

Railway and the Development of Minna and Baro Towns, 1908-1988

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Abstract

The role of rail transportation in the sectoral development and overall growth of any economy cannot be over emphasized. Although, there have been significant changes in railway systems throughout the world this research is a historic account of the development of railways in Nigeria, with particular reference to the Baro-kano railway line. The study discusses the development of the Baro-Kano rail line, to assess its impact on the socio-economic development of Minna and Baro towns.

Introduction

The construction of railways started in London, England in the year 1803, when the first public railways were constructed, then in the USA in Mid 1810's and later spread to Russia, Spain, Italy, Germany, for various reasons. Thus, railways were described as the white hope of the nineteenth century. The development and construction of railway in Africa dates back to colonial rule particularly, when the building of transport infrastructures, such as seaports, railways and roads among others which simplified colonial administration as well as aiding the colonial exploitation of the colonies. This stems from the European imperialists' philosophy that transport development is key to colonial exploitation, as stated in King Leopold's famous dictum "colonizer c'est transporter". Precisely, the construction of railways in colonial Africa can be traced to the 1880s when the French colonial government developed rail road to link the coast to the hinterland of Dakar, Senegal and Guinea between 1879-82, across the groundnut producing areas, Ivory coast in 1905, and Dahomey in 1955 to promote the export of

rubber, timber etc. In fact, the Germans in Togo named the lines after the products that were carried, such as the Cocoa line, cotton line, Palm oil line etc.¹

In the present day Nigerian area, railway construction began in Lagos protectorate in 1896 and was extended to Ibadan in 1901, Jebba in 1909, Kano in 1911 and Port Harcourt, while Enugu and Jos railway line connecting the east to the north was completed in 1926.²

The Development of Railways in the Northern Protectorate

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

Lugard believed that a modern transport system was required, to open up the region, as well as, to extend his influence, because some enclaves were yet to be brought under effective control.³ He therefore, proposed an improvement to the transport facilities. As he asserted, “the material development of Africa may be summed up in one word Transport”.⁴ Thus, a modern transport was required to fast track African and in this regard Northern Nigerian development.

In view of the advantages the railways had over other forms of transport, Lugard therefore proposed building a railway, not only because he believed the economic development of the region depended on it, but also because, he saw it as the critical link to the sea, a link which Northern Nigeria needed. A rail- river transport system from port Baro on the Niger to Kano, the northern *entrepot*.⁵

Lugard proposed that a railway, independent of the Lagos Government Railway should be developed for the benefit of the region, to stimulate agricultural production, commerce, and movement of goods from inland to the coast, all to the benefit of the home country (Britain). The railway, as he further asserted, should be seen as part of the scheme of imperial defense, facilitating rapid concentration of troops and supplies if necessary, in view of the French and German presence on the Nigerian frontiers.⁶

In 1904, Lugard allied himself with the British Cotton Growing Association (BCGA), an association whose aim was to further cotton imperialism in British West Africa.⁷ Lugard assured the BCGA of the

cotton potentials in Northern Nigeria and of his administration's assistance. He pointed to them the inadequacy of the transport situation; and unless it was improved, Lugard warned, cotton could not be exploited in commercial quantities.⁸

By 1907, the British Parliament approved the construction of a "pioneer railway" (to build a cheap railway that would be developed to standard when traffic developed), from Baro to Kano, to ease administrative and military difficulties and for the purpose of opening up trade, as well as, the development of cotton.⁹ The construction of the Baro-Kano rail lines and the Bauchi Light railway was to provide the Northern Province an independent railway system that would link the province, as well as, to compete with the railway in the Southern province.¹⁰

The emergence of the Nigerian Railway Corporation

The first rail line in Africa was constructed in 1852 by the famous railway engineer Robert Stephenson to connect Cairo with Alexandria in Egypt, and later the Cape colony of South Africa in 1859.¹¹ In Tropical Africa, railway construction started towards the end of the 19th century. Thus, the period between the late 19th Century and the First World War were the boom years of railway construction in Tropical Africa.

Consequently, by 1896, construction of the first railway line began from Iddo (Lagos), reached Otta and Abeokuta in 1898 and Ibadan in 1901. That year Lagos - Ibadan line was opened and by 1909 the line reached Jebba and linked to Baro- Kano line (already completed in 1911) at Minna by 1915.¹²

The Eastern line connecting Port-Harcourt to Enugu was opened in 1916. This line got to Port Harcourt in 1924 from where it was extended to Kaduna by 1927; thus linking the Western and Eastern lines. Jos was linked with Zaria in 1912 by a narrow gauge line designed for the evacuation of tin from the Jos Plateau called the Bauchi light Railway.

The Nigerian Railway was therefore constituted in 1912 by the amalgamation of the Lagos Government Railway and the Baro- Kano Railway.

At the onset, the railway was known as the Nigerian government railway and run as a department of the Federal Government. However, in 1952, the Government announced its intention to establish the Nigerian

Railway Corporation (NRC) as an autonomous body to take over the duties and functions of the railway department. This did not come through until 1955 when the Nigerian Railway Act was passed. The Act set up the Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC), as a statutory Corporation entirely owned by the Federal Government. The act assigned the following functions to NRC.

- i. To manage and operate the railway and provide reasonable facilities
- ii. To control railway expenditure
- iii. To ensure that annual revenues are sufficient to meet all expenditure properly and
- iv. To direct and control expansion and extension of the railway system¹³

The Nigerian Railway Corporation as it exists today was established by an Act of Parliament - Nigerian Railway Corporation Act 1955. By the authority of this, Nigerian Railway became a body corporate with perpetual succession and a common seal with power to sue and be sued in the corporation name to acquire hold and dispose of movable and immovable property for the purpose of its function under the act.

Impact of Bard – Kano Railway Line on Minnabaro

The development of railway had significant effect on the economy of Nigeria as a nation, as the railway network stimulated economic activities in most railway cities. Although, it is generally accepted that long distance trade had been in existence in Nigeria before the coming of the Europeans, but it was not in large quantities. In other words, the establishment and development of railway transport system in Nigeria completely led to improvement in the movement of goods and services in Nigeria, and Minna tapped immensely from it. Also railway system across Nigeria gave opportunity for international trade to thrive, for instance the volume of exports is recorded to have increased from £2.9m to £5.3m and the volume of import increased from £2.8m to £5.2m between 1907 and 1912¹⁴. The following are some of the Economic impact of the Baro-Kano rail line in Minna and Baro towns:

Socio-Economic Impact**Transformation of Minna to a Commercial Town**

A distinct feature of railway lines in Nigeria is that, while it usually led to the decline of pre-colonial states like Oyo, Katsina, Calabar on one hand, on the other hand, the railway also influenced the emergence of new railway towns and urban cities. Before the Baro-Kano railway line was constructed, Minna was virtually a village. However, due to the construction of the Baro-Kano railway line, Minna by its location became a major junction on the line. Minna, thus emerged as a railway town as it became a beehive of activities. The town also became an entry-port for the traders in the neighbouring towns and villages, which increased internal generated revenue. The Baro-Kano railway line caused an increase in the number of traders that came to Minna, as such there was a subsequent increase in the exchange of goods between the indigenous people of Minna and traders from surrounding villages like Paiko, Kuta and Lambata.

Traders also came from Yoruba

a land, Ibo land and further up from Hausa land. For instance, Yoruba traders from as far as Lagos, Ogbomoso, Offa, among others easily brought items such as woven clothes to sell in the north.¹⁵ Toyin Falola stated that, many Yoruba women engaged in the textile and cosmetics trade, Oshin also testified to the fact that, through the railways, the trade in foodstuff between the north and the south multiplied, causing regional specialization of food crops and subsequent inter-dependence among Nigerians.¹⁶

Therefore, Minna turned into a cosmopolitan city and a commercial town due to the presence of the railway. Thus, the foundation of modern day Minna was laid by the railway line, and this explains why Minna is often regarded as a railway town. The rail transport system in the town had made the movement of internal and long-distance trade easy.

Baro, a very insignificant village during the pre-colonial days also attained the status of an important port town due to the coming of the railway. The people of Baro began to participate in the export of goods, especially cash crops and other agricultural produce and import of European manufactured goods.¹⁷ The coming of the railways influenced Baro to become a port and also led to the improvement in trading

activities in the area, the main commodities for trade were potash, salt, cotton, groundnuts, shea butter, rice, e.t.c¹⁸

Emergence of New Labour Force and Spread of Colonial Currency

Railway constructions in different countries always demand huge labour force and finance. The construction of the Baro-Kano rail line is not different. According to Francis, “The railway construction between Minna junction and Zaria in Kaduna was termed the heaviest work attracting the higher cost”¹⁹

Historical data indicates that, about two thousand men were believed to have started the construction of the Baro-Kano railway line²⁰. It suffice to say, the skilled and semi-skilled labour and technical know-how of the Baro-Kano railways were provided by migrants from other ethnic groups such as the Yoruba from southwest Nigeria and other immigrant workers who possessed western education and technical skills. In his doctorate thesis, Yusuf²¹ asserted that, men from the North lacked the expertise and qualification to enter the lowest positions due to late contact of the North with Christian missionaries and western education. This presents Minna as a labour camp where migrants settled to partake in the railway construction, and other sectors of the railway. Railway workers, whether skilled or un-skilled, all lived in railway camps located along railway lines. Markets were established in these camps which facilitated local trade.²²

Hence, the railway system became the major employer of labour in Nigeria during the colonial economy. Many Nigerians joined the railway to earn steady income. Although, a lot of railway workers were uneducated, they acquired the technical skills which made them relevant in maintaining and repairing the railway lines

The railway system cannot be undermined in the introduction of wage labour in colonial economy²³. For instance, in Markudi, another railway city, wage labour began to feature in the economy of the town with the construction of railways and bridges. Similarly, in Minna and Baro, the presence of the railways provided the impetus for the introduction of money as a new medium of Exchange. The foreign firms that traded in Minna and Baro came with a new form of currency, different from the usual trade by barter and other local currencies such as cowries and manilas used by the natives. These currencies included

the English Silver coins, pounds, shillings, pennies as well as the French Francs which were in circulation as at September 1926²⁴. Taxation was introduced to ensure the monetization of the economy.

Increased Cash Crop Production

The coming of the railways, no doubt, made transportation easier and cheaper, thus people and goods were able to move from place to place with less stress. The railways were majorly constructed for the purpose of transporting goods, especially cash and plant crops to the sea. As Minna transformed into a commercial and urban centre, and Baro a major port town, the influx of migrants to Minna and Baro also increased. As such, the production of cash crops such as shea butter, palm oil, cotton, e.t.c, rapidly doubled so as to meet the demand of people and commercial firms respectively. According to Isa Useni²⁵, the railway system attracted large number of traders to Baro and even Minna increasing the demand for the production of cash crops.²⁶ Thus, the construction of the Baro-Kano railway stimulated the production of groundnut, cotton and other cash crops in Northern Province.²⁷ Also, the Baro-Kano railway simplified the conveyance of goods, especially cash crops from the point of production to the seas for further export.

Shortage of food crops

British colonial policy as well as the construction of rail ways in Nigeria no doubt, encouraged the production of more cash crops due to the high demand for these crops in Britain and the whole of Europe. On the other hand, farmers were not encouraged to produce food crops as high taxes were placed on them which forced farmers to produce cash crops, such as cotton, ground nuts, Shea nuts, e.t.c. For instance, more farmers went in to the production of groundnuts and farmers also sold their food reserves.

By 1913, there was food shortage due to famine, thus, the prices of food crops doubled causing food shortage. Yusuf, attributed this to a factor which he stated thus; “the existence of non-food producing southern migrants across the localities also meant that, they contributed to the food crisis”.²⁸ By 1914, food shortage was acute and price of food was at famine rate and by 1918, due to the second world war, drought and intense rains, food crops were bought at inflated rate that even farmers sold their food reserve due to high prices²⁹.

Emergence of foreign firms

Another main feature of the railways was that they attracted foreign firms to Minna and Baro. The operation of the railways most often attracts foreign firms to major railway cities. Immediately after the completion of the Baro-Kano railway in 1911, and especially from 1912³⁰ foreign companies began to open up businesses in Minna and Baro respectively. These firms mostly obtained cash crops from the indigenes in exchange for manufactured products such as clothes, salts e.t.c which were being carried back to the hinterland through the rail. Minna accommodated foreign multinational companies like the Royal Niger Company (RNC), United Africa Company (UA5567i099C), Paterson Zochonis (PZ) and JOHN HOLT.³¹ These companies established trading posts in the town to deal in the buying of sheanuts, palm kernels, cotton, beani-seed, groundnut and mineral deposits like gold at cheaper rates and employed large number of indigenes and commercial migrants.³²

Spread of Western Education and Foreign Religions

Through the railway system, new trend of migrants apart from traders and railway workers began to surface in Minna and Baro. These migrants included religious workers or missionaries and teachers. It is important to emphasize that, Christian missionaries and evangelists were part of the people who worked in the construction of the railways mainly because they believed that, the construction of the railways will facilitate the preaching of the gospel. According to colonial reports;

Not only is the construction of the Baro-Kano railway already having a great effect on markets and districts...but it has also led to a remarkable education influence on the primitive inhabitants of districts which had never before come into touch with Europeans...³³

Thus, along with the missionary activities came the western education. For instance, the activities of the traders of first Baptist Church got to its peak when a school was established in 1927 in Minna, although it was to serve the need of the Baptist institution in the Niger province. The school was called the Baptist Day School but presently referred to as Marafa Primary School.³⁴ The Roman Catholic established the Roman Catholic elementary school in 1932, so also the Anglican missionaries established the St. Peters and St. Lois elementary schools in 1936 respectively.³⁵ Also, Muslim scholars moved into Minna from other places to establish Islamic schools.

Inter-Group Relations

The railway was an important factor that facilitated inter-ethnic group relations and interaction among traders, railway workers, labourers and migrant groups. Olasiji stated that, “barely a year after the opening of the Baro-Kano railway line, the volume of traffic had grown beyond the capacity of existing railway facilities”³⁶ and the amalgamation of the railways in 1912 aided migrations into railway cities,³⁷ like Minna and Baro. The first set of migrants in Minna, were railway workers even from as far as Sierra Leone, Ghana, as well as from the southern part of Nigeria. This set of people were followed by traders, artisans and missionaries e.t.c

Minna became a meeting point for different cultural groups leading to the emergence of new settlements that attracted a population that was made of other ethnic groups like the Nupe, Hausa, Igbo and the Yoruba from other towns and villages, who served as middle men and agents between the indigenes and multinational companies. The number of Europeans in Minna greatly doubled as they were mainly the station masters. This led to increased intergroup relations and social integration between the natives and migrants on one hand and among the various ethnic groups in Minna.

The influx of different ethnic groups promoted inter-ethnic marriages which had great influence on the cultural aspect of the Minna and Baro people.³⁸ The presence of different migrant groups in these towns raised the need for a common means of communication. Hausa language thus emerged as the lingua franca of Minna, a Gbagyi settlement³⁹ and even Baro a Nupe settlement⁴⁰.

Spread of Diseases

Recent studies show that the railway network aided the spread of diseases worldwide, for instance the influenza outbreak of 1918⁴¹ has been traced to the movement of trains and the railway network. In the case of Nigeria, the disease reached Lagos and further spread easily along railway towns through passengers who moved from one community to another. Thus, the influenza epidemic spread through the railway lines and stations and measures to limit the spread by examining passengers at the stations and trains through quarantine failed. In fact, record shows that the traffic department of the Nigerian railways lost

one European and thirteen Nigerians, while twelve Europeans and about seven hundred and fifty-five (755) Nigerians were placed off duty as efforts to reduce the spread of the disease.⁴²

Criminal Activities and Prostitution

During the colonial administration, license was granted only to European companies to mine while local iron workers and smelters were denied the rights to smelt or mine. The decline in rural mining, therefore led to dependence on foreign iron, which led to the displacement of locally smelted iron and indigenous iron workers.⁴³ The policy that undermined indigenous mining and smelting led to stealing of rail way infrastructure by blacksmiths: such as keys and sleepers which were of great value and importance during the glory days of the railway,⁴⁴ to smelt agricultural and household items. Iron theft on the Baro-Kano railway lines dates back to the period before 1920.

Also, train bandits who operated in gangs mostly robbed freight trains by stopping and offloading moving freight trains carrying valuable goods and cash between Lagos and Kano and between Baro, Jebba and Minna.⁴⁵ The activities along the railway lines thus, led to increase in criminal activities and provided new opportunities for criminals to operate. This is not to say that, crimes did not exist before the construction of rail way. However, with the coming of rail lines, there was increase in the cases of burglary, high way robbery along railway lines and pick pockets in the railway stations which attracted criminals due to the influx of people.

The construction of railways, as well as the nature of the rail way system during our period of study, demanded railway workers and labourers, predominantly single males or men who had to leave their families to work and get extra income. However, the demand for sexual relations in the rail way camps by these men who had steady income also increased the rate of prostitution. Also, women and young ladies deserted the homes and parents for railway camps to prostitute, especially as railway workers enticed them with money derived from railway labour.⁴⁶ The functioning of the railway caused the establishments of hotels, motels, restaurants and beer parlours, along railway lines and at railway stations which encouraged prostitution.

Studies by Judith Byfield also shows that the railways increased the rate of divorce and prostitution stating that, married women and

young girls ran away from home to become mistresses to railway workers.⁴⁷

Political Impact

The coming of the railway to Minna and Baro also brought political changes to these areas. Minna did not just remain a junction of the Baro-Kano railway line, but also became the Headquarters of the Niger Province in 1908.⁴⁸ The influence of the railway led to the transformation of Minna into a commercial and urban centre, such that by 1917, Minna had become a second class Township (the highest township class in the Northern Province during the period) in accordance with the Township Ordinance of the Northern Province.⁴⁹ Subsequently, in the 1920s, the Gbagyi Federal and Native Authority was also relocated to Minna from Kuta became the headquarters of the Gwari-Kamuku federation.⁵⁰

The formation of the town council also granted migrants the opportunity for increased political participation as migrants jostled for various positions in the administrative structure and for recognition by the British.

By February 1950, the Resident Officer proposed that the town Council be replaced by a District Council, on 18th October, 1950, Mallam Ahmadu Bahago Kuta was appointed as the district Head and Chief of Minna. The chief was generally acceptable to all the migrant groups. In appreciation, of the massive support given him, they conferred traditional titles to some migrants especially the ward heads. For instance, Mr. Joseph a Mosadomi Yoruba man was titled the *Katuka Minna*.⁵¹ This explains that Minna was a colonial administrative town whereby, indirect rule was successful. Migrant groups also fully participated in the partisan politics of Minna town.

Baro's political experience on the other hand differed from that of Minna. The village Head of Baro categorically stated that the coming of the European never ousted the Political structure of the Village as they were warmly accepted by the people. However, he explained that, Bida emirate agitated against European presence in Nupe Emirate as a whole mainly because they collected tributes from their vassals like Baro, and the presence of the European meant that the Emir of Nupe could no longer demand tributes from Baro. Therefore it could be said that the system of indirect rule flourished very well in Baro.⁵²

Baro also assumed the status of a politically relevant town as Governor Lord Lugard first settled in Baro before he later left for Zungeru and later Kaduna. Thus, the people of Baro believed that, at a time, Baro was the political Headquarters of Nigeria, since it served as the first seat of Lord Lugard, the Governor General.⁵³

Influence of the Railway on the Development of Minna

Labour Migration

The first set of Yoruba migrants to Minna were those that came to trade. Meaning that, the first trend of migrants in Minna were traders, and the first Yoruba settlement in Minna called "*Ile Kpanu*" was established by early traders, believed to mainly engage in the buying and selling of goods and commodities, especially food stuffs.

The second trends of migrants were the railway workers. The railway lines have been in operation since the 19th century as Lagos-Otta and Lagos Iddo railway lines were constructed in 1896. And by 1901, Iddo-Ibadan lines were opened. Thus, when the construction of the link line from the South to the North commenced, the southerners were absorbed to the railway corporation and some workers with the corporation who had embarked on one study or the other were posted from Lagos to the Northern railway including Minna, as skilled or semi-skilled artisans, while those that were not trained were there as labourers.

The third set of migrants was the missionaries. The missionaries were a group of people who undertook works on religious purposes. Christian missionaries are believed to have found their way to Minna along with the traders and railway workers. This can be deduced from the missionaries' works that established churches, such as first Baptist church in 1911 by a group of traders cum missionaries that came with the railway constructions.⁵⁴ In a similar manner, a renowned railway worker and contractor Pa J.L. Mosadomi established the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church in Minna in the year 1943.⁵⁵ Also in the aspect of missionary works, some Muslims later came from the North and South to spread Islamic education and knowledge.⁵⁶

The last trend of migration was those that came in response to the demand for employment as a result of the emergence of the civil service

in the 1960s. These set of people were professionals in both skilled (teaching, banking e.t.c) and unskilled labour (taxi drivers, carpenters, vulcanizers, among others).

Increased External Trade

The rail line led to the emergence of a modern economic and social structure in Minna as the people of Minna were forced to come down from their hilltop settlements to relate and trade with foreigners and migrants that entered Minna. Available colonial report emphasized thus;

A few sections of low grade pagans arrived on the line stark naked, with their wives clad in circlets of leaves, but they returned to their homes with clothes on their bodies and money on their hands...⁵⁷

There was relative decrease in cost of transport that immediately resulted in the immediate expansion of the export trade in Shea butter, cotton, beni seed, onions, sugar cane, potash, guinea corn, millet, gum, leather works, while European goods such as manufactured clothes, perfumes were imported.⁵⁸ Thus, the construction of Baro-Kano rail line enabled Minna to participate largely in the trade in cotton and other cash crops that previously existed in Minna, but could not be transported profitably due to distance.

Demographic Changes

The influx of migrants which comprised of mainly colonial civil servants, railway workers, miners and traders caused a change in the settlement pattern of the town, which initially was at the top of the hills. New settlements emerged down the Hills, such settlements that sprang up include Limawa, Makera, Kwangila, Kpakungu, Nasarawa, Sabongari and Tundunwada⁵⁹. It is noteworthy that, these settlements were created as migrants found their way to Minna. Thus, the population of a particular migrant group was higher than the other in a particular settlement.

Infrastructural development

The construction of the railway facilitated the movement of missionaries to Minna. These missionaries triggered prominent development in the town, including the establishment of schools. First schools established in Minna include the Sudan Interior Mission School, with the aim of teaching students to read and write in Hausa, as well

as, to teach arithmetic and the second school was the Catholic Mission Schools first to teach English. Meanwhile, there was increased practice of the apprenticeship whereby, children who did not go to school can learn the trade in semi-skilled artisans such as carpentry, blacksmith, bricklaying e.t.c ⁶⁰

In addition, railway lines led to the general increase in facilities such as water as there was the construction of drinking fountain with several taps, hospitals, telegraph, post as well as good sanitation system whereby colonial administrators called sanitary inspectors ensure that Minna is kept clean.⁶¹

Political Development

Another influence of the railway in Minna was that it made some distinguished migrants to dominate certain sectors of the economy and politics of Minna. Amongst this group of migrants were people like Omo Oba Abudu Akanji Ibiyeye, who was one of the many Yorubas that left an indelible footprint in the extension of the railway lines from the south to the North. He hailed from Offa in present day Kwara state and was a trained carpenter. His excellence in carpentry connected him with the Lagos-Iwo railway construction and he also led the team that constructed the rail way to Minna and the Niger Bridge at Jebba. His hard work and contributions led him to the post of a foreman in 1946, a position formally reserved for the colonial masters. It was from this position that he came to be known as ABUDU Foreman.⁶² He did not stop at that, as he was conferred with the rank of inspector of works in the engineering department of the rail way and in 1951 he was awarded by the Queen of England the status of British Empire medalist (BEM).⁶³ No doubt, Pa Ibiyeye associated himself with the economic growth in Minna and built the first upstairs in the town in 1946. As a result of this, a street in Kwangila, a settlement for the railway workers, was named after him-ABUDU Street.³²

Influence of the Railway on the Development of Baro Migration and Urbanization

The coming of the railway in Baro in 1908 served as a catalyst for development in the area contrary to the idea behind the introduction of railway system in Nigeria which was for maximum exploitation of resources. The emergence of Baro as an urban centre along the railway marked a radical departure from the traditional village community. Baro

grew to become a famous railway and port town, due to its location along the bank of the River Niger. A port was constructed in Baro because of access to the River Niger and ferries easily moved from Baro to places like Calabar, Lagos, Lokoja, Ghana, Britain, and Burutu in Delta (such that, the water way was named Burutu-Baro water way). The main commodities of trade were Millet, rice, fish and even European goods. In line with this, Baro also became a commercial centre as traders came in from as far as Benin kingdom, Igala kingdom, Onitsha, e.t.c. to trade with Baro indigenes mostly for agricultural produce.⁶⁴

Economic opportunities and the Introduction of Wage Labour

Apart from the fact that being a railway terminus, a lot of indigenous people from Baro like Abdullahi Ibrahim and Mohammed Kolo were able to join the rail way system as workers and Drivers,⁶⁵ a lot of immigrants also migrated to Baro as railway workers and according to them, the first train to Wushishi was driven by a Baro man.⁶⁶ The steady rise in the population of Baro, transformed Baro to a commercial centre, as the people of Baro related with migrants and traders from as far as Burutu, Lokoja, Warri, Lagos, as well as foreigners from Ghana, Sierra Leone and Europe.

Also, the railway line made European firms move from the coast to the hinterland, and this resulted in the emergence of, trading depots along the railway lines in the North specifically, at Baro to establish direct contact with traders.⁶⁷

In Baro, the increase in colonial activities facilitated the introduction of wage labour as well, due to the mobilization and the recruitment of labour force which cut across different ethnic groups in northern and southern parts of Nigeria.⁶⁸

Infrastructural development

In Baro, the coming of the railways and seaport led to the establishment of Post office and telegraph system, as colonial document shows that mails were easily sent from Baro to as far as Burutu.⁶⁹ The telephone lines used by the post office and town were direct from the railways, since more than one third of the workers in Baro then were railway staff. The station had a transceiver and a radio system which was used to relay information to different places.⁷⁰

Baro, served as a very important settlement for Europeans, especially, during the colonial administration. From the evidence of the first Lord Lugard's house, stationed on top of the Hill at Baro called the Baro Empire Hill to the presence of Mungo Park's cenotaph attest to the fact that Baro was home to foreigners. It is however possible, that some of the remains of the historic evidences may have lied in ruins in Baro.

In addition, Idris Baro also reveals that, the first primary school in Northern Province was established at Baro.⁷¹ The school is presently known as Government Secondary School, located in Wuchaka area of present day Baro Local government. The school served a very important purpose to the whole of Lapai, Agaie emirates as pupils came from the emirates to the school in Baro.

Healthcare services also came into being with the construction of the railways. Hospitals were established to cater for the health needs of the people who migrated to Baro as railway workers and businessmen. With the construction of the railways in Baro, many feeder roads were constructed to link the station with the villages around to help in the conveyance of the people, goods and services⁷². There were cases of inter/intra ethnic marriages, these further enhanced the cordial relationship that existed within the people of Baro. The railway brought many people from different socio-cultural backgrounds, thereby creating a spirit of togetherness.⁷³

Attempts have been made to discuss the Baro–Kano railway before its abandonment. The railway line impacted economically, socially and politically on the towns, villages and communities that are situated along the railway lines of which Minna and Baro were not left out. The Baro–Kano railway has played positive role in the development of Minna and Baro towns in terms of the infrastructural transformation, commercialization and urbanization of the towns, which led to the introduction of modern medium of exchange, inter group relations, political developments amongst others. On the negative aspect, the line caused shortage of food crops, increased criminal activities and prostitution amongst others.

Endnotes

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