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Ntewusu, S.A.

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Samuel Aniegye Ntewusu

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Samuel Aniegye Ntewusu
University of Ghana, Institute of African Studies
ntewusu@gmail.com

African Studies Centre
P.O. Box 9555
2300 RB Leiden
The Netherlands

Telephone	+31-71-5273372
Fax	+31-71-5273344
E-mail	asc@ascleiden.nl
Website	http://www.ascleiden.nl
Facebook	www.facebook.nl/ascleiden
Twitter	www.twitter.com/ascleiden

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THE ROAD TO DEVELOPMENT: THE CONSTRUCTION AND USE OF 'THE GREAT NORTH ROAD' IN GOLD COAST GHANA

Samuel Aniegye Ntewusu[1]

Abstract

This article is a historical study of a 'motor road' linking the north of the Gold Coast (present day Ghana) to the South. Historians concerned with routes and trade in nineteenth century Gold Coast usually end their accounts at the onset of colonial rule. While studies that concentrate on transport development in modern periods make little reference to the motor road linking Kumasi to Tamale and beyond.

Difficulty in communication between the north and the south of Gold Coast, led to the construction of the Great North Road. Northern labourers, the majority of them Dargarti, Frafra, Vagla, Kanjarga (Builsa) among others played a critical role in the road construction. Women also played an important part in the construction as they ensured that food was prepared for the labourers without which it would have been impossible for work to go on.

In 1920, the road was completed and the first motor vehicle driven by the then Governor Guggisberg arrived in Tamale in April of that year. The Great North road aside facilitating the work of administrators, also played a significant role in moving a variety of trade goods such as cattle, goats, fowls, Shea butter, corn, groundnuts and migrants to the south. The north also received southern goods especially salt and beer and other European products such as soap, sugar, cloths, bicycles among others. The opportunities offered by the road in terms of ease of travel and trade encouraged the development of settlements on the road and the urban expansion of Salaga and Tamale.

INTRODUCTION

In 1992, Ivor Wilks indicated that a full history of the great-roads (Twi, *nkwantempon*) of Asante has yet to be written. Wilks admits that more is known about the southern routes than the northern routes in the Gold Coast (Ivor Wilks 1992: 176).[2] The reason for such a conclusion was simple; European merchants operated more in the south and were interested in the development of roads in the south. Years after the 'lamentations' of Wilks, the issue of the great-roads is yet to be re-visited by scholars.

My paper is concerned with the construction of a two hundred and thirty four mile (about three hundred and seventy eight kilometres) road linking Kumasi to Tamale via Salaga—what became popularly known in colonial discourse as 'The Great North Road'. Critical appreciation of the Northern Road is essential to the history of the north as well as the south

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[1] Samuel Aniegye Ntewusu is a social historian. He obtained his PhD in history from the University of Leiden, The Netherlands. Since October 2011 Ntewusu, has been employed as Research Fellow at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana. He is currently a visiting Fellow at the African Studies Centre in Leiden, The Netherlands.

[2] Gold Coast and Ghana will be used interchangeably depending on the event or the historical period being discussed.

of Ghana; for one cannot come to an adequate understanding of the socio-economic history of the north and the south without recourse to this road. This paper interrogates the rationale for the construction of the road and the way and manner in which the road was used. While doing so, this paper argues that the construction and use of the Northern Road had far-reaching implications in the socio-economic history of the Gold Coast with regards to labour, trade and colonial administration.

INITIAL CONSIDERATION FOR A NORTHERN ROAD

The history of roads in Asante has been extensively discussed by Wilks (1975;1992). He indicates that the roads in Asante headed in all directions. The south roads linked Kumasi to a series of coastal ports which connected to the maritime highways to Europe and the Americas. The north roads were also connected to the trans-Saharan routes leading to Mediterranean shores via the western and central Sudan. Roads at that stage were linked up to traditional political power, as kings had the duty of maintaining the highways. Unlike, the Great North Road, the greatness of pre-motorised or great roads of Asante described by Wilks can only be analysed from their constant use by porters and donkeys and not by motor vehicles.

Wrangham (2010) in writing about road revolution in the Gold Coast, indicates that unlike pre-1900 Asante which concentrated on roads as a way of promoting economic and traditional political development, colonial administrators were interested in railways and not on motorised roads. For example Governor Clifford's interest in railways was influence by the transport development in other parts of the world- this was the great age of railway construction (Wrangham 2010:2). Railways were integrating local economies into the world economy, exploiting raw materials and importing manufactured goods across Britain's tropical empire including its African colonies. Development was seen by colonial governments as dependent on the railways opening up sources of trade and through rail rates providing public funds. In addition the colonial administration felt that road construction was much more expensive than rails especially when it came to issues of maintenance. Many reports described roads as badly damaged by lorries (Ntewusu 2012:131). Motor lorries churned up the roads into quagmires or reduce them to powder. Even though Wranghams view seems to suggest that colonial administrators were mainly concerned about railways a critical view of the archival records indicates that some of the administrators at least favoured the construction of 'motorised roads' in the Gold Coast.

As earlier on noted, in the sixteenth century and even earlier, footpaths played an important role in linking trade centres in the north to the south of Gold Coast. Wilks indicates the central role of these footpaths in linking Kumasi with the Gonja provincial capital of Kpembe, the commercial town of Salaga and the Dagomba capital of Yendi. During that period, Dyula traders monopolised these footpaths. They sold their wares along the routes. The most important economic product that fuelled trade and the use of the footpaths between Kumasi and Salaga and Yendi in the north, and to areas beyond the frontiers of Gold Coast such as Timbucktu in Mali and Kano in Nigeria was kola nuts (Wilks 1971:129). Up to this stage one could conclude that affairs of mobility in terms of the use of footpaths and routes were controlled by African traders.

It was the Anglo-Ashanti war of 1873-4 which highlighted the interest of British administrators in the interior of the Gold Coast. Indeed, after the war with Asante, the British administration wanted to have free contact with Salaga through Kumasi. For the British such

an interaction would doubtless be of great advantage to the colony, since it would allow the opening up of trade with the interior (Ward 1960:138).

In line with the need for linking the north to the south, several European administrators and missionaries and explorers embarked on a number of trips from the south of the country to the north. Some of them included: Barth, Bonnat, Bowdich, Glover, Gouldsbury among others. These travels/journeys brought to the fore, the difficulty of paths and routes which were the principal means of transport in the country for which all the administrators, missionaries and explorers agreed, was bad and difficult to travel on (Johnson 1965). Such difficulties were usually communicated to the metropolitan offices in Europe and request made for the construction of 'modern roads' into the interior.

Apart from Europeans, there were other Africans who stressed the need for a road to the north. For example, in 1896, the British establishment employed George Ekem Ferguson, a Ghanaian Fante surveyor to negotiate and sign treaties of friendship between ethnic groups in Ashanti hinterland particularly with the King of Salaga. Besides treaties of friendship his visit also had other initiatives among them was the extension of British influence in the interior, which he did by hoisting or distributing British flags in some of the villages and towns. His efforts were also directed at containing the northward economic and political expansion of Asante (Arhin 1974:59-60). As a surveyor Ferguson indicated the importance of a modern road to the north which will enable goods to be moved from the north to the coast and vice-versa without much of Asante's influence.

Essentially one could say that earlier attempts to construct a road to the north were much more highlighted by European administrators, missionaries and explorers including one African.

As previously noted both in Britain, and the Gold Coast, the reports sent by the administrators and missionaries provoked many debates in the Legislative Council and the British parliament. All discussions at this stage served to discourage the construction of a road to the north and in most parts of the Gold Coast.

Despite these arguments, by 1900 the general conclusion reached by members of the legislative council in the Gold Coast and the British parliament was that even though good carriage roads in Ghana were too expensive to build, it was nonetheless important to construct roads since roads were not only desirable, but very necessary.

In line with the above, in his address to the Gold Coast Legislative Council in 1901, Governor Mathew Nathan outlined a policy of communication development that included the building of more railways and roads in the Gold Coast for trains and motor vehicles even though still at that stage, there were no motor vehicles. Interestingly by 1902, the first motor vehicle was imported into the country and that revolutionised road construction in the Gold Coast (Dickson 1961:137; Haydon 1970:114).

CONSTRUCTING THE ROAD: A CHOICE BETWEEN THE WESTERN AND EASTERN ROUTES

In the construction of the road, the colonial administration had three options regarding the direction that the road should take. Firstly, the administration had a choice of route through Techiman to Kintampo thence to Tamale (Fig. 1. See the green line on the map below). That route did not have the disadvantage of crossing the Volta River at a longer distance especially

at Yeji and Makango.[3]Another choice was to totally develop a route from Accra through parts of the present day Volta and Eastern Regions through to Bimbilla and then to Tamale (Fig. 1. See the red line on the map below). Even though that route would have succeeded in cutting out Kumasi as was initially proposed by Ferguson and other European administrators, it was impossible to do that, because a sizeable part of the area was already occupied by Germans (Ntewusu 2012:233). The third route was through Kumasi-Yeji- Salaga and Tamale, (Fig. 1. See yellow line on the map). It was the third route that was selected for construction.

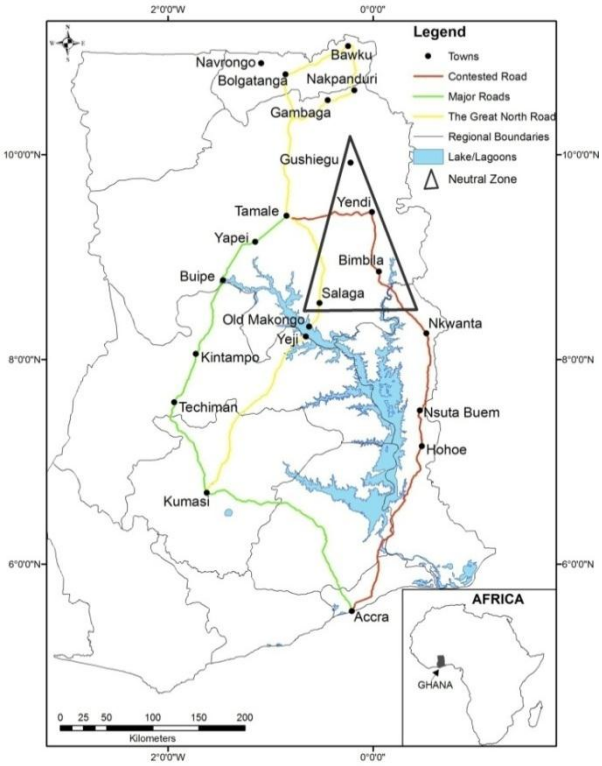

Figure 1 Map of Ghana showing the 'Great North Road' marked with a Yellow Line.

There were several reasons why the third route, that is, the Kumasi-Ejura-Yeji-Salaga-Tamale road was favoured. First, was the need for the road to follow the old trade route that was already in existence, and which connected Salaga to Kumasi. As the officer responsible for inspection of the road indicated:

From time immemorial, there had been a trade route from the North and North-East, through Salaga which carriers large quantities of cattle, cloth and other produce to Coomassie

[3] There were shorter places to cross at Yapei (Tamale Port) and Buipe each of which could have been crossed easily with a bridge. The Volta River which links the northern side of the road that is Makango to the southern part which is Yeji is about ten kilometres long and can be crossed by ferry. Since the 1960s the Kumasi-Kintampo-Tamale road has taken much of the traffic from the Salaga road. The diversion came about as a result of the construction of the Akosombo dam which led to a lot of flooding on the Salaga-Kumasi road. Another reason is that any time the ferry broke down it was impossible for one to cross with a vehicle to either the north or the south. To avoid such an inconvenience many preferred to travel to Tamale via the Kintampo road.

chiefly returning for the most part with kola nuts. The road from Salaga southwards runs to Makango and thence to the left bank of the river at Yeji Ferry....hence the necessity of the road, the Gateway of the Northern Territories.[4]

From the above it is clear that old trade routes played a very important role in the choice of the new road. From the statement also, it was obvious that Salaga was considered economically important as far as the Northern Territories were concerned. As noted earlier, in all the diplomatic travels of colonial administrators to the north, they never hid their wish and intention regarding Salaga. They intended Salaga to bounce back to its former status as an important market centre in West Africa. With these perceived advantages, the road construction began in the eastern corridor.

Strategically the eastern route was also favoured because of taxation and the need to control mobility of people. Most of the goods leaving south to the north and vice versa had to be ferried across the Volta at Yeji. With the construction of the road it was considered an easy way of taxing every product that went across the river in addition to regulating the movement of people and goods.[5]

Furthermore, the westward expansion of Germans from Kete Krachi was not in the political and economic interest of the British colonial administration, and the road was considered one of the ways by which such expansion could be put in check. (R.B. Bening 1999:31-32). Prior to the construction of the road, German goods and currency were already gaining patronage in most parts of the Northern territories that were under British rule. The availability of German currency and goods were due to the transport advantage that the Germans had over the British as far as that territory was concerned. For example, it was relatively easier to transport goods by donkeys and canoes from German areas such as Kete Krachi and Yendi to Salaga. Through the road, the British would have the advantage of regulating German trade going in and out of their territory.

Other factors that influenced the construction of the road through Salaga were the availability and concentration of oil seeds especially shea nuts and groundnuts in the area between Makango and Tamale.[6] In addition to the oil seeds there was a great number of cattle, which were intended to be supplied to the south particularly to Kumasi, Secondi-Takoradi and Accra. Besides these local products, a number of British companies had established cotton farms in the Northern part of the country of which transport was needed to carry the products to the south. These factors mentioned above influenced the construction of the road from Kumasi through Salaga to Tamale. It is important at this stage to discuss the way and manner the road was constructed.

BUILDING THE ROAD: LABOURERS, CHIEFS AND ADMINISTRATORS

There were conflicting reports in colonial historiography as to the exact date for the commencement of construction of the road. Even though some reports indicate that the road construction began in 1900, there was no seriousness attached to its construction. Very serious

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4 PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/3/3, Yeji-Makango Road- Completion Report, 1914

5 For issues of taxation and regulation of mobility to and from the Northern Territories see R.B. Davidson. *Migrant Labour in the Gold Coast,* Achimota, University College of the Gold Coast, (1954) J. Rouch, *Notes on Migrations into the Gold Coast,* Musue de l'homme Paris, (1954).

6 No Author, A Project for the Construction of a Railway between Kumasi and the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, Accra, Government Printing Office, (1928), 19-20

construction started in 1907. In that year, a new policy on the laying out of roads in the Northern Territories came into being. In the Northern Territories, the road to Tamale received the prime priority. The British considered the road to Tamale important because of the transfer in 1907 of the British administration from Gambaga to Tamale which required good communication from the south into the new administrative capital.

Two labour categories were identified in the construction of the Great North Road- European supervisors and African labourers. One can further categorise the African labourers into two: those who were conscripted and those whose labour were rewarded or paid for. In most cases, chiefs or traditional authorities were responsible for providing most of these two categories of labourers.[7] As precisely pointed out by Governor Guggisberg during the construction of the Great North Road:

The efforts of the chiefs and people continue unabated. In spite of great natural difficulties, poorly equipped with tools and naturally with complete ignorance of the requirements of the motor vehicle they construct many miles of new motor roads and open up districts which had hitherto been closed to motor traffic. Bad as were many of the roads owing to lack of technical knowledge and the scarcity of supervision they were an all important factor in the development of roads. However much it may have cost to reconstruct these roads, they fully justify their existence (Guggisberg 1927:79-80)

These efforts of the chiefs and the people showed a belief in the future of the country and a determination to take advantage of the new system of transport.

Even though exact figures were not quoted, Guggisberg was of the view that the involvement of the chiefs in road construction brought the cost to 'vanishing point'. This statement reveals that most of the hands that were employed were actually not paid.

As previously noted, different ethnic groups were employed in the construction of the road. The most visible ethnic groups that were used in constructing the road were, Vagla, Gonja, Dagarti, Frafra and Kangarga (Builsa). Of all the different ethnic groups, according to the inspector of roads, the Dargati and Wala especially those from Wa and Lawra were considered the best, the Frafra were good, the Grushie fair and the Kanjarga were those who did not take kindly to hard work. At the same time the colonial administration praised the Kanjarga for their high sense of security which ensured the safety of workers and construction items on the site. Women were also involved in the road construction and they were mostly responsible for cooking food for the workers.

There were several groups of people that worked on the road, and each group was referred to as a *gang*. Gangs were organised with one headman, twenty-nine labourers, one blacksmith, eight carpenters, nine sawyers, a timekeeper and a storekeeper.

From time to time, a colonial officer in charge of construction went around inspecting the progress of work. In situations where there was no construction inspector the Assistant District Commissioner became responsible for such inspections.

[7] Report on Togoland Under British Mandate for the year 1932, London, (1933), 21

Photo 1 Picture of two gangs working on a bridge on the Yeji-Makango stretch of the Great Northern Road. Note the traditional loin cloth (Danta in Twi, Dakori in Nawuri) (Reproduced with permission of PRAAD, Tamale)

Photo 2 A completed wooden bridge on the Yeji-Makango stretch of the Great Northern Road. Note on top of the bridge a colonial official with his bicycle on inspection duties (Picture reproduced with permission from PRAAD, Tamale, Ghana.)

The cost of construction of a one-mile road ranged from around fifty to sixty pounds, rising to about 2,500 British pounds in marshy areas and riverside. The cost of constructing a bridge of about forty-five feet was four hundred pounds for marshy areas and one hundred and twenty two pounds for areas that were not marshy- dry areas. This is understandable because marshy areas required more wood and more gravel and stones. It must be indicated that the expenditure mentioned above were a little below the real cost of construction since as already emphasised, conscripted labour was used in addition to the wage labour. Those who

received wages were paid according to the general wage existing in the country at the time. Each labourer received about two shillings six pence.[8]

Gifts from chiefs such as cattle, goats, fowls, and other foodstuffs such as yams and maize remain unaccounted for in monetary terms. Also in times of heavy rains or bush fires some parts of the road got washed away or some wooden bridges burnt thereby increasing the cost of construction. Notable tools used in the road construction comprised pickaxes, shovels, hammers; carrier pans, wheel barrows among others.

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED DURING ROAD CONSTRUCTION

The most important problem that was encountered in the course of the construction of the road was food. In most cases, lack of food compelled the colonial administration to divert gangs from road construction to markets in Kete-Krachi and Attebubu to carry maize to the construction sites. In some instances, lack of food compelled the colonial administration to reduce the number of workers on the road. For example in 1914 from February to October about 1,716 bags of maize was consumed by workers on the road, compelling the administration to reduce labourers from twenty-nine in a gang to about nineteen.[9]

Besides the problem with food, there were also desertions. The stretch of road that witnessed the most desertions during the construction was on the Kumasi-Ejura portion of the road. Kumasi and Ejura were important centers for production of cocoa in Ashanti. Labourers were therefore demanded for both cultivation of cocoa and for transportation. Since motor vehicles had not started operating at that time, the only means of transporting cocoa from the area to the railroads was by rolling it in barrels or carried by porters to Agona, on the present day Kumasi-Ejura road, a distance of about thirty five miles.

Most of the gangs preferred working on the farms because it was much more remunerative. Unlike the two shillings and six pence paid in road construction, the farmers were willing to pay the labourers between three and four shillings. Furthermore, labour on the farms could not be engaged for free as occurred in the case of conscripted labour on the road. Besides, there had been little frequency in shortage of food for workers on the farms. In most cases, the desertions compelled the inspector of roads to go into farms in search of the deserters only returning on most cases unsuccessful and exhausted.[10]

Other problems besides food and desertions were rains and bushfires. It must be borne in mind that most of the bridges were made of wood and not concrete (see pictures above), which meant that during the dry season the weed/grass near the bridges need to be cleared. Failure to do so led to the burning out and collapse of some of the wood bridges. The next had to do with rains; heavy rains usually wash away most parts of the road since the road was not fortified with stones/gravel and bitumen thus compelling the colonial administration to work on the road again.

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8 For more on wages at the time see; PRAAD, Accra ADM 11/1, Difficulty in Obtaining Carriers for special Remittances, 1919, PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11/1. Artisans and Labourers- Accra Schedule of Daily Rates of Pay 1919

9 PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/3/3, Yeji-Makango Road- Completion Report, 1914.

10 PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/3/3, Yeji-Makango Road- Completion Report, 1914

Photo 3 Picture of a mile straight road when the construction had just reached three miles after Makango towards Salaga. From the picture it is evident that the road was not tarred and appeared muddy as well. (Picture re-produced with permission of PRAAD, Tamale, Ghana)

Finally, the First World War also affected the road construction. After the outbreak of the war, construction had to be slowed. Much of the resources were diverted into war and some of the labour that was supposed to be used in the construction of the road had to enlist for the war.

Despite all the problems mentioned above, the road was completed and subsequently put to use. It is important to indicate that even though no separate account was made for the road between Kumasi and Tamale in the north, it was reported that the completion of the road had forced government expenditure which included rails and roads to 6, 844, 047 British pounds, against which the value of trade rose from 7, 150,000 British pounds.

PUTTING THE ROAD TO USE: 1920-1942

The Great North Road was put to a number of uses and attempting to discuss the numerous uses would prove too daunting a task. I shall therefore evaluate the use of the road from five perspectives: administrative, trade, labour migration, inter-state relations and religion.

ADMINISTRATIVE

As already indicated by 1920, the Kumasi-Tamale road was completed. The completion of the Great North Road finally linked the coast to the north by a 'modern road'. The first to use it was the head of the colonial administration at the time- Governor Guggisberg. He arrived in Tamale in April 1920 by a motor vehicle. Following the successful travelling of Guggisberg

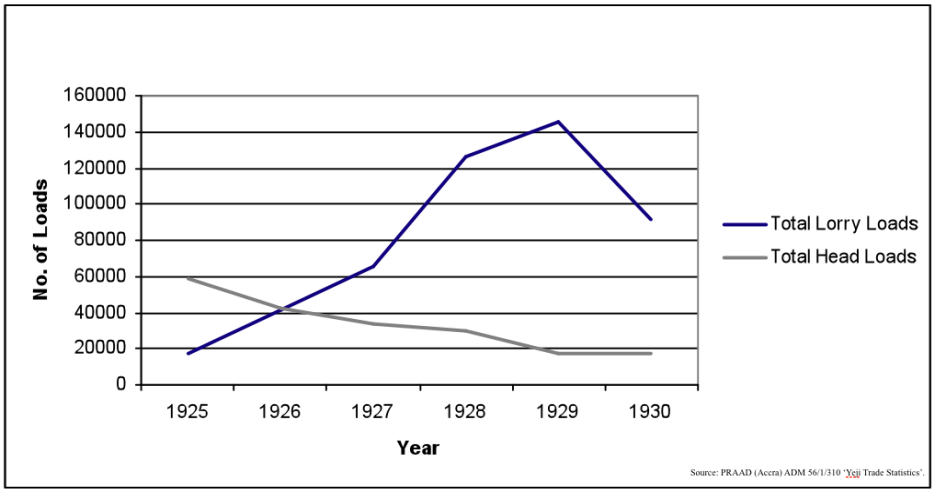
to Tamale, the road was put to greater use by more colonial administrators as well as those who worked in the colonial service especially ex-servicemen.[11]

The completion of the road enabled demobilized soldiers, such as Ex-Sgt. Amadu Suuka, Ex-Sgt Bukari Grumah, Pte Kofi Boafo, and a host of others, to take on jobs as drivers since they had already received training as drivers and mechanics while in the military.[12] Ex-Servicemen drivers at the lorry parks in Accra and Kumasi, preferred destinations such as Yeji, Salaga, and Tamale since most of them were recruited from there. Incidentally, some of the colonial administrators were stationed in these places mentioned above and had to rely on the drivers for services. The colonial administration preferred working with the ex-servicemen and made some of them responsible for the dispatch of letters and delivery of goods meant for administrative units and administrators and their families. The preference for them was due to the fact that they had in the course of serving as soldiers, been exposed to the geography of the area. In addition, they were already used to the colonial working ethics thus making them the most preferred for handling transport issues related to the colonial bureaucracy (Ntewusu 2012: 126).

The frequent use of the road by colonial administrators, traders and 'ordinary' people led to a decline in portage. Already, one of the reasons for the road was to overcome the disadvantage of the carrier system.

The Great North Road relieved most people from the burden of carrying more heavy goods and persons over long distances. Sebastiaan Robert Soeters' study provides very useful insights into the nature and use of the great northern road and drew the conclusion that the completion of the road and the use of motor vehicles on the road had some important effects on human powered portage. He indicated that the road facilitated the movement of goods by motor vehicles thereby reducing portage (Fig 5).

Table 1 Total Lorry Loads vs. Total Head Loads, 1925-1930



Source: S.R. Soeters, Tamale 1907-1957: Between Colonial Trade and Colonial Chiefship, PhD Thesis, Leiden (2012: 59).

[11] It is important to indicate that even before the completion of the road porters were already using the road as portions got completed. For every part that was completed porters immediately made use of it. But, when the road was completed the usage by porters began to dwindle.

[12] For the list of ex-servicemen taken as drivers in the Gold Coast after the First World War, see PRAAD, Cape Coast, ADM 23/1/308, Lorry Drivers, East Africa Gratuities and Medals 1918-1927.

At first, the carriage of goods had been considered very costly in terms of human energy, cost of food consumed and rates paid to porters. Worst of all, most of the carriers sustained injury or serious damage to their feet, compelling the colonial administration and traders to put tar on the feet of the porters. The reason for using tar was that, it contained antiseptic which healed the wound and at the same time acted as a pad, which prevented further wearing of the feet. When the road was completed, such human burden was reduced.

KOLA NUT AND SHEA NUT (BUTTER) TRADE

Prior to the construction of the road much of kola nut distribution from Kumasi to Tamale was done in two ways; animal drawn transport, and by head-load portage. Due to a number of disadvantages associated with these modes of transport the prospects of the Great North Road and the use of motorised transport was very much anticipated.[13]

Amadu Ilorin who was one of the kola-nut traders, gave a report to the colonial government in 1919 which helps us discuss the issue of the Great Northern Road further. In his report regarding kola-nut trade, Amadu Ilorin (alias Amadu/Baba Tudu) wrote as follows:

> Kola nuts from Ashanti some go by land to Mossi, Sokoto and Kano and take about three months to Sokoto. It takes four months to Kano from Coomasi. By steamer from Seccondee it takes about five days to Lagos and three days by rail from Lagos to Kano. It takes about two months from Lagos to Sokoto by walking. No railway from Lagos to Sokoto. Kola nuts from the colony are shipped to Lagos or Nigeria from the ports of Cape Coast, Saltpond, Winneba and Accra. If a boat of kola takes nine days from Seccondee to Lagos it must go bad. The kola shipped from Seccondee sustains more damage than those shipped from Cape Coast, Saltpond, Winneba and Accra because the Kola from the port in Seccondee goes right down the bottom of the ship and it suffers more [sic]. If a boat takes five days from Seccondee to Lagos the damage will not be much... If one takes hundred donkeys load from Coomasi to Sokoto about two loads will spoil and in that case by land (donkeys) is also better than by steamer and only takes too long to reach.[14]

The report from Amadu to the colonial secretary summarises the invaluable advantages of road transport and explains the reason for the sudden switch of kola-nut suppliers to the Great North Road. From the mid-1920s, maritime exports of kola nuts to Lagos declined. Some commentators on kola nut trade such as Lovejoy and Abaka attribute the decline to alternative sources of kola nuts to Lagos, particularly productions within Nigeria and imports from Cameroon and Sierra Leone (Lovejoy 1980: 126; Abaka 2005:87).Even though there were alternative sources of kola to Nigeria, that maritime exports dwindled not only because there were alternative sources of kola supply to Nigeria but also because improved motorised transport led to more kola nuts getting to Nigeria by the Great North Road. Oral and archival evidence provide considerable evidence about the events at the time, explaining how the completion of the road in 1920 coincided with dwindling maritime exports to Nigeria. As the kola nut report of 1930 indicates:

The diminution of maritime exports has attracted attention and given some cause for alarm, meantime however observations led the Department to suppose that overland traffic to the north was increasing and it seemed likely that the decrease in the former was coinciding with this. Improved transport facilities and the development of motor roads, with the

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[13] PRAAD, ARG, 1/12/36, The Kola Trade, 1921-1934. Some of the disadvantages include less speed and few quantities of load carried by both porters and donkeys. In addition insect bites from tsetse flies led to sickness and in some cases death of the animals.

[14] PRAAD, Kumasi, ARG 14/11/12, Secret Letter, Kola Export Tax, 1918-1919.

consequent increase in motor traffic all tended to support the later theory. . . .In the case of reduced railings from Ashanti, however it is evidently due to larger quantities being dispatched by the northern overland route.[15]

The statement above was actually supported by the statistical evidence in the table below, regarding the preference for transport of kola on the Great Northern Road.

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Year	South by rail from Kumasi	North by Motor and other means	Total
1924	2,449	2,086	4,535
1925	2,947	2,929	5,876
1926	2,050	3,487	5,537
1927	2,006	3,387	5,393
1928	759	3,206	3,965
1929	348	3,937	4,285
1930	753	4,650	5,403

Source: PRAAD, Kumasi, ARG 1/12/36. Cola Survey of the Eastern Ashanti Areas and a General Review of the Gold Coast Cola Industry, 1931

Due to the completion of the Great North Road, Lebanese and Syrians who otherwise did not take part in the transport system in the north of the country which at that stage was human powered portage, acquired motor vehicles and began conveying the kola nuts of traders to various parts of Northern Ghana and even outside Gold Coast.[16] Syrians and Lebanese were even engaging in kola transportation and trade from the Gold Coast using motor vehicles and plying on the road, going as far as the Sudan with kola nuts.[17]

In sum, there are several reasons for the change of direction of kola nut trade and the utilisation of motor lorries on the Great North Road which could be explained as a measure of the economics of the industry. The merchants dealing in tons of kola borne by the road through the use of motor-lorries were equally favoured and could realise investments in a very short time without undue risk of deterioration. Having purchased the nut, it could be loaded at his convenience and there are a lot of markets within easy reach and still better prices to be obtained at the northern markets such as in Yeji, Salaga, Masaka, Tamale, Navrongo and Bawku. The markets are sufficiently near to the merchant to turn over his cash within a few days involving little risk and a minimum outlay of capital.[18]

Besides kola nuts which went north, the completion of the road led to an increase in shea butter transport to the south by road beginning from the 1920s. For example, in the Gonja District alone, 3,792 head-loads of shea butter were transported by lorry to the south in 1927. The figure increased to 6,710 head-loads in 1928.[19] The completion of the road coincided with a number of local and global forces which affected the demand for shea butter.

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15 PRAAD, Kumasi, ARG, 14/11/12, Kola Export

16 PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/3/125, Gonja District Report, 1944-1945.

17 PRAAD, Tamale, NRG8/3/10, Annual Report 1928-1929.

18 PRAAD, Kumasi, ARG 1/12/36, Cola Survey of the Eastern and Ashanti Areas and a General Review of the Gold Coast Industry, 1931.

19 PRAAD, Kumasi, ARG 3/15/30, Traffic in Goods South Bound. Figures from Bamboi Ferry, 1929.

For example, shea butter was supplied to the Gold Coast Constabulary Force. Just like other northerners, they used shea butter in food preparation. Also, as mounted members of the constabulary, they used shea to treat cracks in the hoofs of the horses.[20] During the period under review, much of the policing in Kumasi and Accra depended on horse patrols since there were few patrol vehicles. The few vehicles that were available could also not be used because of a general caution on the use of vehicles by government agencies owing to the economic depression at that time.[21] Closely related to the above in terms of shea butter use among the service personnel is the butter's role in foot care. Up to this period, the police and military non-official corps still walked barefooted, and just like the porters of the pre-lorry stage who used tar on their feet, they took care of their feet by using shea butter (Ntewusu, 2011:195)

As shea served these domestic purposes in the early parts of the twentieth century shea was also being repositioned on the global front and of which, the northern road played a critical role.[22] Upon completion of the road, Lebanese and European firms relocated to important northern towns such as Salaga, Yendi and Tamale among others and started buying and exporting shea butter and shea nuts abroad.

The increase in demand for shea nuts and shea butter from the 1920s was well contained by the road. Statistics at the Yeji ferry provides important leads to the exports. Trade in cattle, goats and fowls also increased tremendously. The road enabled large numbers of cattle to be sent to Kumasi, Accra and Takoradi to satisfy the growing urban population in those areas. It is important to note that until the completion of the road few cattle got into Accra from the north. The few that got there went by the Volta River. Sending cattle to the south by bush paths was uneconomical due to difficulty of movement as well as the frequency of tsetse flies. As a result until the 1920s much of the demand for cattle in Accra Takoradi and Kumasi was met with supplies from Cameroon and Nigeria. The completion of the road enabled more cattle, sheep, goats and fowls to be sent from the north to the cities in the south.

THE ROAD AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

There were certain important aspects of the development of the road that need to be considered. Colonial administrators and travellers have indicated the general progress that was greatly assisted by the construction of the road network. Easy communication between the north and the south brought the various chiefdoms, practically isolated in the past into closer touch with each other. The suspicions and often hostile attitude which they displayed towards each other developed into mutual forbearance and cooperation, thus immensely encouraging the development of a kind of 'national' pride and unity.

The road also served another important social need. Some Hausa and Yoruba residents in Kumasi and Accra, still regard themselves as natives of Salaga, even though they are migrants from Nigeria. As they put it in Hausa, *Mun fito Salaga* (literally, "We are natives of [or we come from] Salaga"). The notion of coming from Salaga indicates the formation of a social

[20] Interview with Abbass Adamu, Tudu, 15th December, 2008.

[21] PRAAD, Accra, CSO 17/1/57, Scheme for the control of the Operation of Motor Vehicles, 1942

[22] Reports indicate that by 1903 , Shea nuts from the Northern part of the Gold Coast was been sought for by most firms in Britain and other parts of Europe. For more on the Shea nuts and Shea butter reports see PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11, SNA 349, Shea butter, 1903; PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11, SNA 91/1910, Shea butter, 1911.

identity which transcends Ghana's urban space into the rural hinterland. It projects a sense of belonging and a sense of place or roots—Salaga and the rest of the Zongos in Ghana—which subsequently demands frequent travels between the two places.

Closely related to the issue of communities in the south getting linked up to the north was also the sudden emergence of settlements along the road. The completion of the road led to massive movement of Bassaries and Konkombas from the former German territories into the British territory. The migrants contributed immensely to the production and sale of crops such as yams, groundnuts, guinea corn and millet to travellers. Others also moved to Salaga and Tamale since the road (re)activated economic ventures in those places. In most cases, such movements not only led to increase in economic activities but also to population growth.

For example between 1933 and 1947 the District Commissioner for Salaga had occasion to report as follows:

> Salaga shews (sic) definite signs of revival. This is due to a variety of causes, among which may be included the establishment of the weekly market and the steady increase of Konkomba settlers down the road…. Trade up and down the North road is increasing every year and Tamale in the eastern side of the territory is crowed daily.[23]

It is clear from the above that the road played a critical role in the urbanisation process of Salaga and Tamale. Indeed whereas it was difficult to find figures to support the growth of Salaga beyond the report above, in the case of Tamale it was very evident. For example before the completion of the road, Tamale's population was 1,907 in 1907 but after completion of the road, the population increased to 3, 901 in 1921. The population further increased to 12,901 in 1931 and to 16,055 in 1948. These population increases, Soeters concluded, may be reduced to two developments. First the decision by the colonial administration to establish a colonial headquarters in Tamale and the second, the uptake of motorised transport by local and Syrian entrepreneurs following the completion of the Great North Road in 1920 (Soeters 2012:59).

From the discussions so far, it is evident that the northern road contributed to the development of trade, urbanisation and also the smooth administration of the north and south. However, the road also had some negative consequences on the northern part of the country. The next component evaluates the negative consequence in the context of long distance migrations of northerners to the south.

THE ROAD AND MIGRATIONS TO THE SOUTH

Seasonal labour migration is an integral part of the social and economic life of West Africa (Swindell 1977:452; Carolina Lentz and Veit Erlman, 1989 :74). In Ghana, some commentators see the migrant labour system as a useful adaptation to the unequal distribution of resources, particularly between the rich forest and coastal south and the poor savannah north. Labour migrations have also been interpreted as a direct product of colonialism. It would seem that in an attempt to correct the imbalance between the north and the south, the colonial administration encouraged southward migrations. In this regard the role of the road and of British colonial administration in stimulating labour migrations cannot be ignored.[24]

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[23] PRAAD, Tamale, NRG, 8/3/36, General Report, 1933-1947; PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/3/125, Gonja District Report, 1944-1945

[24] PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/3/10, 1928-1929 Annual Report for the Northern Province, NT.

I argue that the road enabled the government's policy of encouraging southward labour migrations to be implemented. Through the road, private individuals in the south made requests for labour to the district and regional commissioners in the Northern Territories. For example, in July 1929 the Adontehene of Kumasi requested fifty labourers from the Northern Territories through the District Commissioner of Tamale.[25] The commissioners usually relied on drivers on the road who transported the labourers from the north to their employers in the south.

In 1931 the Commissioner had occasion to report that:

> The Northern Territories has [sic] always been relied on to supply labour in the south. Throughout the dry season there is considerable migration of labourers and traders from the north and people on their routes make a living catering for them.[26]

By 1949, migration of northerners to the south had become institutionalised. The institutionalisation of migration in the later period was due to advancement in communication between the north and the south courtesy the Great Northern Road. For example, the Commissioner reported that:

The highest proportion of adult males estimated to be absent from their home villages at any one time is fifteen percent in Zuarungu area of the Mampruise district. The greater numbers of these migrants return to their homes for the farming season. The journey is not particularly arduous and motor transport facilities are now adequate.[27]

Whereas some of the migrants remained in the forest belt to engage in farming in the cocoa and mining areas, some ended up in the coastal area as labourers and carriers. In Accra, quite a number were engaged in the cultivation of sisal and head-load portage. As the Superintendent of the Sisal Plantation in Accra reported:

There is no shortage of labour during the year though it is necessary to rely on the Northern Territory labour it has been very gratifying to notice numbers of old contract labour returning on their own for work on the plantation. In most cases they have travelled by foot for over 300 miles from their homes in the Northern Territories to the sisal plantation to work. It certainly proves that work on the sisal plantation is not as unpopular as was assumed at first.[28]

Even though there was improvement in motor transportation after the 1920s, most of the migrants still made the trip on foot, but definitely by using the main road that was constructed for vehicles. Sometimes such travels resulted in hunger and death. The average journey per day for the travellers is thought to be from fifteen to twenty miles. Generally, the migrants slept out around the villages that developed along the road, while many slept on the side of the road.[29] Shelter was taken in the villages on a wet night. There were instances where villages on the migratory routes could not contain the number of migrants, thus resulting in deaths. For example, in 1931 the District Commissioner for Gonja district reported as follows:

> There have been several deaths from starvation reported. This occurred among labour moving along the road. If they developed sore foot or are otherwise incapacitated from walking they

[25] PRAAD, Kumasi, ARG 15/2/15, Recruitment of Fifty Labourers from North, 1927.

[26] PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/3/42, Census Report 1931, For the Southern Province of the Northern Territories.

[27] PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/3/161, Report on the Gold Coast, 1949.

[28] PRO, Kew, London, CO 96/682/9, Sisal Plantation at Accra, 1928.

[29] PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/3/42, Census Report 1931, For the Southern Province of the Northern Territories.

> lied [sic] down anywhere besides [sic] the road and are subsequently found dead or dying of starvation. The local people report these cases but generally not until it is too late, as the unfortunate are not noticed until they are in extremis.[30]

Deaths and starvation were not the only negative effects that came about as a result of the use of the great road. Venereal diseases such as syphilis spread along the road by migrants and travellers. There also emerged a group of tricksters who connived with drivers on the road and kidnapped northerners to work on palm plantations and cocoa farms in the south.

ASAUKA LAFIA (ARRIVE SAFELY): OF PRAYERS, SPIRITS AND OFFERINGS ON THE GREAT NORTH ROAD

Asauka lafia (Arrive safely in Hausa) to which the passenger or traveller responds *Amee* (Amen) is a common phrase that has survived the period of the completion and immediate use of the Great North Road till date. Asauka lafia has religious connotations and is often regarded as prayers offered by the non-travelling community and beggars to passengers and drivers who travel along the Great North Road. With the exception of a few cases asauka lafia is not said in vain. The passenger/s who is/are to receive it must offer some money to the one who is offering such prayers. Both Christians and traditionalists in the north who are about to travel on the road have to leave asauka lafia for their relations at home or give it to beggars at the lorry park before embarking on their journey. It is a way of ensuring safe passage from the point of embarkation to the point of destination.

Asauka lafia opens our discussions on the religious dimension of the Great North Road. Klaeger (2009; 2013) offers very useful insights into rituals and prayers on roads in southern Ghana. He discussed how Christians and traditionalists offer prayers and sacrifices on southern roads in order to cleanse them of evil spirits that cause harm and even death to passenger through accidents on the road. The Kumasi-Accra highway has been a major recipient of such traditional sacrifices and Christian prayers (Klaeger 2013:446-448).

Unlike the south, the Great North Road is rather dominated by Islamic and in some cases traditional rituals often performed by individuals and in some rare cases by whole communities. The sacrifices are therefore not as elaborate as in the south. But it is important to discuss the items that are used in such sacrifices and the significance or intent of the rituals.

The sacrifices mostly involve kola nuts, shea butter, cotton tread, millet, cow milk, baked beans (*mansa*), money (mostly coins), cowries and fowls. These items are usually put in a calabash and the live fowl tied by the calabash. The items are normally placed by the road side or at major cross-roads. The road leading to Tamale from Kumasi passes through a number of towns and villages including Ejura, Salaga, Masaka. Each village or town connects to other settlements in the interior. Hence every village or town in the village has a cross road and a potential place for such road side rituals. An informant indicates that until the construction of the road sacrifices of this nature were unknown.[31] The question therefore arises as to why the sacrifices and why they are performed on the road.

Informants indicate that most of the sacrifices are linked to the profound later day Islamic evangelisation that swept the area in the 1920s and 1930s. It is important to indicate however that the northern part of Ghana has been one of the places that Islam and trade went hand in

[30] PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/3/42, Census Report, 1931.

hand. As a result of the trans-Saharan trade and trade in Salaga much of the north got Islamised mostly through Islamic traders (Weiss 2000:80-82; 2004: 10). At the time of the trans-Saharan trade such rituals were performed at home or in the market. But the completion of the road unleashed a new crop of Muslim preachers who traverse the road between Tamale in the north and Ejura in Ashanti. In most cases people in communities on the road consult them for spiritual guidance or intervention in their day to day activities and problems. As a people who do not lodge in homes but mostly dwell by the roadside the Muslim evangelists and mallams will tell most of the people who come to them to perform sacrifices by the road. One needs to understand that the decision to perform such rituals by the road is informed by the lack of jurisdiction of preachers over land and other physical spaces. In a sense one can describe the road as a 'no man's land' for which such sacrifices could be made without offending any traditional authority or community. With time it was not only people who consulted the mallams that make the offerings even people who intend to travel perform such sacrifices to ensure safe travels.

Beside these Islamic and individual based rituals on the road, sometimes sacrifices are also performed on the Makango-Salaga stretch of road by communities that developed along the road. These sacrifices are informed by the belief that, that stretch has always been a place of intense contestations of river spirits from the Volta and land deities and dwarfs. These unseen beings always struggle for territorial dominance and control. In the event that vehicles get into the cross-fire while travelling on the road, chances are that such vehicles might be involved in an accident or may break down. As a result, sacrifices are offered to ensure that vehicles are spared in such circumstances. Unlike the Islamic rituals, described above the communal sacrifices do not involve kola nuts, tread or Shea butter but only cow milk and baked beans in a calabash placed on the road. Mostly the fights are believed to occur on Fridays and hence it is not uncommon to find a number of calabashes at the outer edge of communities on Fridays.

In problematising the Great North Road as a religious space, two religio-cultural ideas are particularly instructive. First is the belief in a world in which evil supernatural powers act as the cause of misfortune on the road as reflected in the constant fight for territorial domination on the road by river spirits, land deities and dwarfs. Secondly the need to create appropriate ritual contexts and sacred spaces on the road within which the world of benevolent powers could be invited to intervene in human crises as reflected in the individual rituals prescribed by mallams to facilitate the acquisition of fortunes and progress.

But at an analytical level these sacrifices also served the needs of the travelling public or communities on the road. There have been instances where stranded passengers on the road have emptied the calabashes of their contents especially the baked beans and cow milk which were consumed by hungry passengers. Porters and other road users have also taken the kola nuts and chewed them or gathered them and sold them out. Some members of the communities on the road also do go for the live fowls and rear them.

From the above detailed discussions it is evident that in addition to its administrative, social and economic significance, the Great Road also symbolises converging destinies for religious practitioners, drivers, passengers and communities that live or earn a living from the road. The sacrifices on the road are supposed to be good turning points in their journeys and their lives.

CONCLUSION

The most enduring aspect of colonialism which affected the north was the construction of the Great North Road. Through the road construction, villages were drafted into forced labour whilst others offered their labour for wages. They worked in teams popularly referred to as 'gangs'. Working conditions on the road were not as favourable as the cocoa farms where food was in abundance and wages were much better. While some labourers deserted for the so called 'lucrative jobs' on cocoa farms, the rest remained and work to the completion of the road in 1920. The construction of the road empowered chiefs in the north. They were given the power to recruit labourers and sometimes they were given monetary incentives. Unlike the south where the history of development of construction of roads was linked to extraction of mineral resources and the exploitation of cocoa, in the north the road was linked to the need for effective colonial administration of the protectorate and the exploitation of human labour for the mines and cocoa farms in the south. The export of seed oils and import of kola nuts came second to the needs mentioned above.

In is important to indicate that the completion of the road reduced the monopoly of Ashanti over the north both in terms of traditional political authority and in trade. Customs duties which had to be paid for goods coming in and going out of Asante were stopped and the institution of traditional road guards (*akwansrafuo*) was abolished. But the road also opened up the area for British colonisation and exploitation. Taxes were imposed on goods carried on the road via Yeji. Communication had been a major barrier to British direct control of the north. As reports already indicated immediately after the completion of the road, Governor Guggisberg became the first colonial official to drive on the road from Kumasi to Tamale.

After the completion of the road travellers and traders covering long distances by foot and donkeys shifted to lorries. The use of lorries also led to the building of lorry parks along the road. These were meant to accommodate the increasing passenger traffic on the road. The parks have spawned a complex economy of services, trade and exchange involving, ticket sellers popularly referred to as bookmen, food vendors, spare parts dealers, pick-pockets and prostitutes all dotted along the road from Kumasi to Salaga and Tamale.

Northern migrants who came down south through the road, to work at the mines and in cocoa farms facilitated the spread of venereal diseases on the road as they returned home. It was argued that until the completion of the road the Northern Territories were largely free from venereal diseases. No doubt syphilis was referred to in Dagbani, one of the northern languages as 'Kumasi doro'-Kumasi disease (Addae, 1996:239, Patterson, 1981:76). In addition to diseases, the uncertainty of travelling on the road has often led to many people especially passengers and drivers performing elaborate sacrifices before their departure to ensure safe arrival without any harm.

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