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Samenvatting

This thesis examines the social and cultural impact of the railway on the rural communities situated along the rail line between Kano and Zaria in Northern Nigeria, from 1908-1970s. It is a critical re-examination of the history of the railway and its consequences. Using old and new tools of historical analysis, the study argues that the railway was the most important innovation that transformed the communities in to important centers on the rail line. The rail line had many more consequences than previous studies had actually recognized.

The study contributes to our understanding on how the Nigerian communities perceived, appropriated and integrated the railway technology into daily life and how initiatives resulted in the appropriation of the railway. It also contributes to our understanding of how the railway bred criminality and provided platforms for criminals to operate; and also how the railway led to the emergence of new settlements and intermingling of Nigerian cultures along the rail line. These are in addition to re-examining the cash crops production and trade engendered by the railway.

The construction of the railway as the study demonstrates was an imperialist creation to transport cotton from the landlocked Northern region to industrialized Britain. Right from the onset of the British administration in Northern Nigeria, the idea to build the railway came from government and not businessmen or speculators who wanted government guarantees. Chapter two indicates that the idea to build the railway provoked reactions of rivalry and controversy from the Southern Nigerian authorities who perceived the line as a rival railway. The proposal to build the railway conflicted with their agenda of extending the southern railway to landlocked Northern Nigeria. The controversy dragged on for six years, after which the railway was sanctioned for construction in 1908. Contrary to the well established narrative that the reactions to railway construction did not go beyond flight, the chapter demonstrate that fear and awe as well as anti-colonial resistance were the reactions to the railway work, as people were not familiar with the railway technology, including railway construction, but as the familiarity increased and they understood the benefits of working on the railway for wages, they quickly appropriated it to transform their life.

The study also describes how the local inhabitants encountered and perceived the locomotive and train. Contrary to the popular assumption that Nigerians appropriated the railway immediately it was completed, chapter three demonstrate that its appropriation was not immediate, but was something worked out over time. The chapter argues that mixed reactions of fear and awe were the response to the new transport technology, as Nigerians did not understand what it was all about, much less of appropriate it, but as they became familiar

with it and understood its benefits they quickly apprehended it in distinctive ways to transform their life. The colonial authority also educated the people how to intensively use the system. The completion of the railway to traffic almost immediately revolutionized transportation and transformed the experience of travelling. It made the colonial authorities control of the communities much easier administratively and economically. The new transport also increased mobility and connected them to the global economy much more easily than had previously been possible.

As the study also demonstrates, the opening of the railway to traffic almost immediately activated cash crop production and trade. Chapter four argues that the anticipation that the railway would stimulate cotton export failed, because farmers exploited the opportunities provided by the railway to grow crops that were not anticipated during the planning and construction of the line. This was because cotton had always been grown for use in the indigenous textile industry and also because the price offered by the European buyers was much lower than that offered by the Hausa. Nevertheless, cotton export became popular over time. As has been shown, the trade in the cash crops began at the initiatives of the indigenous traders who channeled their money, expertise and network into the trade. Of the many crops that were activated by the steam, groundnut was by far the most popular, because it was easier to grow and could finance tax much more than the others.

The railway also has limitations; it stimulated production in far distant areas, far removed from the line, but it could not intensively exploit the new markets. This was circumvented by professional transporters who exploited it to their own advantage. The colonial authorities also tried to open up such distant areas by bringing them closer to the line of rail through road constructions. Right from the beginning, the colonial authority envisaged a coordinated transport system in which the road would feed the railway of traffic, but efforts were made to ensure it did not compete with the railway. The cash crop trade opened up a lot of opportunities to the locals and outsiders who depended on it for their livelihood.

As the study further demonstrates, the railway led to emergence of new settlements and intermingling of Nigerian cultures along the rail line. It is argued in chapter five that the opportunities to work on the railway and for the commercial firms as well as for trade were the pull which attracted populations to the communities. This in turn made the colonial authorities establish segregated settlements to house the migrants, as a form of control. As the study shows, the migrants concentrated at the main centers with high economic opportunities, thereby contributing to those centres' expansion. Despite the attempts by the colonial authority to control the migrants into rigid compartments, social relations brought them into

direct contact with locals, a development which not only eroded official barriers, but also led to their integration into the communities. The migrants were agents for change in the communities; they were instrumental in the establishment of western education schools and postal facilities as well as the diffusion of southern based foods and technical skills in the localities. However, it was not one-way traffic, as they too also learnt and copied from the hosts. There was a significant decline in the migrant population in the 1970s, due to the civil war, the decline of export trade and the decline of the railway in the 1970s.

The study also further understanding on how the railway engendered criminality and unexpectedly provided a platform for criminals to operate. Chapter six demonstrates that the railway was something of a paradox. It opened new frontiers of opportunities and indirectly endangered many, most especially the indigenous crafts which forced the operators into criminality such as stealing of iron from the rail line and train robbery. The crimes took the colonial authority unaware, despite attempts to combat them they continued unabated, until the decline of the railway in the 1970s. As the chapter argues, 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 the crimes was due to existence of large markets for stolen goods.