farmers until the 1950s, and even then it took time before they began to make use of them. The sugar cane was also plagued by diseases, which reached a disturbing level in the 1950s with fungus and red rot diseases ruining the crops.¹⁶¹ As with sugar cane, demand for brown sugar was high, but the limiting factor was the shortage of fuel wood for boiling jaggery, which led to a decline in production. Colonial policies against wood felling also contributed to the shortage. During the Emir of Zaria’s visit to Gimi and Makarfi in the late 1940s, the complaint he heard from sugar makers was that fuel wood was scarce.¹⁶²

By the 1950s, the sugar industry was in a critical situation, as many of the mills were bankrupt. For instance, of the more than 238 crushers operating in Zaria Province, only 190 were operating in January–February 1953.¹⁶³ As the evidence from Makarfi and Soba District indicates, many of the crushers were in debt to the government and could hardly repay their

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ NAK ZarProf 5280.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.; NAK ZarProf 3296 vol. II.

¹⁶¹ NAK ZarProf 3296 vol. II; NAK ZarProf PLT/4 Makarfi District Affairs; NAK ZarProf 5240, Annual Report for 1953; NAK ZarProf 4708 Zaria Province Annual Report 1949.

¹⁶² NAK ZarProf PLT/4.

¹⁶³ NAK ZarProf 5240, Annual Report for 1953; NAK ZarProf 4708 Zaria Province Annual Report 1949.

loans to the Agricultural Department. The brown sugar industry carried on in that manner up to the period of Nigeria's independence.¹⁶⁴ The emergence of modern sugar mills in the country in the 1960s competed with the brown sugar industry. Although a plan to establish a modern mill in Makarfi was mooted as early as the 1940s, it was dropped as it was thought that the time had not matured for such a development. The thinking in official circles at the time was that the industry might not be able to compete with jaggery makers for sugar cane.¹⁶⁵ Z. A. Bonat has pointed out that the plan was thwarted by the combined efforts of the UAC and John Holt firms because they profited from importing sugar cane crushers.¹⁶⁶

As the discussion above suggests, the railway was instrumental in the development of the sugar cane and brown sugar trade. The development of the trade was a result of the cheap transport provided by the railway, as well as higher demand and better prices. Unlike the other crops, sugar cane was not exported from the colony; it was consumed internally in the form of chewing cane and for making brown sugar. As is obvious from the discussion, the sugar cane and brown sugar trade developed almost at the same time, and the demand for sugar cane boosted the brown sugar industry. Although the brown sugar technology was introduced by outsiders, people quickly appropriated it to transform their lives. Both the sugar cane and brown sugar trade started on a small scale, expanded in the 1920s, and reached their peak in the 1940s, beginning to decline in the 1950s. By the 1970s, refined sugar was competing with brown sugar.

4.6 Food production

This section highlights how subsistence production was sustained and provisioned in the face of increased cash crops production. Contrary to the vent for surplus arguments that cash crops export was achieved without a decline in food production, I attempt to show that cash crops export reduced subsistence food production. And contrary to the claim that the communities between Kano and Zaria were self-sufficient in foodstuffs to the extent of feeding the urban population, I also attempt to show that most of the communities, especially those bordering Kano, were not self-sufficient in foodstuffs. The situation was so bad that whenever famine and drought struck the communities became vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition. Although

¹⁶⁴ NAK ZarProf 3296 vol. II.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Z. A. Bonat, "Colonialism and the Destruction of the Local Industrial System: a case study of Zaria Provinces 1902-1945", *Savannah*, 9/2, (1988): 6-23, 21.

they tried to produce enough to sustain their household requirements, this was never sufficient and they had to rely on traders. The tendency across the studied communities, including those deficient in foodstuffs, was to sell their surplus reserves because of the price.

I argue that British colonialism entailed many disruptions in the prevailing relations of production in the countryside. The colonial economy was founded on cash crops production. The colonial authority introduced taxes and forced cultivation of cash crops, and it allowed European firms to extract the crop. Since the colonial authority abolished slavery, land accumulation, and plantation agriculture, production was largely household-based. Although the aristocrat and merchant classes relied on slave labour, production was generally based on family labour. Production under conditions of household and limited wage labour reduced subsistence production. The existence of fulltime crafts across the studied communities also negatively affected household sufficiency in food. The monetization of the economy made rural producers vulnerable to price fluctuations, unequal terms of trade, and weather fluctuations, and yet the colonial authority did not have an effective relief system.

From 1913 onward, the studied communities' sufficiency in foodstuffs was constrained by cash cropping and weather fluctuations. Increased cash returns from cash crop exports and the need for cash to pay taxes drew rural dwellers into cash cropping, which resulted in contraction of the acreage under food cultivation. Although farmers tried to produce sufficient food for domestic requirements, it was not sufficient. The first food crisis following the start of the export trade occurred within the context of a cooking oil shortage. The high price of groundnuts above other crops in 1913 saw farmers selling their stocks, including the reserves meant for cooking and lighting. The shortage was quickly resolved by resort to shea butter. By the 1913/14 season, food was running short. The rainfall in that year was extremely low, and too much land had been devoted to groundnuts. The result was famine conditions. By the middle of 1914, the food shortage was acute, with prices being at famine levels, and the domestic reserves were not sufficient. Between May and June 1914, corn was sold at 5d per pound as against 2d a pound in the previous years. There was a general condition of hunger, and the government response was ineffective, as the relief materials ordered arrived late. Domestic food requirements were serviced by the Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo food traders as well as the European firms, but the consignment arrived late. The existence of non-food producing southern migrants across the localities also meant that they contributed to the food crisis. The groundnut-exporting belt—unlike the cocoa zone of south-western Nigeria—did not have food-producing migrants. Their food requirements were partly serviced by the southern food traders, who also shipped foodstuffs from the

communities (see Appendix 1). In Kano Emirate, the mortality rate was high as a result of this food crisis.¹⁶⁷

The food shortage continued well into wartime, as the wartime staple food requisition sapped domestic food reserves.¹⁶⁸ Food prices were high, and rural dwellers had to provision for food from traders. Attempts to establish district grain reserves during the war were abandoned. Notwithstanding the impression from the records that food was plentiful, the evidence indicates that cereal prices were higher and the demand was higher than supply. Farmers sold their food reserves because of the high price. When the corn harvests failed in 1917 and 1918 owing to drought and “superabundance” of rain, farmers had to buy foodstuffs at an inflated price.¹⁶⁹

When the war ended, food requisition was abolished, but prices were still high. Farmers were encouraged to increase food acreage, but the high price of groundnuts influenced them to grow the nuts at the expense of food crops. They continued to produce for domestic requirements, but it was not enough, as production was household-based.¹⁷⁰ As the record indicates, the foodstuffs trade in Gimi, Makarfi, and Anchau was controlled by the Niger Company. Early in 1919, the company purchased 28 tons of corn in Gimi at ½d per 1b. By the time the price rose to ¾d per pound in the middle of the year, it discontinued buying. As the record also indicates, the Hausa and Yoruba traders were buying foodstuffs and transporting them to the tin mines on the Jos Plateau, using animal transport because transportation by railway was too costly, there being no through connection. It does not appear that producers got value for their produce, as they were underpaid. In order to prevent producers from exploitation, a by-law was enforced to prohibit buying produce outside the official market.¹⁷¹

The tension in domestic food sufficiency assumed disturbing proportions in the 1930s, owing to income decline, food price hikes, and locust and hopper invasions which destroyed farm crops. A *mudu* (bowl) of corn was sold for between 2d and 4d in 1931, as against 1d in 1930/31. The implication is that farmers stepped up production to raise cash for taxes. They

¹⁶⁷ Hogendorn, *Nigerian Groundnut*, 101, 117-9; Okediji, “Economic History”, 193-4; Watts, “Brittle Trade”, 77-79; B. Shenton and M. Watts, “Capitalism and Hunger in Northern Nigeria”, *Review of African Political Economy*, 15/16, (1979): 57-8; Dupigny, *Gazetteer of Zaria*, 34; NAK SNP10/175P/1913.

¹⁶⁸ Adamu, “Food Economy”, 160; Dupigny, *Gazetteer of Zaria*, 38.

¹⁶⁹ NAK ZarProf, 273P/1919, Zaria Province Annual Report no. 74 for half year ending 30th June 1919; NAK ZarProf, 273/1919, Zaria Province Report no. 74 for half year ending 30th June 1919.

¹⁷⁰ PRO 657/7; PRO 657/4.

¹⁷¹ Dupigny, *Gazetteer of Zaria*, 38.

sold not only their cash crops but foodstuffs as well, a situation which made them vulnerable to hunger, forcing many to migrate.¹⁷² The renewed demand for foodstuffs for the tin mines during the Great Depression era complicated the domestic food insufficiency.¹⁷³ Food prices were generally high. L. C. Giles, in his survey of Soba, Jere, Kudan, and Ikara districts in the late 1930s, revealed that a sack of grain was sold for between 8d and 3s.¹⁷⁴

The outbreak of the war in the 1940s further attenuated domestic food sufficiency, as the wartime measures required the colony to assist Britain in the war effort. The application of wartime policy marked a huge withdrawal of labour, food, and cash crops from the countryside for the army and the tin mines. The wartime food requisition placed enormous pressure especially on rural producers, further reducing domestic sufficiency. For instance, in 1943 the colonial authority requisitioned 3,330 tons of corn from Zaria Province. This was in addition to a fortnightly 50 tons of brown sugar, Irish potatoes, and onions requisitions from Makarfi District, where some of the studied communities fall. The locust and hopper invasions and famine that occurred during the war also upset food prices. Sales and movement of foodstuffs across provincial boundaries were also prohibited. As if the authority envisaged a price hike, it enforced a price control at the onset of the war, prohibiting private sales of corn and limiting the number of bags an individual could keep.¹⁷⁵

Faced by food scarcity, the southern railway workers at Challawa, Kwankwaso, Madobi, Yako, and Dangora complained of hunger.¹⁷⁶ These workers left written letters which enable us to locate their voices. Chima Korieh pointed out that complaint letters are tools for understanding interactions within colonial settings.¹⁷⁷ As the letters indicate, staple foods like gari (a local staple food made from cassava), yam, palm oil, fish, and agidi (made from corn starch), as well as imported white sugar and tea were scarce across the areas. Unlike their counterparts in the urban centres, the workers in these areas did not benefit from the wartime permits required to purchase or import their own food.¹⁷⁸ Although the railway authority had permits to import gari for its staff, those in the countryside were not covered by

¹⁷² NAK ZarProf 1712; NAK ZarProf 395; NAK ZarProf 5280; KSHCB MLG 16490/1932, Kumbotso District Kano Emirate Reassessment; NAK KanProf 2469, Kiru District Revision of Assessment 1928-1938.

¹⁷³ Watts, "Brittle Trade", 80-83; Shenton and Watts, "Capitalism and Hunger", 59.

¹⁷⁴ Smith, *Economy*, 136.

¹⁷⁵ Adamu, "Government and Food", 14-50; NAK ZarProf 3296 vol. II; Watts, "Brittle Trade", 83.

¹⁷⁶ NAK KanProf 5467, Railway Employee Complaints of Short Food Supply; NAK KanProf 6033, Provision of Passes on the Railway; KSHCB Acc no. 68.

¹⁷⁷ C. J. Korieh, "'May It Please Your Honor': Letters of Petition As Historical Evidence In An African Colonial Context", *History in Africa*, 37, (2010): 83-106.

¹⁷⁸ NAK KanProf 5467; NAK KanProf 6033.

the permit. The food scarcity offered opportunities to food traders who circumvented the situation by selling at wartime rates.¹⁷⁹ After the war ended, the grain requisition and ban on food movement was abandoned in 1947, but food prices still remained high.¹⁸⁰ Increased demand for Nigerian cash crops in the post-war era continued to compete with domestic requirements for food. When famine reappeared in the late 1940s, the colonial authority renewed its determination to establish grain reserves, but this intention was not implemented until the late 1950s.¹⁸¹

The outbreak of the Civil War in the 1960s further upset domestic food sufficiency, as the inter-regional trade in foodstuffs was affected by transport difficulties. The Sahelian famine and the government's neglect of agriculture in the 1970s complicated the situation. Increased wealth from oil exports in the post-independence era shifted government attention from agriculture to the productive sector. By the end of the 1970s, the food situation in the country had worsened to such a point that the government was importing food to feed the population. For instance, in 1970–1978, food imports into the country increased by 700%, while real food output declined by 1.5% per annum.¹⁸² The transformation of the urban centres by industrial activities also drew many rural dwellers into wage labour in the cities, with serious consequences for agriculture.¹⁸³

As highlighted above, domestic self-sufficiency in staple foodstuffs was constrained by cash crop production and ecological factors. This challenges the vent surplus claim that cash crops export was achieved without a decline in food. Although farmers tried to produce as much as possible, this was not always enough because the basis of production was household- and not plantation-based. Production under a condition of household labour and limited wage labour reduced food production, as the producers tended to reduce food production to avail of every price rise, an action which made them vulnerable to hunger and famine. Also, the colonial authority did not have a strong relief mechanism, although it intervened in food supplies during the two world wars. Contrary to the claim that the communities were self-sufficient in food, it has been shown that they relied mostly on food traders who circumvented the situation to their own advantage. As the discussion suggests, the existence of non-food producing southern migrants across the communities also meant

¹⁷⁹ NAK KanProf 5467; NAK Prof 6033; NAK KanProf 5467.

¹⁸⁰ Adamu, "Government and Food", 149-50; Adamu, "Food Economy", 173-74; NAK ZarProf 3296 vol. II; Watts, "Brittle Trade", 85.

¹⁸¹ Adamu, "Food Economy", 157-8.

¹⁸² Watts, "Brittle Trade", 96-103.

¹⁸³ Ibid.; Dottridge, "Aspects", 34-35.

enormous contraction in the local food sufficiency. As these migrants did not farm, their food requirements were serviced by southern food traders, who also extracted foodstuffs from the communities for sale in the South.

4.7 Conclusion

As the foregoing analyses indicated, the railway was built with the aim of carrying cotton, but, surprisingly, it activated other crops not contemplated during the planning and construction process. The arrival of the railway stimulated production and assured farmers of better prices for their produce. Of the many types of produce exported from the localities, groundnuts were the most popular in term of earning cash and employment generation. Contrary to the well-established claim that cotton was exported from some of the communities immediately upon the completion of the rail line, the chapter demonstrated that exports of cotton from the communities were not as significant as previously assumed, owing to the low price and the fact that the crop had always been grown for use in the indigenous textile industry. While it did become popular as time went by, the crop did not feature on rail-borne traffic lists until the 1920s, and it was not as significant as groundnuts. Increased production was achieved largely by a combination of household, forced, and slave labour.

The railway also stimulated production in distant areas but could not intensively exploit these areas, as it was circumvented by animal transporters who exploited the situation to their own advantage. The colonial authority also stimulated production in such areas by continuously building roads to feed the railway with traffic. This was so because a railway without roads is useless. When the marketing boards were established in the 1940s, they also invested in road development, with the aim of stimulating production. The roads became more important in the 1970s, when road transport became popular. As the analyses have revealed, right from the advent of the export trade the railway could not cope with the volume of traffic, which resulted in accumulation of groundnuts at rail stations. Until the introduction of diesel electric locomotive on the Kano–Zaria route in the 1950s, the nuts continued to accumulate. As the chapter also suggests, the much talked about groundnut pyramid, previously assumed to be a result of surplus production, was in fact a result of transport difficulties.

The chapter also shows that intensive cash cropping reduced domestic self-sufficiency in food. Contrary to the vent for surplus claim that increased production was achieved without reduction in food production, we have seen that cash cropping did indeed lower food

production to such an extent that, on occasion, there were famines. Colonial policies such as taxes and forced production of cash crops also reduced food production, which made producers vulnerable to price falls and weather fluctuations. The claim that the communities were sufficient in foodstuffs to the extent of feeding the urban populations is also misleading, as most of the communities were not sufficient in foodstuffs, much less capable of feeding the urban populace. This was because production was household- and not plantation-based. Although the aristocrat and the merchant classes relied on slave and forced labour, production was otherwise generally household-based. Farmers always tried to produce enough to satisfy domestic requirements, but this was not always sufficient. The government also did not have an effective relief mechanism, which made producers vulnerable to famine and drought and exposed them to the mercy of grain traders who used the situation to their advantage.

As the chapter also indicates, the export trade reached its peak in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s depending on the crop, and it went on to decline into the 1970s. The diversification of the economy following an oil-based wealth in the 1970s shifted priority from produce to oil export. The emergence of modern industries in the post-independence era also meant that most of the produce exported previously was processed internally in the emerging industries.