

Declining Relations and Emerging Partners: A Historical Analysis of Re- Direction of Kano Trade from Jeddah to Dubai and China, 1970- 2012

Fatima Abdullahi,

Department of History and International Studies,
Umaru Musa Yar'adua University Katsina, Katsina State.

Abstract

This paper is on the long standing trade relations between Kano and Saudi Arabia. This long relation spanned several centuries and the relation transcends pilgrimage to trade and diplomatic intercourse. Research have shown that trade was and is still part and parcel of annual pilgrimage from West Africa to Saudi Arabia. Due to its commercial importance, in pre-colonial and post colonial period, Kano occupies center stage on pilgrimage operations in Northern Nigeria. Pilgrimage is inseparable from trade and in Kano; from this relation emerged the phenomenon of Kano to Jeddah in the 1970s, which is a trade relation between the Hausaland and the Arabs of Saudi Arabia. However, in contemporary parlance of trade diplomacy, lack of bilateral trade agreement between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia made the trade conducted through unofficial means. Although the trade relations spanned for decades at least since the independence of Nigeria, by mid 1990s however, the relationship between Nigeria and the Western world forced the then military regime to introduce new economic policies that pushed Kano to Jeddah traders to re- direct their trade activities elsewhere, specifically to Dubai and China. Thus, the decline of the hitherto trade relations began between Kano merchants to Jeddah and the emergence of new partners in Dubai and Asia. The new trade relationship has its own positive impacts on Kano merchants but research have shown that its negative impacts outweigh the positive ones.

Introduction

The history of Kano to Jeddah trade relations spanned several centuries. The root is traced back to pre- colonial period. This is because of Kano's position as a commercial center and a melting pot of pilgrimage activities and commerce in the Western Sudan. Thus, Kano to Jeddah trade relations cannot be fully understood without looking back at the commercial importance of Kano since the 15th century, when Arab traders began to flock into Kano. By the mid 15th century, the trans-Saharan trade extended to Kano from various North African cities. Arabs began to be firmly established in Kano, which led to the establishment of famous Kurmi

market by Muhammad Rumfa (1463-1499). Coupled with this was the migration of various Arab communities into the city. Thus, trade established economic relations between the people of Kano and North Africa. North African Arabs also contributed to the emergence of Kano city as an emporium of the Trans- Saharan trade and leading centre of commerce in Hausaland (Adamu, 1999: 214). By the 19th century, the commercial importance of Kano was known throughout Africa and was acknowledged by many European travelers and explorers. The Kurmi market for instance, became an international commercial emporium where goods from Europe and North Africa could be found (Naniya, 1983: 90).

There is no precise date when the trade relations evolved between the Hausaland and Saudi Arabia. It is also known that Saudi Arabia used to be a center of international trade even before the advent of Islam. The Arabs, especially the *Quraish* were traders, because the Hejaz is barren land (Hitti, 2002: 17). Also, the economy of the Hejaz has been reliant on imports from other regions of the world, especially from China; and the Persian region, Africa and Europe. Khadija, the first wife of prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) was a wealthy merchant. The Prophet himself was also a merchant (Hitti, 2002: 112). With the advent of Islam and its spread to North and later West African regions, the annual pilgrimage expanded trading activities (Hiskett, 1984: 77, Lewis, 1995: 173). Pilgrimage route has always been same with trade routes and that explains why it became very difficult to differentiate between a pilgrim and a trader. This made pilgrims from many parts of the world and *Bilad al- Sudan* to combine trade with pilgrimage (Lewis, 1995: 231).

Since the 11th century to the last decade of the 19th century, cities en-route the trans- Saharan routes in the Sahara desert provided safety passage to West African pilgrims. The pilgrims have for several centuries been crossing the Sahara to the holy places in Makkah and Madinah annually for pilgrimage and trade purposes. Due to the difficulty in organizing the pilgrimage venture, all sorts of arrangements were involved, including security, diplomacy among other things to facilitate easy passage. This kind of relationship continued up to the early 20th century when Europeans conquered Africa and introduced policies that transformed the previous pilgrimage activities in Africa. The transformations were necessary because, the pilgrims had to traverse territories that were under different colonial controls, and they had varied immigration policies, and such arrangements were necessary for fear of trace pass. Part of the changes that necessitated this checks and control measures include the introduction of modern means of transportation, which not only eased pilgrimage activities but also was a lucrative means of making money. This led to the decline of overland pilgrimage and at the same time it negatively had impact on movement. This is because, it clearly indicate that only the wealthy could partake the journey, unlike previously when the less to do could adventure into it through meticulous planning that could take longer period to accomplish.

After colonial conquest, Kano continued to play an important role in terms of trade and commerce within and outside Nigeria. One of the most important form of trading activity that sprang up is Kano to Jeddah trade, which is a trade and commercial transaction between the Hausa people of northern Nigeria that use Kano as a center of departure, to Jeddah, the commercial hub of Saudi Arabia.

Kano to Jeddah Phenomenon

Kano to Jeddah means different things to different people; to some, it means the business activities that are taking place between the Hausa people of northern Nigeria, that use Kano as a point of embarkation to Jeddah in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Interview with Suleiman: 2016). In another perspective, Kano to Jeddah could also connote those people whose business activities revolve around Kano in Nigeria and Jeddah in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Kano is privileged because, in the modern era, it had the first International Airport in Northern Nigeria constructed in 1936 (Decker, 2008:45). While in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Jeddah and Dammam have been important commercial port cities located at the banks of the Red Sea. However, Jeddah's commercial activities overshadowed that of Dammam and therefore, West African pilgrims and traders preferred Jeddah due to its closeness to Makkah and Madinah. Jeddah is also the focus of the overland pilgrims from Sudan, and also it has the advantage of an international airport. There is a general perception though; that the Kano to Jeddah trade phenomenon connotes illicit activities committed by Nigerians, especially Hausa people in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Barau, 2011: 20). However, this paper underwrites that perception, and looks beyond the illegality of the relationship between the two partners in terms of trade. The need for social services by Nigerians residing in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and short time resident pilgrims, however, is the main determinant of the relationship between the communities.

The Early Hausa Migrants in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the emergence of Trade Relations

The early Hausa in Diaspora in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia engaged in trade as a means of survival in the kingdom, especially in Makkah, Madinah and Jeddah. They engaged in petty trade like selling local mats, needles, thread, tailoring materials as well as butchering and local barbing among the Hausa communities. With the discovery of oil in 1938 in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the subsequent Arab – Israeli war of 1973 and the emergence of petrodollar/ global economy, the price of oil in the world increased drastically which allowed the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to realize a lot of wealth (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019>). From the 1970s, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia became a rich nation from which the new found oil wealth that diversified the economy and created more job opportunities in the country. This led to the rise of new parlance of trade between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and other nations, where there is more importation of consumer goods due to the rise in population of the Kingdom. Additionally, annual pilgrimage and the increase in frequent visitation for lesser pilgrimage among the Muslims also enhanced the Kingdom of Saudi's GDP and created more trade opportunities (Interview with Musa: 2016).

The colonial conquest of Kano and subsequent development of *Hajj* by air changed the position of Kano, where pilgrims from all parts of the northern Nigeria met before proceeding to Jeddah. The role of Kano as a leading industrial, commercial and pilgrimage center in Nigeria facilitated the development of trade relations between Hausa traders in Kano and the communities in the Kingdom of

Saudi Arabia. The existence of various markets in Kano like *Kurmi*, *Sabon gari*, *Kwari* and the *Hajj Camp* markets played significant role and benefitted from the Kano to Jeddah trade. Kano therefore, continues to be a center of pilgrimage operations and the point of embarkation and exit for Nigerian pilgrims up to 1980 (Harith, 2002: 56). This position enabled Kano to also become the center of the emerging trade relations between Kano and Jeddah.

Additionally, the commercial activities taking place between Kano and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia last for many decades, however, lack of bilateral trade agreement between the two countries made the trade to operate through unofficial channels. The trade involves textile materials of children, men and women and shoes; fairly used items (H. *Gumama*), Zam- Zam water, rosaries, dried dates, traditional Islamic medicines, kola nut trade, electronics, kitchen utensils, jewelries especially gold and silver, cargo shipment, *Bureau de change* (H. *Yan Chanji*), land line phone business (H. *gidan waya*), dental tooth beautification, textile materials and travel agencies are all part and parcel of Kano to Jeddah trade relations.

Kano traders are the highest patronizers of businesses in Jeddah; this is because in the 1990s, an itinerant trader from *Kwari* market can charter a whole Cargo plane full of consignments and shipped it to Kano. As a mainly textile market established in 1967 in Kano, the merchants at *Kantin Kwari* in the 1980s and early 1990s heavily depended for much of the supply of children and women clothes from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Danladi, 2013: 139). Additionally, Kano merchants like Alhaji Ibrahim Mijinyawa, the owner of SAHAD stores sponsored people in the 1990s purposely to buy goods for his supermarket in Saudi Arabia (Interviews with Mijinyawa & Abdallah : 2016). The patronage of Kano merchants to the Jeddah and Makkah business enterprise is attested by Saudi Arabian merchants (Jabo, 2010: 153). Evidently it is common to see the Arab merchants at Jeddah and the elaborate malls in Makkah, who had never been to Africa, yet they speak Hausa proficiently. This apparently was due to their long established interaction with Hausa pilgrims and merchants.²

Emergence of Dubai and China and the Decline of Kano to Jeddah Trade in the 1990s

Dubai is one of the seven emirates that made up of United Arab Emirates (UAE), located on the Persian Gulf. Dubai shares its borders with Abu Dhabi in the south, Sharjah in the northeast and Sultanate of Oman in the southeast. Due to its unique geographical location, Dubai is connected to all local Gulf States, as well as to East Africa and South Asia. Dubai is positioned at 25.2677 ° N 55.3095 ° E and covers an area of 1,588 sq (4,110 km²) (<https://www.dubai.com:2018>). Dubai's location is a key element in its success because it is located midway between Far East and Europe. Dubai has over 120 shipping lines and 100 airlines connecting it to more than 140 global destinations (<https://www.condohotelsdubai.com:2018>). It is a global city and the business hub of the Middle East. It is a center of international trade, with its economy relies on trade, tourism aviation real estate and financial services. Since 1901, the ruler of Dubai Maktoum bn Hasher Al-Maktoum established Dubai as a free port with no taxation on import or export and

also gave merchants parcels of land and guarantee of protection and tolerance. Since the 1970s, Dubai maintained its importance as a trade route, with free trade in gold (<https://wikipedia.org/wiki/Dubai> : 2019).

As a result of the Gulf war of 1990, many foreign investors withdrew their investment from Kuwait and invested in Dubai. The Jebel Ali Free Zone of Dubai also served as refueling military base to the allied forces during the Gulf war. Additionally, due to the Shia unrest in Lebanon, foreign investors left the country and moved to Dubai. These two incidences helped towards the economic development of Dubai in the 1990s. Also, Dubai is known as the city of gold, because, a major part of the economy is based on gold trade. While in terms of trade, Dubai has the world's largest shopping centre, the Dubai Mall. The annual shopping festival which started in 1996 in Dubai from January to February is the biggest shopping event in the Middle East, where there is sales in every shop (<https://wikitravel.org/Dubai> :2019). All these attracted merchants from Kano and other part of the world to Dubai.

As discussed previously, Kano to Jeddah trade relation was very old and it spanned for centuries. However, by the late 1990s, Kano to Jeddah trade took a new dimension whereby there was a change and re-direction of the trade to Dubai and China. This re-direction of trade reflects the pulling and pushing factors that necessitated the change. Most Kano to Jeddah trader's re-directed their businesses from Kano and Saudi Arabia to Dubai and later China. This phenomenon is due to many challenges faced by the traders, which includes economic sanctions put on the Nigerian government and the emergence of Dubai and China. First of all, there is no bilateral trade agreement between Nigeria and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, even though the two countries have been relating for more than two centuries. The relationship was mainly on religious matters concerning pilgrimage and scholarship.³

Kano traders also realized that most of the goods or products they were buying in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia were imported primarily from China. There was also high rate of taxes imposed on Kano merchants in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which made the traders turned their trading activities to Dubai and later China. The absence of bilateral trade agreement and the Article 23 of the Anti-money laundering law issued by the Kingdom's Royal Decree (m/20), also hindered the smooth flow of trade between Nigeria and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This is because; the Royal Decree was explicit in the prohibition of carrying cash into the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that exceed \$10,000 or SR 60,000 must declare the money to Saudi customs before entering the Kingdom (<https://www.lifeinsaudiArabia.net>;2019). This means that traders are left with only one option that is sending money through *Bureau de change*, or if one breaks the law, he face apprehension and imprisonment for charges of money laundering. This made majority of influential Kano to Jeddah traders, especially those dealing with textile materials, jewelries, household and kitchen utensils, furniture and electronics to relocate their enterprise to Dubai and China, especially by late 1990s and early 2000. However, others retired completely from Kano to Jeddah trade and continue their businesses within Nigeria especially Kano (Interview with Muhammad: 2016).

Another reason has to do with high rate of taxes imposed on Kano merchants due to absence of bilateral trade agreement between the two countries. Thus, unlike in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia where the traders were paying more tariffs, the tariff in Dubai was very low, which increased the volume of the trade between Kano merchants and Dubai (Interview with Aisha: 2017). Nonetheless, some Kano traders prefer to maintain their business in Saudi Arabia. The category of merchants that clinked to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are mainly people with less capital that uses the *Hajj* and *Umrah* periods to trade. They take goods from Kano to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and after selling; they also purchase other goods and sell in Kano (Interview with Hajara: 2016).

In terms of immigration policy, Kano to Jeddah traders re-directed their businesses to Dubai because, Dubai Entry visa is easy to get compared to that of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This is because, Kano traders uses tourist visa which is valid for a particular duration to Dubai. The entry visa can be obtained easily by simply submitting basic travel itinerary documents and information. The entry visa also varies, for 96 hours, 14 days or 30 days and can be granted within 24 hours to 4 days (<https://www.musafir.com.Dubaivisa> & <https://travelvisa.ng>:2019). But the case is not the same to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia entry visa, whereby an individual have to apply through a Travel Agency. Dubai entry visa is also cheaper compared to that of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia entry visa. All these are additional reasons and incentives to Kano traders, who finally became enticed to re-direct their trade to Dubai (Interview with Hauwa: 2017). It should be noted that, in less than two decades of the emergence of Kano to Dubai trade, Kano traders also turned their trading activities to China who was assuming global trade dominance.

China, officially the People's Republic of China (PRC) is in East Asia and is the world's most populous nation, with 1.404 billion people. The country covers approximately 9,600,000 square kilometers (3,700,00sq mi). It is the fourth largest country in landmass (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org> : 2019). China's economy over the years had moved from very poor since after the Communist Revolution to one of the world's largest and most advanced economies. China's GDP grew progressively from \$150 billion in 1978 to \$13.28 trillion by 2018 (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org> : 2019). However, by 1979, the Chinese government launched several economic reforms which include price and ownership subsidies for farmers, establishment of economic zones which attracted foreign investment, importing high – technology products into the country and discarding the policy of planned economy or the decentralization of economic policies (Ayoola, 2013: 99). Other reforms introduced were high savings and investment and improved productivity gains. Within two decades, China has grown from a poor country to a major economic power. China view Africa as a profitable investment zone and lucrative markets for its finished goods (Orngu, 2009: 103). It also targeted the African continent as a means of consolidating her status in the world capitalist regime.

China's first official contact with Nigeria dated back to 1960 and by 1971, the two countries established diplomatic ties (Z.E, Kwaghe, 2018: 54). Additionally, Nigerian economy in the 1980s also intensifies trade relations between the two

countries. This was when International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank imposed Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) on Nigerian economy in the early 1980s. One of the major impacts of SAP is that it forced millions of Nigerians moved into urban centers, neighboring African countries and eventually outside the continent. Nevertheless, transnational traders or African traders also experienced the economic hardship and moved outside the continent for better trade opportunities (Adebayo, 2018: 174).

However, during the military regime of General Sani Abacha (1994-1998), bilateral relations between Nigeria and China improved greatly. This is because, after the annulment of the June 12th general election in Nigeria, there was diplomatic scuffle between Nigeria and the West (Kwaghe, 2018: 51). Europe and America accused Nigeria over human right abuse and around 1994, they imposed various sanctions on trade, official movement of goods and targeted government officials of Nigeria. As a panacea, the military regime completely re-directed its attention to Asia from Europe and America. The regime introduced drastic policies, for instance the 1995 Nigerian Investment Promotion Decree which allowed Asian countries particularly China to participate actively and without hindrances in the Nigerian economy (Danladi, 2018: 85). Thus, Abacha's "Open Door Policy" aided the redirection of trade, especially the Kano traders to move to Dubai market and later to China (Nasidi, 2018: 109).

Furthermore, the Saudi Arabian government being as usual, a close ally to the USA and Britain, as stake holders in the sustainability of the petro-dollar reserve currency, knew if they continue to allow Nigerians to trade with the Saudi Arabian Kingdom, it could jeopardize their US/UK relations. Beyond that, Nigerian government under Abacha's regime found a solution in the existence of more lucrative market in China. Since that period, various agreements on trade, economics, technical, scientific and technological cooperation were signed by the two countries.

Kano traders also re-directed their activities towards China due to real cost (opportunity cost) in terms of the varieties of goods offered by its markets. There is also the existence of a bilateral trade agreement between China and Nigeria, which gives Kano merchants comparative advantage due to the access to China market and relatively lower prices of goods, which are quite affordable by common man. China therefore, became the better option for the Kano to Jeddah traders instead of Dubai. Though, some still continue to go to Dubai especially when buying products like gold, which is more available and cheaper in Dubai (Interview with Hauwa: 2017).

From the year 2000, China entered the development scene of Africa and China-Africa trade blossomed speedily from \$10 billion in 2000 to \$25 billion in 2005 (Adebayo, 2018:169). Thus, China became Africa's largest trade partner since then. Furthermore, Kano traders began to move on both directions, to acquire and distribute large volumes of consumer and industrial goods in local markets. By the year 2010, Nigeria became one of China's largest trade partners in Africa (Kwaghe, 2018:42).

It is imperative to stress that; world globalization is the main factor that encouraged Nigeria – China trade relations. This was because by the first decade

of the 21st century, the development of the Chinese economy made her one of the leading producer of manufactured goods worldwide. On the other hand, Nigeria experienced an increased demand for import commodities especially manufactured goods, which altered the trade balance. Thus, as imports increases, demand in Nigeria for local produced goods falls because Nigerian population are buying imported goods instead (Ayoola, 2013: 98). This act pushed local producers and their markets outside the country to import new, cheap and better quality commodities than locally produced.

Another reason that made most of the former Kano to Jeddah traders to re-direct their businesses to China is the Canton Fair in China. Canton Fair implies an annual trade fair held every year during the spring and autumn seasons which started since 1957 in Canton China. It is the oldest, largest and the most representative trade fair in China (Interview with Maryam: 2017). In 2007, Canton Fair of China was renamed China Import and Export Fair and each year, over 24,000 of China's best foreign trade corporations took part during the fair which includes private enterprises, factories, scientific research institutions and foreign trade companies (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org.CantonFair-wikipedia> :2019).

A lot of Kano to China traders target Canton Fair period in China, where they get the opportunity of meeting different companies who display their goods in several booths that gives buyers opportunity to make business dealings. They can also seal good deals with the various companies even if they are not ready to buy a particular product at that point in time, but can always contact them whenever they are ready (Interview with Hauwa: 2018). Canton Fair of China therefore, gives Kano to China trader's access to cheaper goods compared to other items in Dubai or Saudi Arabia. This is because, in China, buyers can request manufacturers to brand their product and China is also a major producer for both Dubai and Saudi Arabian markets. Therefore, Kano merchants prefer to buy from the source manufacturers, which are cheaper for them (Interview with Hauwa: 2018).

Although Kano to China trade relations overshadowed the hitherto Kano to Jeddah trade, there are series of consequences related to this trade relations, especially on the Nigerian economy. This is because; the end result was that, there is absolute rather than comparative advantage given to China, over the Nigerian economy. In economic terms, this translates into massive trade imbalance in favor of China because; Nigeria imports more than it exports. But recently, Nigeria is countering that, through export of petroleum products this apparently, has to do with the problem in the Middle East especially between Iran, USA, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The politics of oil thus is in favor of Nigeria's to China, especially since the USA imports little oil from Nigeria currently. Thus, Nigeria relies more on the importation of goods from China for domestic consumption.

There was also mass importation of inferior quality goods in Kano markets and other parts of the country, especially textile materials and other consumer goods. This is because; unlike in Saudi Arabia where all imported goods have to meet certain standard, the case is not the same in Nigeria. In some instances, Kano traders placed order for less quality products from Chinese companies, perhaps because of low purchasing power of Nigerian consumer.⁴ Chinese manufacturers

and traders put the blame on Kano importers, because the interest of Kano traders and customers favored cheap products (Danladi, 2018: 90). This could be understood from the fact that China exported high quality goods to Europe, America and even Saudi Arabia. But in Nigeria, even with the Standard Organization of Nigeria (SON), meant for enforcing importation of quality standard goods into the country, yet inferior goods are found in many Nigerian markets.

Also, the comparative advantage of the Chinese market over Nigerian economy could also be understood from looking at the influx of Chinese goods which crippled local manufactures and industries in Nigeria. This is because; the influx of textile materials from China was attributed to the collapse of many local industries in Kano and Nigeria in general. It also led to unemployment and retrenchment of local workers. For instance, between 2002 and 2003, about 10,000 workers in various textile industries in Northern Nigeria lost their jobs (Danladi, 2018: 96). Kano to China trade also culminated in the closure of local textile manufacturers. For instance, in the 1980s, there were about thirty one (31) textile industries in Kano State alone but by the year 2012, only six were working (Danladi, 2013: 96).

Conclusion

This exposition demonstrates that although there was a long established relationship between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia on pilgrimage and scholarship, there was no bilateral trade agreement between the two countries. This also made Kano to Jeddah trade that has been in existence for decades became legal trade through unofficial means. However, due to Nigerian economic policies, trade restrictions and tariffs, major Kano to Jeddah traders by the beginning of the 21st century re-direct their trading activities to Dubai and later China, where it was more profitable for them. Although the new Kano to Dubai and China trade overshadowed the previous Kano to Jeddah trade, it has its own consequences Nigerians has to pay. This is because there is mass importation of cheap and inferior quality products into the country which was not the case during trade with Saudi Arabia.

Footnotes

1. Personal Observation of the researcher at Makkah, Madinah and Jeddah, when on pilgrimage sometime in 2014 and on research visit to the Kingdom in 2017.
2. As late as 2017, Nigerian ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Muhammed Isa Dodo stressed the absence of bilateral trade relations between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia. See <https://www.thenationonline.ng.net> 'The Nation' Nigeria's bilateral trade relations with Saudi Arabia of economic importance' accessed on 2-05-2019.
3. Information from Hafizu (China) Uba Adamu, interviewed at *Kantin Kwari* Market Kano, Kano to China trader, 42 years, on 10-08-2017. He also confesses that Chinese companies gives option of quality or inferior goods to Kano to China traders. As a result, some of the traders requested for the production of inferior products especially textile materials which they shipped back to Nigeria and sell it in Kano and other part of the country.

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