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Yusuf, S.T.

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Author: Yusuf, Shehu Tijjani

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CHAPTER 6: THE RAILWAY AND CRIMINALITY

6.1 Introduction

The advent of British colonialism and its transport innovation was marked by critical disruptions in existing social relations of production in Northern Nigeria. Following the establishment of British rule, the colonial authority focused on expanding the economy, with the aim of promoting trade and extracting raw materials for the metropolitan industries. To achieve these imperial goals, the colonial authority monetized the economy and abolished the taxes under the Sokoto Caliphate, replacing them with new ones. In order to make people produce for British industries, the colonial authority introduced policies which dispossessed them of their right to use land and the resources therein and forced them to produce cash crops and minerals, which in the long run turned them into wage labourers.

Under the Sokoto Caliphate, all land was communally held and kept in trust by the Emir. The British abolished the tradition by taking control of all land and allocated it to European commercial interests. In addition, almost from the start, the new tax regime made the production of raw materials and the necessity for wage labour a precondition for obtaining cash. In the ensuing socio-economic instability, the colonial authority also implemented an import policy which flooded the markets with European manufactured goods, with the aim of dislodging the indigenous industries. The advent of the railway, most especially its role in the penetration and distribution of manufactured goods into the hinterland, indirectly accelerated the decline of indigenous industries, in the long run forcing local craftsmen out of business.

This socio-economic instability eroded the material conditions of many in the countryside. People reacted in different ways, including engaging in criminality. Different types of crime, such as theft, burglary, and highway robbery, sprang up with the establishment of British rule.¹ The advent of the railway, with its attendant opportunities, bred new crimes and provided platforms for criminals to operate.² In this regard, rural

¹ A. Christellow, *Thus Ruled Abbas: Selected Cases from the Records of the Emir of Kano Judicial Council*, (East Lansing: Michigan University Press, 1994), and "Property and Theft in Kano at the Dawn of the Groundnut Boom", *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, XX, (1987): 237-243; NAK SNP7/950/1911, Zaria Provincial Report Annual; NAK SNP7/957/1912, Zaria Province Report, Annual, 1911.

² NAK SNP7/950/1911; NAK SNP7/957/1912.

dwellers, particularly blacksmiths, reacted by stealing railway keys and sleepers from the rail lines. Those predisposed to banditry reacted by robbing trains. Frederick Engels asserted that theft is the most primitive form of protest and that it is caused by poverty.³ It is a form of protest and reaction to an established order, as it violates the law.

This chapter looks at how the railway bred criminality such as iron theft from the rail line, provided a platform to banditry and train robbers, and the attempts by the colonial authority to combat these crimes. The chapter argues that the crimes were reactions to the socio-economic disruptions brought by the advent of colonialism and its transport innovation. It also argues that the prevalence of these crimes was due to the existence of large markets for stolen goods.

6.2 Theft of railway iron

Thefts of keys (*makuli*)⁴ and sleepers (*sikwati*)⁵ from the railway lines were some of the crimes which sprang up with the advent of the railway. Many blacksmiths and railway labourers in the studied communities made a dishonest living by stealing the iron. The crime flourished on the rail lines throughout the North and so was not peculiar to the studied communities alone. Sometimes the keys and sleepers were removed from the rail lines in a way that compromised the safety of oncoming trains. At times, the keys came loose from the tracks of their own accord and were ripe for the picking.

The appeal of theft was high, as iron was scarce and the demand for it was high. The material quality of the keys (the fact that they were made from iron and not copper) and sleepers (made from wood or concrete) made them particularly susceptible to theft. Iron was required for household and agricultural implements but was scarce in the countryside. In order to compensate for the scarcity, blacksmiths and their associates resorted to stealing iron from the rail lines. The theft was widespread both on the main and the branch lines in the North, causing loss of revenue to the railway authority. This was an infrastructure that was

³ Cited from D. Crummey, "The Great Beast", in: D. Crummey (ed.), *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa*, (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 1986), 1-29, 3-4; W. Freund, "Theft and Social Protest Among the Tin Miners of Northern Nigeria", *Radical History Review*, 26, (1986): 68-86; T. Falola, "Theft in Colonial Southwestern Nigeria", *Africa*, 50/1, (1995): 1-24.

⁴ "Keys" are the metal bolts or rivets that secured the track and the sleepers together. See: P. A. Rogers, "Hausa Blacksmiths"; R. W. Harms et al. (eds), *Path Toward the Past: African Historical Essays in Honor of Jan Vansina*, (Atlanta GA: African Studies Association Press, 1994), 371-393, 391 (endnote no. 4).

⁵ A "sleeper" is the foundation or iron on which the track is laid at a perpendicular angle (i.e. a tie or cross-tie). On the Nigerian railways, these sleepers were made of iron rather than concrete and wood, owing to the effects of the tropical environment on organic material. See: Rogers, "Hausa Blacksmiths", 391.

built for development purposes, but somehow it was appropriated in unexpected ways. Attempts to stem the theft through moral persuasion, policing, and prosecutions energized the perpetrators even more.

Despite the sustained attention the theft elicited throughout the colonial period, it has attracted very little attention in the literature. Of the extant literature, only one so far has concentrated on the theft, though it misinterpreted the real situation in regard to iron in the countryside.⁶ The rest of the literature mentions it only in passing,⁷ and even the mainstream literature on iron-working has ignored the phenomenon.⁸ This theft of iron needs to be understood because, as the literature generally suggests, poverty and unemployment were its causes.⁹

British colonialism dealt a fatal blow to the iron-working crafts. Right from the outset, the colonial authority methodically stripped the indigenous iron workers of their rights to prospect for tin and ore and granted the rights to European mining companies. This development had devastating repercussions for the rurally based mining and smelting crafts. The miners and smelters could neither mine nor smelt, nor even fell wood, as they had previously done. Under the new regime, they required a licence to mine and to fell wood, a licence which many of them could not afford. Many smelting sites closed down as a consequence.¹⁰ The colonial authority also flooded the markets with imported iron and scrap, which “forced” people to depend on them, in the long run dislodging the indigenous smelted iron. These policies had repercussions not only on rural mining and smelting, but also on the smithing craft, which relied on smelted iron.

In the nineteenth century, mining, smelting, and the associated markets for fuel wood were rurally based. Urban smiths did not mine or smelt; they relied on rural markets for raw materials. At the close of the century, smelting was confined to a few centres close to raw materials (i.e. iron ore deposits, fuel wood, water supplies, and clay for building furnaces),

⁶ Rogers, “Hausa Blacksmiths”.

⁷ Fika, *Kano Civil War*, 204-5; M. I. Mukhtar, “The Decline and Collapse of Indigenous Iron Industries in Northern Nigeria C. 1903-1989”, being a Paper Presented at the Workshop on Iron Smelting and Smiting in Northern Nigeria, organized by the Kano State History and Culture Bureau, Kano, at Daula Hotel Banquet Hall: (1990), 1-17; N. Abubakar, “Traditional Iron Industry in Nigeria: Beyond the Glorification of an Indigenous Technology”, being a Paper Presented at Workshop on Iron Smelting and Smiting, organized by the History and Culture Bureau, Kano, at Daula Hotel Banquet Hall: (1990), 1-16; Jaekel, *Nigerian Railway*, vol. 3, 348-49; Ochonu, *Colonial Meltdown*.

⁸ Jaggat, *Blacksmiths of Kano*.

⁹ Rogers, “Hausa Blacksmiths”; Mukhtar, “Decline and Collapse”; Abubakar, “Traditional Iron Industry”.

¹⁰ Rogers, “Hausa Blacksmiths”; Mukhtar, “Decline and Collapse”; R. A. Cline-Cole, “Political Economy, Fuel Wood Relations and Vegetation Conservation: Kasar Kano, Northern Nigeria, 1850-1915”, *Forest and Conservation History*, 38/2, (1994): 67-78.

owing to the declining raw materials which faced the industry at the time. Despite the declining raw materials, the smithing craft carried on in this manner until the arrival of the British.

The advent of British colonial rule undermined rural mining and smelting and reversed the existing arrangements.¹¹ By the 1920s, rural mining and smelting had disappeared in most places, though they continued to flourish in some enclaves in altered forms. The advent of the railway, especially its role in distributing iron and scrap, indirectly accelerated the decline of the indigenous mining and smelting. The iron brought by the railway did not circulate widely in the countryside. Although its arrival was a positive development, it benefited only the urban smiths, whose location on the rail line gave them advantaged access to new sources of iron.

This differential access to new iron and the consequent scarcity in the countryside forced the miners and smelters out of business and led many of them to try out new livelihoods altogether. For many rural blacksmiths, this entailed a critical adjustment to their livelihood, and this included “forced” reliance on imported iron or scrap and stealing from the rail lines to compensate for the scarcity, despite the fact that the iron was not of a high quality as the indigenous smelted iron. As the literature generally suggests, the demand for European iron was as a result of “iron hunger”,¹² which ruined many rural miners and smelters, as well as blacksmiths.

Opinion differs on how far the European manufactured goods delivered by the railways competed with indigenous substitutes. Anthony Hopkins asserted that the penetration of European manufactured goods had different implications for the indigenous crafts.¹³ Studies on the indigenous crafts in Ilorin by Ann O’Hear indicate that the bead craft was obliterated, the male weaving craft declined, and the pottery craft expanded and reached its widest market, despite competition with imported substitutes.¹⁴ Akin Mabogunje and A.

¹¹ Rogers, “Hausa Blacksmiths”; Mukhtar, “Decline and Collapse”.

¹² C. L. Goucher, “Iron is Iron Till It Is Rust: Trade and Ecology in the Decline of West Africa Iron Smelting”, *The Journal of African History*, 22/2, (1981): 179-189; L. M. Pole, “Decline or Survival? Iron Production in West Africa from the Seventeen to the Twentieth Century”, *Journal of African History*, 23/4, (1982): 503-513; E. W. Herbert, *Iron, Gender and Power: Ritual of Transformation in African Societies*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Rogers, “Hausa Blacksmiths”; Mukhtar, “Decline and Collapse”; S. T. Yusuf, “Stealing from the Railways: Blacksmiths, Colonialism and Innovation in Northern Nigeria”, in: Jan-Bart Gewald, Andre Leliveld and Iva Pesa (eds), *Transforming Innovations in Africa: Explorative Studies on Appropriation in African Societies*, (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 275-296, and “The Incidences of Thefts of Railway Metals in Colonial Northern Nigeria”, *Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences*, 2/2.4, (2011): 1-23.

¹³ Hopkins, *Economic History*, 244-253.

¹⁴ O’Hear, “Craft Industries in Ilorin”.

Callaway also reported that the indigenous crafts in Yoruba cities declined owing to competition with European substitutes.¹⁵ Studies by Phillip Shea and Polly Hill indicate that the textile crafts declined owing to competition with European manufactured substitutes.¹⁶ However, in their different interpretations, Peter Rogers and Phillip Jaggar argued that the iron-working craft was not like those other crafts because the imported hoes delivered by the railway could not compete with the indigenous smelted hoes, as the imports were expensive and of lower quality compared with the indigenous smelted ones. According to these authors, it was the “forced” reliance on the cheap iron and scrap which competed with the smelted iron and accelerated the decline of rural mining and smelting. Jaggar pointed out that blacksmithing expanded, but he did not recognize that rural smithing declined and that stolen iron from the rail lines was used as raw materials by blacksmiths.¹⁷

Evidence from administrative, railway, and police reports, spanning the years from 1914 through the 1950s, indicates that rural mining and smelting had declined owing to administrative restrictions and forced dependence on imported iron, which consequently led blacksmiths to steal from the rail lines to compensate for iron shortage—as a result of the previously mentioned differential access to the iron. A mineral survey of the Northern Provinces revealed that iron smelters faced competition from imported iron as early as 1905.¹⁸ By the 1940s, the smithing craft had become marginalized in some places owing to differential access to the iron brought by the railway.¹⁹ The iron brought by the railway did not circulate widely in the countryside and was available at a higher rate. The iron dealers’ preference for areas not fully integrated into the colonial economy also compounded the scarcity. It was in reaction to this ensuing socio-economic instability that blacksmiths stole from the rail lines to compensate for the iron scarcity. In this regard, the theft was a reaction to and a protest against the totalizing conditions prevalent under British colonial rule. Nothing in the records suggests a link to “social banditry” or “populist redistributors” who robbed the railway and redistributed to blacksmiths.

¹⁵ A. Mabogunje, *Urbanization in Nigeria*, (London; University of London, 1968), 85; A. Callaway, “From Traditional Craft to Modern Industries”, in: P. C. Lloyd, A. L. Mabogunje and B. Awe (eds), *The City of Ibadan: A Symposium on its Structure and Development*, (London: Cambridge University, 1967), 153-171.

¹⁶ P. J. Shea, “Economics of Scale and the Indigo Dyeing Industry of Pre-Colonial Kano”, *Kano Studies*, 1/2, (1974/1977): 55-61; Hill, *Population*, 96.

¹⁷ Jaggar, *Blacksmiths of Kano*, 35; Rogers, “Hausa Blacksmiths”.

¹⁸ Cited from Rogers, “Hausa Blacksmiths”, 376.

¹⁹ Yusuf, “Stealing from the Railways”, 286; NAK ZarProf RLY/2, Offences on Trains and Railway Stations; E. J. B. Gahan, “Notes on Re-laying and Maintenance, Nigerian Railway”, *Civil Engineering Problems in the Colonies*, 16-20 June 1952, 16-20.

A further clarification also needs to be made concerning the iron theft and blacksmiths preference for stolen or imported iron: working with stolen or imported iron and scrap saves labour time for blacksmiths. Unlike the indigenous smelted iron, the imported and railway iron were soft and easier to work. It was also easier for blacksmiths to determine the material quality of the iron as it was already shaped and only needed to be cut into workable units. It was also easier for them to determine their profits than was possible with the indigenous smelted iron.

Contrary to speculations that the iron theft from the rail lines began in the 1920s and 1930s,²⁰ the evidence indicates that it started much earlier on the Baro–Kano line and the Bauchi Light Railway. It started only later on the Eastern Extension because the line itself was not completed until the late 1920s. The first iron theft occurred around Dumbi (on the Lagos–Kano Line) and Rahama on the Bauchi Light Railway in Zaria Province in 1914. The evidence indicates that large numbers of “the keys were removed from the tracks” by force. At the end of the investigations, six people were convicted in connection with the theft in the Provincial Court and 29 in the Native Court. The theft attracted the attention of the Governor himself, who instructed that there be severe penalties for the culprits, and the Emir was instructed to watch over blacksmiths’ huts along the rail lines.²¹ The theft caught the railway and the colonial authority off guard. While the railway considered the prevention of theft on the railway as part of its primary responsibility of protecting life and property on railway formations, it did not have adequate men to police the rail lines in the North. The Railway Police in the North, whose duty it was to fight the scourge of theft, was, in addition to being in its infancy, poorly organized and inadequate.²² In effect, the railway found itself at the mercy of the provincial authorities, who drafted in its Native Authority Police (*yandoka*) to watch over the line. It does not appear that the development had much effect, as the provincial record for the following year reported a widespread key theft from the rail line and lamented the difficulties in apprehending the thieves. The record mentioned that 27 convictions were made in the Native Court in 1915 and noted blacksmiths as the principal receivers of the iron.²³ As indicated above, iron was scarce, so rural mining and smelting had

²⁰ Ochonu, *Colonial Meltdown*; Jaekel, *Nigerian Railway*, vol. 3, 348.

²¹ Dupigny, *Gazetteer of Zaria*, 34; NAK SNP10/ ZarProf 175P/ 1915, Zaria Province Report Annual 1914; NAK ZarProf 2561/1914, Zaria Province Annual Report for 1914; Yusuf, “Stealing from the Railways” and “Incidences of Thefts”. Also see Rogers, “Hausa Blacksmiths”, 377.

²² NAK SNP 17/15874 Railway Police Formation and Control.

²³ NAK SNP10/138P/1916, ZarProf 138P/1916, Zaria Province-Annual Report 1915; NAK ZarProf 2562/1915, Zaria Province Annual Report 1915.

declined. The wartime scarcity of iron and scrap and the differential terms of access to iron exacerbated the shortage and forced rural smiths to steal from the rail lines to compensate for the scarcity.

One particular strand that runs through the reports is the tendency of the provincial authorities to implicate blacksmiths without mentioning the social background of those convicted. This is not to suggest that blacksmiths were not the ones stealing the iron, for, as the records suggest, the theft occurred during the wet season when farm implements were in demand. Also, where the theft was committed by outsiders, blacksmiths were always mentioned as receivers of the iron. Phillip Jaggar asserted that blacksmiths profited from the wartime scarcity by having to produce substitutes for imported products, as iron imports were curtailed during the war. Increased demand for these products simultaneously fuelled demand for iron, which was met through illicit channels.²⁴

Between 1917 and 1918, large numbers of keys and sleepers were stolen from the rail lines in Zaria Province. The theft was committed in a way that made it difficult to catch the culprits. As the report indicates, while one section of the line was under inspection, another was being robbed. At the end of the investigations, 69 convictions were secured in the Provincial Court.²⁵ As usual, blacksmiths were mentioned as suspects, and the Native Authority Police were called to search their forges and watch over the rail lines. Most of those convicted in 1917 were arrested during a search of blacksmiths' huts. The report did not indicate whether they were blacksmiths but did implicate railway labourers. Theft by railway labourers was "part of a wider livelihood strategy".²⁶ The most talked-about conviction in that year was the case of a European foreman convicted of illegally selling railway property and pocketing the money.²⁷

²⁴ Jaggar, *Blacksmiths of Kano*.

²⁵ NAK ZarProf 2475/1917, Zaria Province Annual Report for 1917; NAK ZarProf 163/1919, Zaria Provincial Annual Report 1918.

²⁶ R. Callebert, "Cleaning the Wharves: Pilferage, Bribery, and Social Connections on the Durban Docks in the 1950s", *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 46/1, (2012): 23-38, 32.

²⁷ NAK ZarProf 2475/1917; NAK ZarProf 163/1919.



Figure 6.1 Hausa Blacksmiths at work in Kano

Sources: Personal collections

Earlier in 1916, the authority suspected that railway labourers were accomplices to the thefts, which led to inspection of all railway camps in the province. This, according to the colonial authority, would prevent thieves and criminals settling in there. Though nothing was found to suggest they were stealing the iron, some squatters found in the camps, who had no business being there, were evicted. No cases of iron theft were mentioned in the report for that year, and the authority attributed this positive development to its new policy of “collective punishment or responsibility”. By this policy, labourers of a camp where a theft was discovered had to pay half the cost of the stolen iron. Similarly, village heads under whose jurisdiction a theft occurred had to pay half the cost of the stolen iron in their domain, a policy which the report indicated was effective in Kano Province.²⁸

It should be noted that the demand for iron was high, which was the reason the theft continued. The villagers along the rail lines also were not cooperative, as they did not see the theft as crime. As one senior colonial official pointed out, a village head who knew his village was short of iron would not report the arrival of iron, even when he suspected it to be stolen from the rail lines.²⁹ Even when they did report the arrival of iron, there was also the difficulty of identifying stolen iron and implements made from stolen iron, as some iron dealers sold scrap to blacksmiths—though scrap did not become available in commercial quantities in the rural areas until the 1920s. Even as it became available, there was a differential access to the new iron. The existence of organized ‘fences’ who received the stolen iron also fuelled the prevalence of theft. As the record suggests, the farther the iron travelled, the higher the prices it obtained. For instance, in 1917 iron keys were obtained in Katsina, which had no rail facility at that time, at a rate higher than their original market value in Zaria.³⁰ As mentioned earlier, iron was scarce and the prices were high. There was also an insufficiency of manpower to police the line. The thieves were aware that the police were dispatched only temporarily, and they exploited this to maximum advantage. Some of the thieves also went to steal in districts and provinces other than their own, making it difficult to track them.

²⁸ NAK SNOPI0/97P/1917, Zaria Province Annual Report No. 69, 1916; NAK ZarProf 750/1916, Zaria Province Annual Report for 1916.

²⁹ NAK SNP17/2, 11959 Railway Ordinance 1920 Order in Council Applying.

³⁰ Yusuf, “Stealing from the Railways”, 287.

The fact that Kano has not been mentioned in connection with iron theft does not suggest the rail line there was theft-free, although it has been speculated that iron theft did not occur in Kano until the 1920s because blacksmiths there continued to receive their supplies from the same traditional sources that had supplied them in the nineteenth century, “at levels adequate to fulfil regional demand”.³¹ The evidence does not support this claim, however, as the rail line there was also plagued as in Zaria, though not on the same scale. Part of the reason the theft was rampant in Zaria was the existence of the two rail lines, which increased to four in the 1920s.³² The combined mileage of the rail lines in Zaria was more than that of Kano, which was one reason for the difficulty in policing the line. Though the mileage in Kano later increased in the 1920s, it was not comparable to that of Zaria.

The first mention of iron theft in Kano appeared in the annual report for 1919.³³ The report suggested the theft was common in the close-settled zone between Kano and Zaria, most especially around Madobi and Dangora, which led to the stationing of 41 uniformed policemen along this short mileage.³⁴ Peter Rogers suggested that the areas may have “provided most of the market demand for any stolen iron” in Zaria.³⁵ Part of the reason such a number of police were stationed along this short section of the rail line was also the occurrence there of train robberies (see next section in this chapter). There was no indication to suggest the theft had occurred for the first time. Contrary to the claim that iron was abundant and at a level adequate to support regional demand, iron was indeed scarce due to the decline of rural mining and smelting.³⁶ Furthermore, the end of the war did not bring succour to blacksmiths, as scrap and iron remained scarce in the countryside and were available only at high prices.

As the authority in Kano was busy policing the line, its counterpart in Zaria was also fighting sporadic theft of keys and sleepers in the same year (1919). This time around the theft was common on the Bauchi Light Railway, especially around the pagan community of Pitti in Lere District. The authority lamented the difficulty in tracking the thieves, as the theft occurred on wet nights when police were not in sight, and also some of the thieves from Bauchi went to steal in Zaria Province, in the same manner those in Zaria went to steal in

³¹ Rogers, “Hausa Blacksmiths”, 378.

³² The rail lines are as follows: Lagos–Kano Line, Bauchi Light Railway, the Eastern Extension, and the Zaria–Kaura Namoda.

³³ KSHCB 318P, Kano Province Report no. 57 for half year ending 30th June 1919.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Rogers, “Hausa Blacksmiths”, 378.

³⁶ Rogers, “Hausa Blacksmiths”, 378.

Bauchi Province. The record did not indicate whether blacksmiths were involved in the theft, but it suggested that railway labourers were implicated.³⁷ The accuracy of the report is also problematic: in one location it indicated there were seven arrests and five convictions in the Provincial and Native Courts. Elsewhere, it mentioned that there were four arrests and four convictions.³⁸

Despite the sustained attention the theft attracted, it did not decrease, as the theft assumed a disturbing proportion in the 1920s. This time around, the rail line in Kano was the scene of theft, as more than 63,050 keys were stolen from the rail line in Kano in just four years. A major report on the theft indicates that in 1921 more than 40,000 keys were removed from the line around Dangora alone, with an additional 15,633 from the remaining mileage of line. The theft was so rampant that the Railway reported it “cannot ascertain [the] daily losses”.³⁹ As usual, blacksmiths were mentioned as receivers of the iron, and their huts were searched by police. At the end of the investigations, eight people—including a railway overseer, John Jengre—were convicted and sentenced to different terms of imprisonment.⁴⁰ The report blamed the theft on the scarcity of iron and the existence of an organized fencing or network for stolen iron. As a measure to curtail the theft, a former Resident of Kano advised the Railway to import iron and subsidize its distribution to blacksmiths.⁴¹

In the same way that keys were stolen from the rail line in Kano, they were also stolen from the Bauchi Light Railway. Sleepers were removed from the rail line in a way that compromised the safety of oncoming trains. Large numbers of scrap sleepers deposited along the rail line were also stolen near Dutchin Wai Station. The piecemeal and uncoordinated manner in which the different sections of the rail lines had been constructed—with respect to the gauges and the type of locomotives and cars that could be moved on the lines—along with the expansion of the lines in the 1920s, created an accumulation of scrap which provided ideal opportunities for thieves. As a solution to the theft problem, the Resident proposed the replacement of iron keys with locked ones, emphasizing that the theft would continue as long as the keys were iron-made.⁴² Since the theft persisted, he pointed out that, it was due to iron shortage; and unless iron was supplied to blacksmiths at a subsidized rate, the theft would

³⁷ NAK SNP10, 273P/1919, Zaria Province Report no. 74 for half year ending 30th June 1919.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ NAK SNP17/2, 11959.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² NAK SNP10/105P Zaria Province Report for 15 months ended 31st March 1921.

continue given the high demand. His solution—that the Railway should sell scrap iron to blacksmiths at reduced cost—was based on the fact that, according to him, the commercial firms did not deal in pig iron.⁴³ Two years later, it was the Resident at Kano that again complained of key theft. In the same way, Gimi and Anchau were scenes of key theft.⁴⁴

The theft generated a long correspondence between the Governor and the administrators of those provinces through which the rail lines passed. The correspondence revealed the tension and anxiety within official circles and the attempts to stem the theft. While the state considered the prevention of iron theft as its primary responsibility, it did not have adequate men to police the lines. The colonial state also amended the penal code to accommodate the theft. Two specific ordinances, namely the “Railway Ordinance of 1920” and the “Collective Punishment Ordinance” (mentioned earlier) were implemented. The former attempted to stem the theft of keys, sleepers, and other railway materials, while the latter attempted to hold labourers’ camps and village headmen responsible for the iron theft which took place in their domain. Native authorities with judicial responsibility were also established in districts where the rail line passed, and the areas where each authority was responsible were specified. Similarly, Native Tribunals were established in pagan-dominated areas for the same purpose of preventing iron theft on the rail lines and at the mines. The correspondence also indicates that many of the keys naturally came loose from the tracks of their own accord and were available to be picked up by anyone who wanted to do so. As the Resident of Bauchi pointed out, the very motion of the train itself was apt to loosen the keys and make them available to passers-by.⁴⁵

The theft was not mentioned in the reports again for some time, until the 1930s. This time also, it assumed a disturbing scale, spreading to areas previously unaffected by the theft. The economic depression and its attendant problems aggravated the situation. One such place where the theft occurred for the first time was Benue Province, owing to the Eastern Railway Extension and the Benue Bridge works. The theft was common at Makurdi, Abinsi, and Ogoja divisions. Attempts to replace the iron keys with copper also failed, as replacement could not keep pace with the theft.⁴⁶ Moses Ochonu asserted that the cut in take-home pay

⁴³ NAK ZarProf 2569/1922, Annual Report Zaria Province for the year 1922, cited in Rogers, “Hausa Blacksmiths”, 380.

⁴⁴ KSHCB SNP/9/12/1924, Kano Province Annual Report File 635.

⁴⁵ NAK SNP17/2, 11959.

⁴⁶ Ochonu, *Colonial Meltdown*, 82.

and the retrenchment exercise of the time aggravated the theft.⁴⁷ Between 1930 and 1932, several railway labourers and retrenched employees were convicted in connection with the theft. Although the record does not indicate whether those convicted were blacksmiths, it mentioned blacksmiths as receivers of the stolen iron. As the Resident of Benue Province pointed out, the theft would continue as long as demand for iron was high.⁴⁸ In an attempt to stem the theft, measures were enforced such as making blacksmiths register and report their iron sources or be liable to six months' imprisonment and a ten-pound fine. The "collective punishment" (already enforced on the Baro-Kano, the Bauchi Light, and the Eastern railways) was also contemplated on the Eastern Extension.⁴⁹

Iron dealers circumvented the scarcity and higher prices by selling iron scrap at a rate which created opportunities for accumulation and strengthening of clientele relationships. L. C. Giles, in his survey of Soba, Jere, Kudan, and Ikara districts in the late 1930s, reported that scrap iron was available in the countryside at a higher price, and blacksmiths were obtaining it on credit. Those who could not afford the price or had been refused credit borrowed from their wives or joined together with others to buy the iron.⁵⁰ A colonial official touring north-eastern Zaria in the mid-1930s found that blacksmiths in remote areas were holding farmers to ransom by extorting corn and loans from them to buy iron. When farmers denied them a loan, they would delay repairs to farming tools.⁵¹ The records generally suggest that much of the blacksmiths' income was derived from repairs and maintenance of farm implements.⁵²

The conditions of scarcity which prevailed in the 1940s also aggravated the scale of thefts. During World War II, iron and hardware imports were restricted, which led to an acute scarcity. Wartime import restrictions benefited blacksmiths, as the colonial authority encouraged local imitation of imported goods, a policy which could have assisted local industries had it been fully pursued. As Phillip Jaggard asserted, blacksmiths profited from the wartime scarcity by manufacturing imitations of imported goods, which led to the emergence of an import-replacing craft within the smiting craft at the end of the war.⁵³ The evidence indicates that the scarcity of iron forced smiths to steal from the rail lines to satisfy internal

⁴⁷ Ibid. 81-2.

⁴⁸ Ibid.; Yusuf, "Stealing from the Railways", 288-9, and "Incidences of Thefts", 16.

⁴⁹ NAK SNP17/2, 11959.

⁵⁰ Cited in D. Forde, "The Rural Economy", in: M. Perham (ed.), *The Native Economies of Nigeria*, vol. 1, (London: Faber), 125-140, 136; and Rogers, "Hausa Blacksmiths", 384.

⁵¹ Rogers, "Hausa Blacksmiths", 383.

⁵² KSHCB MLG 16490/1932 Kumbotso District Kano Emirate Reassessment; NAK MLG 9117/1929 Kura District of Kano Emirate Reassessment

⁵³ Jaggard, *Blacksmiths of Kano*, 58-76.

demand. Iron smelting also enjoyed a temporary revival in some places owing to the wartime scarcity.⁵⁴ Increased demand for iron products simultaneously fuelled the demand for iron, which was satisfied through the illicit channels. The Eastern Railway was most affected by the theft, and keys were stolen from the rail line in large quantities. A special police force was raised at an annual cost of £6,000 to prevent the theft. This was in addition to the huge sums of money the Railway spent in replacing stolen keys.⁵⁵

As the report also suggests, the steel and cast iron keys required for replacement on the tracks could not be procured owing to the wartime restrictions. Attempts to replace the iron sleepers and keys with wooden ones also failed, for reasons of economics and quality. For instance, timber sleepers had a shorter lifespan than iron sleepers. As J. B. Gahan pointed out, timber sleepers have a life span of only seven years on bridges and points, as well as on crossing works, while steel sleepers have a life span of forty years on the main and branch lines, especially in dry climates like that of Northern Nigeria. The timber species that were available in the North—*Khaya grandifoliola* and *Khaya senegalensis* (dry-zone mahoganies)—were unsuitable for the rail line. An added advantage of the steel sleeper was that its scrap could be sold, while the timber could not.⁵⁶

The end of the war did not bring an end to the theft, as imported iron was still scarce and was available only at high prices. Some rural smiths had already gone out of business owing to the scarcity. For instance, in 1945, smiths in southern Zaria complained that they could not work because they had no iron to work with.⁵⁷ A police officer also reported that iron was scarce and was available only at high prices.⁵⁸ In a study on the Hausa communities in Zaria, M. G. Smith reported that the iron dealers made enormous profits at the expense of the blacksmiths. In 1949–1950, for example, iron dealers imported scrap sleepers from Lagos at 10s each, paying 1s each for transporting them by rail and 1s each by donkey, and then sold them at 18s each.⁵⁹ Many blacksmiths could not afford the high price and had to rely on illicit channels. The Resident of Zaria Province reported that hoes and knives were scarce and proposed the distribution of railway scrap to smiths to prevent its being stolen.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Ibid. 27.

⁵⁵ Jaekel, *Nigerian Railway*, vol. 3, 349; Gahan, “Notes on Re-laying”, 107.

⁵⁶ Gahan, “Notes on Relaying”, 104-7.

⁵⁷ Yusuf, “Stealing From the Railways”.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Smith, *Economy*, 135.

⁶⁰ NAK ZarProf 570, Theft of Railway Materials 1947-56; NAK ZarProf RLY/2.

As the record indicates, the theft continued unabated from 1946 through into the 1950s, as keys, sleepers, fish plates, and even spikes (which required skill to remove), in addition to level-crossing boards and scrap were stolen from the rail line between Kano and Zaria and from the branch lines (see Appendix 2: Table 6.1). During this period (1946–1950s), the Kano–Nguru line was a major scene of the thefts, where it occurred almost on a monthly basis. As soon as the keys were replaced on a section of the line, they were stolen again and it was difficult to catch the thieves. The thieves were aware of the lack of sufficient manpower to police the line. Blacksmiths huts along the lines were searched, but it was difficult to make arrests, due to the lack of evidence. However, both blacksmiths and railway labourers were implicated. For instance, a blacksmith was arrested, but was released by the Emir, with a warning to him to desist from the act. It is unclear whether the plan to invite the special police from the Eastern Railway to patrol the Eastern Extension was implemented.⁶¹

In view of the widespread theft, the idea of distributing scrap iron, which the various provincial administrators had proposed, began to gain currency in the 1950s, and the Railway began to distribute its surplus scrap to blacksmiths. Although the scrap iron distribution had started in the 1940s, the largest distributions occurred in 1954–1955 (see Appendix 3: Table 6.2).⁶² Distribution was based on expressed demand and availability. The railway also played an important role in distributing the scrap, while the Native Authority coordinated its distribution. As with the iron imports, the scrap was offloaded mainly at the urban terminals such as Kano and Zaria, whence appointed iron dealers and blacksmiths distributed it to various centres of demand. As the table shows, none of the studied communities are mentioned as recipients of the iron. It would be interesting to know the immediate impact of the scrap distribution; unfortunately, there is no information available on this. It is unclear what direction the theft took in the post-independence era, as detailed evidence is not available for the period. Inferences from the scattered records, however, suggest the theft continued through the 1970s.

From the discussion so far, it is obvious that British colonialism in Northern Nigeria was accompanied by critical disruption for iron workers. The advent of the railway, especially its distributive role in iron and scrap transport, indirectly accelerated the decline of rural mining and smelting. It has been shown that the material quality of the rail lines offered opportunities to blacksmiths and railway labourers to further their livelihoods. Theft by

⁶¹ NAK ZarProf 570; NAK ZarProf RLY/2.

⁶² NAK KanProf RLY/15 Distribution of Scrap Sleepers by Nigerian Railway Corporation, 1954-57; Yusuf, “Stealing from the Railways”, 291.

blacksmiths was a reaction to iron scarcity and the decline in their living standards. The iron delivered by the railway did not circulate widely in the countryside, as it was confined to the urban markets, forcing rural smiths to steal from the line to compensate for the scarcity.

As noted above, both blacksmiths and railway labourers stole from the line. When the iron was stolen by outsiders, it was to the advantage of the blacksmiths. Iron was scarce and the demand for stolen iron was high. The colonial state was taken unawares by the theft and tried then to prevent it; they were unable to do so, however, owing to insufficient manpower to police the line. The thieves were aware of this inadequacy and exploited it to their advantage. Attempts to combat the menace by modifying the penal code also failed, as the Railway was eventually forced to distribute its surplus scrap iron to blacksmiths. The theft continued through the post-colonial period, by which time blacksmithing had become marginalized in most places. Those who maintained the craft had to rely on a variety of scrap, such as motor parts, buckets, and tins, to continue working.

6.3 Train banditry

Train banditry or robbery was another form of criminality which sprang up with the opening of the railway to traffic. These were not heroic bandits who robbed the rich to redistribute to the poor, as in the Western legend of Robin Hood and his Merry Men; rather, they were “professional criminals or men of the underworld”, for whom criminality was a means of livelihood rather than of defiance.⁶³

Scholars have asserted that banditry thrives in societies undergoing transformation by capitalism.⁶⁴ Ralph Austen suggested that it “arises in a situation where [the state] has control over legitimate violence and the rules for market transactions”.⁶⁵ It often flourishes in marginal areas where the state has limited control, just like the illegal oil bunkers in the Niger Delta today. As with iron theft, banditry on the rail line was a reaction to the socio-economic transformations under colonialism. This is not to suggest it was colonial in origin—the practice is much more ancient—but it became common with the advent of the railway

⁶³ R. A. Austen, “Social Bandits and Other Heroic Criminals: Western Models of Resistance and their Relevance for Africa”, in: Crummey, *Banditry*, 89-108, 94; Crummey, “The Great Beast”, 3, 5-6.

⁶⁴ Austen, “Social Bandits”, 89-108.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 94.

because the railway provided bandits with a platform to operate, as the literature generally suggests.⁶⁶

Right from the opening of the railway there were train bandits—*yan mirgine* or *yan ture*, as they were popularly called (from the way they threw or rolled down their loot from the trains). These bandits plagued the railway the same way as the iron thieves. The bandits were from the communities along the rail line, even though the inhabitants claimed they came from elsewhere. These bandits neither stole iron nor robbed passengers; they robbed the freight trains (in spite of Austen’s claim that Africans were incapable of attacking railways).⁶⁷ Like highway robbers, they worked both in groups and individually. Toyin Falola asserted that the most organized robbery is always by a gang.⁶⁸ The bandits did not rob using horses as their counterparts did in the Western world; instead, they jumped onto a moving train, offloaded the contents from the freight wagons to their fellow gang members standing by the track near their villages, and then jumped off as quickly as possible when they had finished their exploits.⁶⁹ This form of crime, though common in the Western world, was novel by local Nigerian standards.⁷⁰ The train transported valuable consignments, including cash, which provided opportunities to criminals. The freight, and particularly the groundnuts wagon, was their target. The crime occurred mostly between Kano and Zaria, especially between the Kano Middle School (now Rumfa College) and Dangora. The crime was fuelled by the existence of large markets for the stolen goods. As with the iron theft, banditry took the colonial state and the Railway unawares, and their efforts to stem it proved ineffective. Despite the sustained attention it attracted throughout the colonial period, train banditry has not received attention in the literature. The only work that commented on it did so in passing.⁷¹ This section is an attempt to fill in the gap.

⁶⁶ Oyemakinde, “Railway Construction”; E. L. Piza, “Transit Stops, Robbery, Routine Activities: Examining Street Robbery in the Newark, NJ Subway Environment”, (2003). Available at: <http://proceedings.esri.com/library/userconf/proc04/docs/pap1303.pdf> [last accessed 4 November 2014]; M. Aguiar, “Making modernity inside the technological space of the railway”, *Cultural Critique*, 68, (winter 2008); J. Richards and J. M. Mackenzie, *The Railway Station: A Social History*, (Oxford: 1986); Kerr, “Representation and Representations”; Jaekel, *Nigerian Railway*, vol. 3, 350.

⁶⁷ Austen, “Social Bandits”.

⁶⁸ Falola, “Theft”, 7.

⁶⁹ Jaekel, *Nigerian Railway*, vol. 3, 349.

⁷⁰ Novels on train robbery abound in the Western world. See for instance Breda Hugen, *The Great Train Robbery: Making Heist*, (Mankao: Congress Publishing Books, 2011); M. Crichton, *The Great Train Robbery*, (Knopf: Doubleday Publishing Group, 1975).

⁷¹ Jaekel, *Nigerian Railway*, vol. 3, 349.

Contrary to the assertion that banditry on the Nigerian railroads began in the 1940s,⁷² the evidence indicates that it started much earlier than that, especially on the rail line between Kano and Zaria—and particularly between Kano and Dangora. Complaints about theft and loss of goods in transit by Kano traders date back to the very first year the line was opened to traffic.⁷³ Compensation should have been paid, but the Railway rarely did so. As the incidence of robberies increased, the Railway considered the prevention of theft in transit part of its primary goal in maintaining law and order on the rail line. However, as indicated above, its police were numerically inadequate and poorly organized. The Railway therefore found itself at the mercy of the provincial authorities where the line passed, and these authorities drafted their Native Authority Police to crime scenes whenever there was a robbery.⁷⁴ The Native Authority Police were also not fully adequate and so were not always successful in suppressing the crime. The bandits, as usual, were aware of this inadequacy and exploited it to their advantage.

What the Kano authority initially reported as minor crime was to become epidemic on the rail line between Kano and Lagos the following year. About 79 cases involving freight robbery and petty theft in transit were discovered. Of these, seven were discovered in Zaria, and two each at Baro, Minna, and Jebba. A train was also robbed to the tune of £100 at Kaduna. The remaining robberies occurred in transit between Kano and Iddo.⁷⁵ As a result of the huge compensations to be paid, the incidences attracted the attention of the General Manager of the Railway. Although the Railway rarely paid compensation, the General Manager pointed out that compensation was paid where railway employees were implicated. And many railway workers were implicated in connection with the robberies. The report also revealed the existence of organized fencing for the stolen goods, as railway watchmen and their wives were caught with stolen goods at Baro.⁷⁶ This illicit channel, not always recognized by the authority, fuelled the demand for stolen goods. Informants reported that stolen groundnuts from the train were usually sold to the Lebanese firms.⁷⁷

In order to stem the robbery and other forms of theft in transit, it was proposed that railway stations should be fenced on the assumption that their openness provided easy access

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ KSHCB 717, Kano Province Annual Report No. 48 for September 1913.

⁷⁴ KSHCB 717.

⁷⁵ NAK SNP17, 15874, Railway Police Formation and Control.

⁷⁶ NAK SNP17, 15874; PRO 657/4, Nigerian Railway Administrative Report for the Year 1915, 10.

⁷⁷ Interviews with Malams Ibrahim Alhassan (village head of Zawaciki), Hamza Zawaciki, and Ali Zubairu, Zawaciki, 19 March 2011.

to criminals. It was also proposed that locked wagons be introduced in place of the open wagons that were being used. A further idea was to establish a special Railway Police to combat robbery on the rail line in the North, just as there was in the South. The proposals would have gone a long way to curb the crime had they been implemented, but they were not because the Railway was not ready to fund such projects. As usual, it continued to rely on the Native Authority Police. While the authorities in Kano and Zaria wanted to fight the crime, they disagreed on the extent to which they should shoulder the financial responsibility for police posted outside their provinces.⁷⁸ Between 1917 and 1918, no less than 41 uniformed men were stationed on the line between Kano and Zaria, especially around Madobi and Dangora. The police did well in stemming the crime, as robbery and transit-related crimes were henceforth not mentioned in the records for some years. The records attributed this success to the presence of uniformed police.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Colonial Report-Annual, Nigeria, Report for 1916, 23.

⁷⁹ Colonial Report-Annual, Nigeria, Report for 1917, 14; Colonial Report-Annual, Nigeria, Report for 1918, 14; KSHCB 318P Kano Province Report no. 57 for half year ending 30th June 1919.



Figure 6.2 Open groundnut wagons

Source: The Nigerian Nostalgia 1960–1980 Project



Figure 6.3 Lock-up wagons introduced in the 1940s

Source: Personal collections

Notwithstanding the impression in the provincial records that the crime had been reduced, evidence from the Railway annual reports suggests it picked up again. Approximately 58 cases of merchandise robbery were tried before the courts in 1923, resulting in 51 convictions and seven acquittals.⁸⁰ Since the Railway did not have sufficient men to watch the line, it continued to rely on the Native Authority Police. As the surveillance on the rail line was tight, the bandits switched the scene of their operations to the stations. Several freight trains were plundered at Madobi Station in 1924.⁸¹ Official response began to focus on the rail line and the stations. The police apparently did well in suppressing the crime, as the records thereafter were silent on robbery for many years.

In 1938, a famous train robbery occurred at Gimi, where a downward or local train from Zaria was robbed at exactly 2 a.m.. Although the DO gave the impression that it was a minor robbery, events of the subsequent months gave the lie to his comments. The report on the robbery suggested that it was organized and committed by a gang comprising criminals from Gimi Tasha, Mayere, Gubuci, and Karaye in Kano Province. Gimi Tasha was raided and searched for criminals, and the unemployed residing there were asked to leave. Although the record did not indicate whether the train was a freight or passenger train and whether the bandits were arrested or not, the measures adopted by the police indicate that the crime was not an insignificant one.

Vigilante or tough people (*yan tauri*) from Kudan and Hunkuyi were invited to police the Tasha, in addition to those stationed on the rail line. Kudan, as the report indicated, had a reputation as a tough town where women arrested thieves and no thief dared to rob the town.⁸² Toyin Falola has argued that thieves were always afraid of vigilantes, because of their magical power and capacity to humiliate their victims.⁸³ Curfew was imposed at Gimi Tasha, and the Native Authority promised a reward for every thief caught.⁸⁴ The other towns were also watched. The report also implicated some traditional rulers for giving assistance to the thieves. The plan to seek the assistance of the District Head of Karaye was suspended, as it was alleged that he had co-operated with the criminals.⁸⁵ The police action seems to have

⁸⁰ PRO 657/7, Nigerian Railway Administrative Report for the Year 1923; NAK SNP17, 15874.

⁸¹ Yusuf, *Impact of the Railway*, 136.

⁸² NAK ZarProf 5280 Makarfi District Note Book 1943

⁸³ Falola, "Theft", 17.

⁸⁴ NAK ZarProf 5280.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

succeeded in stemming train robbery, as the records do not mention the crime again for some years.

The resurgence of the crime in the 1950s attracted sustained attention from the Native Authority Police. Two well-known robberies occurred in the studied communities between 1950 and 1951. A major police report on the robbery, compiled by one Yusuf Lafiagi, provided detailed information on the location, the time, and how the robbery occurred. The report indicated that train banditry was prevalent between Kano and Dangora, especially around Sheka Mai Daki and Jaen. It also suggested the existence of organized fencing, along with the connivance of the inhabitants of the communities along the line.

In the first instance, the report indicated that two southbound groundnut trains (numbered 28 Dtg and 86 Dtg) were always robbed at night between Kano and Challawa, despite being escorted by the Railway Police. As the report recorded, the bandits were from the following communities: “starting from Kano—opposite Kano Middle school, Sheka, Jaen, Fanshekara, Yandutse near Challawa, one mile after Challawa, two miles after K[wa]nkw[a]so opposite Gora, Madobi, Yako and Dangora Kashama”. Whenever the trains approached near these areas, the bandits jumped onto the train and unloaded the contents to their members on reaching their villages. As the report specified, between 50 and 70 people always stood by the track to collect the loot from the train. The villagers, it reported, did not see the robbery as a crime. Also, the village heads were aware of the robberies but failed to take any action.⁸⁶ At the end of the investigation, approximately 30 people, including the sons of the village heads of Sheka and Jaen, were prosecuted in 1951.⁸⁷

The second robbery occurred in 1951 around Sheka, where a southbound groundnuts train (numbered 1289) was robbed of more than 45 bags. By the time the train stopped, only five bags were recovered by the Railway Police. There was even a fight between the police and the members of the gang (numbering about 70) before the five bags were recovered. The Chief Commissioner of Police himself was aboard the train when the incident happened. At the end of the investigation, a number of people were prosecuted.⁸⁸

As the report repeatedly indicated, the bandits had become so brazen that the presence of uniformed men did not discourage them. The police too were hampered because, besides their numerical insufficiency, they could not stop a moving train without permission. Before the train could stop, the bandits had jumped off and run to their villages, while the other

⁸⁶ KSHCB R527.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

members moved and stashed the loot. It is clear that the villagers themselves encouraged the robbery, as they did not see it as crime. The report also suggested the existence of large markets for the stolen groundnuts.⁸⁹

Although data are not available on the incidence of train banditry in the post-colonial period, inferences from several records suggest that it continued through the 1970s, until the introduction of public execution for armed robbery helped to suppress it.⁹⁰

6.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has shown how British colonialism was marked by critical disruptions in the social and economic relations of production in Northern Nigeria. The stealing of iron from the rail line and train robbery were reactions to poverty and the uneven socio-economic transformations engendered by the British. British colonialism and its transport infrastructure, even though indirectly, fuelled socio-economic dislocations and poverty. People reacted to the erosion of their material conditions by stealing keys and sleepers from the rail lines and robbing trains. The penetration of the iron delivered by the railway accelerated the decline of rural mining and smelting. The confinement of the imported iron to the urban markets forced rural blacksmiths to steal from the rail lines to compensate for the iron shortage. The material quality of the rail lines (the fact of their being made from iron) and the valuable consignments transported by the trains provided opportunities to criminals.

As the chapter has also shown, both the iron theft and train robberies took the colonial state unawares. While the Railway and the colonial state tried to stem the crimes, they were unable to do so because of the insufficiency of men to police the rail lines. The criminals were aware of the inadequacy and exploited it to their advantage. Although convictions were secured in many cases, this did not prevent the crimes. Amendments to the penal code in the case of iron theft also did little to stem the crime. The traditional institutions, whose duty it was to assist in fighting the crimes, also looked the other way when the crimes were being perpetrated. The Railway was forced to make concessions in the case of iron theft, by

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Jaekel, *Nigerian Railway*, vol. 3, 349.

distributing its surplus scrap to blacksmiths, but this did not prevent the theft, and both crimes continued through the post-colonial period, though on a reduced scale.