

LEGITIMATE TRADE: CATALYSTS FOR THE EXPLOITATION OF THE AKWANGA DIVISION IN NORTHERN NIGERIA 1903-1960

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Abstract

Modern Africa emerged fragmented and ravaged after an era of European colonialism. The national economies of the emerging nation-states were grossly deformed and proved to be incapable of meaningful economic growth. Historical research has established that the introduction of taxation, the influx of foreign capital, the activities of marketing boards, and commissioned buying agents served as the vehicles for colonial exploitation. A full account of the triple catalyst for the colonial exploitation of the economy and population of the Akwanga division in northern Nigeria has yet to be jointly examined. This study aims to examine the circumstances that precipitated the exploitation of this area during the colonial period. Attention is given to the colonial conquest and the level of resistance offered by the people of northern Nigeria, in particular the Akwanga division. Emphasis is also given to cash crop production as a cause of economic stagnation, besides examining the extent to which the transatlantic slave trade and the legitimate or free trade were responsible for the lack of development in the Akwanga division. We posit that colonial cash crop production solely benefited the European capitalists while damaging the local economy. The historical method is employed in this analysis, and both primary and secondary sources are consulted in order to achieve the aims and objectives of this work.

Keywords: *Cash Crops, Transatlantic Slave Trade, Legitimate Trade, Catalyst, Exploitation.*

Introduction

The Akwanga division was established by the British administration in 1911 and included Wamba, Akwanga, and Nasarawa Eggon in the defunct Nasarawa province. A wide range of cash and food crops were produced in the area before, during, and after the colonial rule for consumption and commercial purposes. The division was initially under the Nasarawa province and later merged with the Plateau province following the reorganization of the northern provinces in 1930.¹ The Akwanga division was at the center of agricultural production,² yet its population lived in abject poverty amidst plenty.

After the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, Nigeria witnessed yet another phase of exploitation in the form of legitimate trade and colonial rule. Numerous studies have explored the history of European colonial oppression in Nigeria,³ yet little effort has been made to examine northern Nigeria's Akwanga division in more detail. This article seems to answer the question of how the Transatlantic Slave Trade, Cash Crop Production, and Legitimate Trade facilitated the Exploitation of the Akwanga during the study period. This work aims to explore the circumstances that precipitated the economic exploitation of this area before, during, and after the colonial period. Attention is given to the colonial conquest, and the nature of resistance advanced by the people of the area, with special emphasis on the transatlantic slave trade, legitimate trade, and cash crop production that were used as tools of colonial exploitation. The research concludes that the colonial

experience in the Akwanga division was characterized by hunger, rural poverty, and the lingering crisis of severe underdevelopment.

A historical approach using the case study method is adopted for the successful attainment of the objectives. Both primary and secondary data were consulted in the conduct of the work. The primary sources consulted include relevant archival records such as Annual Reports, colonial files, diaries, Gazettes /documents, Reports, at the National Archives Kaduna and Jos Nigeria. Special attention was given to relevant files under Kaduna Ministry of Agriculture with particular reference to the nature and structure of cash crop farming in Akwanga division, oral interviews were also conducted to farmers and elder statesman domiciled in the study area, those interviewed were above the age of 60 years old. Secondary sources consulted include published Journal articles from recognized databases, internet sources, books seminar papers, relevant PhD Thesis conference proceedings, and magazines.

Figure 1: Map of Nasarawa Showing the Akwanga Division



Source: Ministry of Information and Culture Lafia, Nasarawa State.

Literature review

Kalu and Falola assert that the slave trade and colonial rule have to be considered as the highest form of exploitation and the worst form of interaction between Africans and Europeans that have decisively shaped the history, culture, and political economy of Africa.⁴ Allen states that English slave traders sold African slaves to the Persian Gulf, Mascarenes, India, and beyond in accordance with the law of demand and supply.⁵ Consequently, slave labour was a major trade commodity and a crucial factor of production required in the New World.⁶ The arrival of African slaves in the

American plantations run by the Spanish and French colonists significantly boosted their economy. In the context of Nigeria, the transatlantic slave trade succeeded in creating an immense social divide, reduced the labour force, and stagnated its economic and political development.⁷ Aptheker⁸ and David⁹ agree that the slave trade played a vital role in the development of capitalism, the exploitation of African resources, conquest, and the establishment of European colonies in Africa. Certain factors slowed the African socio-economic development, among them being the unequal Afro-European relationship, and their distinct geography and culture.¹⁰ M'baye observes that in the wake of the slave trade came hunger, poverty, malnutrition, political instability, low per capita income, increased social problems, and the non-localization of industries in Africa.¹¹

According to Oishimaya, cash crops are a type of produce cultivated solely for commercial purposes. They are marketed for profit and not for consumption by the local population while serving as a source of revenue.¹² Jones and Jayne maintain that cash crops are part of the agricultural produce cultivated for commercial purposes that “entails cultivation for exchange.”¹³ Cash crop farmers enjoy comparative cost advantage, improved standard of living, and employ a proportion of the labour force in a given economy. Cash crop farming is better understood in terms of trade and profiteering rather than as a constructive use of the available resources.¹⁴ It transcends beyond mere sales of yields within a given environment and is specifically designed for profit maximization. Tosh understands this practice as “the implementation of profitable business which is the concern with planning output in the light of market conditions, abandoning of household self-sufficiency in food, the raising of capital and the hiring of labour.”¹⁵ Finnis adds in this respect that the sale of agricultural produce has a monetary inducement attached to it that encourages the farmers.¹⁶ Cash crops are usually yields such as cotton, groundnut, cassava, palm oil, rubber, cocoa that are grown in large quantities for export sales rather than consumption.¹⁷ The commercialization of cash crops is pursued for its positive financial benefit and the dynamics of the milieu. They are usually exchanged between two or more countries, merchants, communities, families, and individuals. What is considered a cash crop in country A may not necessarily be a cash crop in country B. However, within the context of this research cash crops refers to the crops exported from Nigeria to Europe during the colonial period: groundnut, cotton, rubber, cocoa, and palm oil. Hayek views production as the creation of goods and services to satisfy human wants. It is also used to describe the procedure of making, harvesting, fashioning, and manufacturing some of the products for human consumption. Production denotes all the activities required to create goods that make them available to the consumer, for example the cultivation of land, the creation of furniture, and the processing of raw materials into finished goods.¹⁸ Debertin defines production as the practical conversion of input into output for human consumption.¹⁹ Cash crop production in this context is taken to mean the cultivation of crops for consumption and industrial usage (processing into finished products) to satisfy our needs.

Kiger explains that colonial exploitation involves the socio-economic and political domination of weaker countries by more powerful countries, primarily to extort their human and material resources.²⁰ Colonialism is rightfully condemned as a deceitful and morally unjustifiable enterprise that is based on the exploitation of socio-economic resources and the political domination of less developed countries while assuming the role of a well-wishing superior. In the context of British colonialism, the creation of colonies promoted tariffs on imports, increased vulnerability to military action, and provided a market for European manufactured goods, while raising the living standards of only a very small segment of the local population.²¹ The circumstances in post-war Europe, scarred by military conflicts and riddled by depression and the shortage of economic resources encouraged migration and the establishment of overseas

colonies.²² Mick argues that colonialism was the result of the political and economic backwardness and ‘barbaric civilization’ of the colonized states.²³ Colonialism seemingly liberated the colonized states as it ‘enlightened’ them, with the official aim to develop the economy, mechanize the agricultural sector, spread Christianity, and educate the populace.²⁴ However, the real motive for expansionism was strictly the exploitation of the human and material resources of the colonized states, and certainly not their economic and political empowerment.²⁵ Colonial rule had the effect of arresting the indigenous ingenuity of the colonies, instituting a high dependency ratio, integrating the local farmers into the international market as producers of cash crops, and consequently ensuring the continued underdevelopment of the colonies.

Ojo stipulates that the slave trade, corruption, bad governance, political instability, social inequality, and human rights abuse kept the colonized states in a continued state of underdevelopment.²⁶ Upon gaining their political independence, the native leaders who came to power after the colonial administrators had left were guided by ethnic chauvinism and religious extremism. According to Amin, the main characteristic of most African leaders after attaining self-rule and nationhood was an insatiable desire to enrich themselves and their families at the cost of their tax-paying citizens.²⁷

Frank concludes his study on the colonization of South America that the development of Europe in the 20th century was the result of the underdevelopment of Africa.²⁸ African countries remained the major source of labour, raw materials, and continued to be used as markets for finished products. The former colonies remained a dumping ground for European goods, without improving the condition and status of their primary supplier of raw materials. The same can be applied to French Africa. For instance, after establishing colonial rule in Morocco and Algeria, the French administrators were primarily concerned with the dispossession of arable land in order to facilitate foreign investments and French settlements in North Africa.²⁹ The colonial infrastructures introduced by the colonial government only happened in areas that produced raw materials required by their manufacturing sector back home:

“During the French protectorate in Morocco (1912–1956), the colonial power’s influence in agriculture in the Souss Valley was modest. The southern region of the High Atlas was not very attractive to the colonists. It was considered unsuitable for intensive agriculture or export produce, given the low level of precipitation”.³⁰

Thus, the colonizing powers did not give much attention to less economically viable areas, whether in Africa, South America or Asia. It can therefore be safely asserted that colonial rule was in essence a highly exploitative undertaking. Colonialism can be summarized as the willful transformation of the economic, political, and social structure from one culture to another.³¹

The British Occupation of Northern Nigeria

After the Berlin Conference in 1884, all of Nigeria became governed by the British colonial authorities. However, even fourteen years after the partition of Africa, Britain was still unable to fully control its African colonies. However, British Nigeria was administered separately as Niger coast protectorate, colony, and protectorate of Lagos, and later in 1900 as the protectorate of northern Nigeria. Lugard was appointed High Commissioner of the northern territory, which had been controlled by the Royal Niger Company since 1886. The colony of Lagos was combined with

the southern protectorates in 1906, and later in 1914, the southern and northern protectorates were combined for strategic reasons. The Royal Niger Company had been responsible for administering part of the Sokoto caliphate before the revocation of its charter in 1899.

The northern emirs resisted British incursions into the north for several reasons, notably their fear of losing their power, their determination to keep the profitable slave trade going, and their unwillingness to become Christianized. The Muslim emirs tagged all the Europeans as infidels and prohibited their subjects from interacting with them in any capacity and for any reason. The vehement resistance advanced by the Fulani leaders delayed the British conquest of northern Nigeria, although the British had hoisted their flag in Lokoja already in 1900. The resisting Fulani rulers were aware of the bad experiences their neighbours along the coast had made and took heed. Lugard's major concern was the stiff resistance his forces encountered in Sokoto and Gwandu, the seat of the Muslim caliphate, but his forces managed to finally subdue the area in 1906. The occupation of Abuja, Keffi, Akwanga, Benue, and Jos in central Nigeria was a protracted affair, but all areas were finally subdued after a series of punitive expeditions of the Men of the West African Frontier Force (WAFF) in 1911.

The Europeans established early contacts in the area in the 1880s, attracted by its fertile land and rich mineral deposits.³² The actual British take-over started in 1905 with the Nasarawa province, upon capturing Keffi, Lafia, and Jama'a. From this point onward the British strategized and pursued their goal of taking control of the Akwanga division. The take-over happened in the form of a series of military operations to break local resistance. The local populace offered stiff resistance and used the experience they had gained from fighting off the Fulani *jihadists* from Sokoto decades earlier.³³ The Eggons, Mama, Arum, and Mada tribes led the local defense against the British invaders, but the Rindre and the Nunku people accepted the foreigners without much opposition, most probably to avoid more bloodshed; they had suffered already at the hands of the *jihadist* Fulani fighters earlier from Zaria and Jama'a.³⁴ The local resistance against colonial rule in the Akwanga division resulted in burnings and killings, not to mention the seizure of their fertile land. The British invaders were able to subjugate the area in 1911 with the aid of maxim guns and superior military tactics, which were no match to the firepower and the traditional fighting tactics of the people in Akwanga. The British conquest was also facilitated by local collaborators who had detailed knowledge of the local topography and provided important intelligence. These collaborators were later rewarded with appointments as district heads and other material gains and privileges. The *jihad* waged by Usman Danfodio decades earlier has resulted in the restructuring of northern Nigeria and delegated almost absolute power to the emirs. This economic and political reorganization of the north made it easier for the colonial government to administer Northern Nigeria effectively.

The British administration adopted the indirect rule in northern Nigeria and chose a form of government that retained the authority of the traditional ruling elite.³⁵ The rationale for adopting this indirect system of governance was meant to cut down expenses and make up for the shortage of personnel. The British could not afford to hire trained personnel from home and found it much more expedient to use the traditional rulers and their administrators instead. Tibenderana maintains that the emirs were put in place as puppet rulers who lost all real authority and power.³⁶ In this new political arrangement, the emirs were accountable to the British governor. In other words, any act of defiance on their part resulted in their removal from power.³⁷ Consequently, the local ruling elite paid their allegiance to the colonial administration to safeguard their own status and wealth. Kalu and Falola conclude that the justification for the colonial conquest of northern Nigeria was

the fulfillment of the dual mandate: to bring ‘light to the dark continent’ and to advance their economic interests.³⁸

The Slave Trade As a Catalyst for Exploitation

Slavery existed among the ancient Hebrews, Arabs, Romans, Greeks, Indians, Chinese, and Africans and was commonly practiced by the Egyptians, the Hausas, Igbos, and Yoruba. Fage concludes that although the institution of slavery was originally part of African culture, the growing slave trade with Europe greatly encouraged it and turned it into a highly profitable business, given the rapidly growing demand for human labour in the Americas.³⁹ The Portuguese were the first Europeans to ship African slaves to Europe in 1444. The future of the slave trade was determined in 1492 with the discovery of the West Indies by Columbus. Soon, valuable produce in the form of sugar, tobacco, and cotton was cultivated in commercial quantities on Spanish and later French plantations that required slaves as a cheap source of labour. At the turn of the 18th-century British slave traders supplanted their European rivals and entered the race for imperial wealth and power.⁴⁰

The diversification of economic activities in the New World led to an acute manpower shortage because the natives of the area had proven unable to endure the hard physical labour. The Spanish plantation and mine owners found that the slaves shipped from West Africa were much stronger and thus preferable and more profitable for their business. The transatlantic slave trade — involving more than 12 million West Africans in total — was the greatest forced migration movement in history, for the express and sole purpose of profitmaking.⁴¹ However, the slaves shipped from West Africa proved to be not only energetic but also resourceful and ‘stubborn’.⁴² They often escaped and fought their new masters whenever the circumstances permitted it. In the words of Boahen:

“All these disturbances have been planned and conducted by the ‘Coromantine’ Negroes (the name was given to the slaves obtained from the coastal ports where the English built their lodge in 1631) who are distinguished from their brethren by their aversion to husbandry and martial ferocity of their disposition”.⁴³

However, the ensuing slave trade was welcomed by the African political elite and local traders who saw it as a good opportunity to wage wars on their neighbors and make money.⁴⁴ The men, women, and children to be sold as slaves were obtained through raids into neighboring territories and were collected in camps along the coast and handed over to the European slave traders in exchange for other commodities including firearms.⁴⁵ The arrival of European slave traders in West Africa meant that European powers started to organize and control the local slave trade.⁴⁶ In the initial phase, European slavers simply attacked coastal villages and kidnapped the unassuming and often defenseless natives, but upon their return had to face much better organized and armed resistance.

The European slavers soon devised another method of capturing slaves.⁴⁷ The African chiefs along the coast began entering the slave trade by selling their domestic servants, convicted criminals, and prisoners of war to the Europeans in exchange for their manufactured goods. The slaves were taken from collection points in the interior to the coastal areas (Benin, Elmina, Warri, and Bonny), the slave ships ready to take them on the gruesome Middle Passage across the Atlantic Ocean to America. The continuing wars between the West African states ensured the steady flow

of new slaves to the New World, thus making the local economies reliant on slaves and firearms through incessant raiding and armed conflict.⁴⁸

The opinions differ on the number of men, women and children kidnapped and traded as slaves from Nigeria; however, there is no doubt that millions of West Africans were forcibly taken captive and shipped across the Atlantic for the sole purpose of profitmaking. For centuries to come the trade would flourish, to the express benefit of European plantation and factory owners in the Americas. Offiong argues that Africa lost about 65 to 75 million of its working population, from the beginning of this inhumane trade in the 16th century to its abolition in the 19th century.⁴⁹ Curtin adds that more than 10.5 million slaves arrived in America between 1500 and 1867.⁵⁰ This number does not include all those millions who had died during the infamous Middle Passage and never made it to land.⁵¹ According to the estimate of Nunn, about 20 million slaves were shipped from West Africa across the Atlantic, which is a staggering number that drastically reduced the population of the continent.⁵² Manning agrees that at the time of the formal abolition of the slave trade in the 19th century, Africa's population was but a mere shadow of its former self, meaning that without the slave trade the population would have been considerably higher.⁵³

The British abolitionists devoted their time, resources, diplomacy, and legislative power to abolish the slave trade in 1807.⁵⁴ The propagation of the gospel was strongly associated with the abolitionist campaign. However, Rodney⁵⁵ and Afigbo⁵⁶ maintain that the abolition of the slave trade was done for economic rather than humanitarian reasons. In their view, the Industrial Revolution was key to the abolition movement as mechanized and more effective forms of production were introduced.⁵⁷ Inikori further adds that the role of African slaves in funding the transition to the Industrial Revolution in England cannot be stressed enough.⁵⁸ The profits made in the slave trade and the sugar plantations in the West Indies were re-invested into the British economy and allowed English capitalists to invest in scientific innovations. Thus, the advancement from an agricultural economy (slave labour in the West Indies) to a technology-based economy and the global capital-oriented market was ultimately financed by the slave trade.⁵⁹

The abolition of the slave trade led to the establishment of Sierra Leone and Liberia as resettlement camps for freed slaves. Sierra Leone was established in 1787 by Britain after the Mansfield verdict of 1772, and Liberia was created in 1821 by the newly independent United States of America as a hub for the resettlement of freed slaves.⁶⁰ However, with the rise of racist sentiments and opposition at home, America and Britain decided instead to deport the freed slaves, which was a move welcomed by the merchants and lawmakers alike.⁶¹ Afrocentric historians like Offiong, Inikori, and Amin debunked Kendall's argument emphasizing that the industrial transformation in Britain was the major factor that accelerated the abolition of the trade.⁶² The end of the slave trade had become the rationale for the European incursion into West Africa in the early 18th century, and the introduction of legitimate trade in export produce such as groundnut, rubber, cocoa, cotton, and mineral resources.⁶³ Offiong states:

“The enslavement of the African continent was of basic importance in the development of world capitalism, as the exploitation of the economy heightens at the beginning of the 19th century, has been the consequence in the strength of the world of imperialism, indicative of the meaning of this business in money terms is the fact that the value of the over 3000 slaves hauled I738 Liverpool ships from 1879-1973 was more than 15 pounds million—and that is but one port for one decade”.⁶⁴

Among the groups worst hit by the prohibition of the slave trade were the ones primarily engaged in supplying slaves, including the middlemen.⁶⁵ These groups were most directly affected by the abolition as they relied on it as their major source of income. Angus adds that legitimate trade was essentially an extension of the slave trade and that the abolition did not affect the economy of the coastal states which were actively engaged in the trade.⁶⁶

The slave trade had a negative impact on West Africa and cut across all spheres of human activity as it depopulated the most active segment of the labour force, namely the young and able-bodied men who were essential to the thriving of the local economy. The profits made from shipping the West African captives across the Atlantic and selling them as slaves generated the capital flowing into Bristol, Liverpool and London, to the direct detriment of the West African economies.⁶⁷ Ronnback explains that the social stratification among employees was highly emphasized during and after the slave trade, for instance, linguists and carpenters received higher wages than other personnel.⁶⁸ The trade produced a new class of elites (traditional rulers, trusted agents, and coastal slave traders) who saw no benefit in stopping this early form of human trafficking.

Cash Crop Production As a Catalyst for Exploitation

Crop production for consumption and trade was the major source of income for the people of the Akwanga division before colonial rule. They were also engaged in the making of handicrafts like mat weaving, basket weaving, soap marking, and hunting.⁶⁹ Land fertility and the economic viability of the area attracted the first Europeans to this part of the continent with the Portuguese venturing first into the area in the 1880s. The colonial subjugation of Akwanga by the British in 1903 led to the introduction of policies harmful to the local economy such as forced labor, taxation, export crop production, and the introduction of British currency.

The local population fought the alien intruders with bows and arrows and applied rather primitive military tactics. They were soon overpowered by the more professional artillery of the West Africa Frontier Force. In consequence, the Akwanga division was quickly incorporated into the global economy as a major provider of raw materials such as groundnut, palm produce, cassava, and ginger.⁷⁰ Ginger was introduced on an experimental basis by one Mr. James, the Assistant Superintendent of Agriculture, in Wamba in March 1933, but the trial yielded a fruitless outcome.⁷¹ Therefore, the focus was shifted to the production of groundnut.

Gilpin upholds that “the development of cash crop economy in the colonized societies has incorporated the bourgeoisie into international capitalism and merged the societies into the world economy”.⁷² It also affected the political, social, and economic development of the colonized states.⁷³ This view is shared by Danyango who alleges that the colonial experience caused more harm than good by opening the society to ‘the white man’s way of life’, abolishing the local currency, breeding a corrupt new political elite, introducing dangerous weapons, destroying indigenous crafts, and prohibiting technological advancement. According to Dalyop and Yacob, one of the tools of colonial exploitation was taxation.⁷⁴ The introduction of taxes compelled the local farmers to resort to cash crops, thereby integrating them into the colonial economy as producers of export crops in exchange for money. The district officer, alongside the traditional authorities, engineered the production of the cash crops in Akwanga through campaign and mobilization.

The British colonial authorities channeled the profits back to Britain, for the economic benefit of the capitalist investors back home. The formal conquest of the area also led to the influx of British merchants, the emergence of licensed buying agents who were mostly Lebanese. The Nigerian cash crop production and export was based on unequal exchange whereby the Europeans controlled 80% of the sales, while the agents and the rural farmers only controlled 20%. The cultivation and export of cash crops was organized by European trading companies such as Royal Niger Company, UAC, John Holt, and Lever Brothers

Although the colonial economy facilitated the emergence of middlemen as a new class of income earners, they were most often seen as agents of colonial exploitation and collaborators. The majority of the population, however, suffered food shortages, deprivation and abject poverty. Most of the food crops produced in the area were sold to the mining camps in Jos and left the population living in the production areas to starve. The meager wages paid to the labourers working in mining and construction were also channeled back to the colonial regime in the form of taxes. Most tellingly, the colonial economy did not introduce mechanized farming and was largely dominated by foreign investors, without encouraging the localization of industries in the Akwanga division and other parts of Nigeria.

Legitimate Trade As a Catalyst for Exploitation

As argued earlier, the Industrial Revolution prepared the ground for the abolition of the slave trade and also inaugurated the beginning of free or legitimate trade. This trade involved export produce, notably groundnut and palm produce, and supplanted the trade in human beings.⁷⁵ Initially, the legitimate trade was confined to the forest and rainforest zone supervised by the British, while the interior trade was handled by local agents. Baikie and Laird later attempted to expand the existing trade network across the Niger-Benue confluence.⁷⁶ The transition from the slave trade to legitimate trade negatively affected the slave traders, causing hostilities in the area and eventually leading to colonial intervention and domination.⁷⁷ The 'sugar barons' in far-away Liverpool and the traditional rulers together with their agents in the delta dominated the trade and made huge profits.⁷⁸ McSheffrey asserts that legitimate trade was the continuation of slavery as it was based on labour intensive cultivation and solely benefitted the European investors.⁷⁹ This explains the extent of abuse and exploitation, albeit in a different form. The practice of unpaid labour continued in West Africa and elsewhere, very much to the detriment of the labour providers of this bulk trade.⁸⁰

The legitimate trade was kick-started in reaction to the abolitionists, the British Parliament, and the hostility of the missionaries toward the slave traders. The trade in humans was now illegal in Europe, and with the introduction of mechanized manufacturing human labour was no longer as profitable as it used to be. The British plantation owners, in their drive to minimize costs and maximize profits, were ready to lay off their African slaves to save the cost of their feeding, housing, and other necessities for their upkeep. Thus, most West Africans chose to venture into mining, timber work, and farming when their time of human servitude had come to an end. The British officials decided that their 'civilizing mission' in Africa was a priority that had to be accomplished at all cost, notwithstanding their continued desire for raw materials. Thus, the groundwork was laid for the underdevelopment of Nigeria.⁸¹

Brooks maintains that the epoch of legitimate trade is of tremendous importance in the history of West Africa, considering the enormous agricultural produce taken out of its economy, in the name of free and fair trade.⁸² The British and Americans scrambled over the agricultural

resources abundant in West Africa, especially groundnut, palm produce, and gum.⁸³ This goes to explain the rationale behind the legitimate trade Europe engaged in with Africa, and the level of the eager participation of their capitalist investors. This form of open trade is otherwise referred to as 'free or legitimate trade' in order to distinguish it from the slave trade. This legitimate trade, however, was an equally exploitative commercial transaction that prohibited the economic development of African countries for decades to come.⁸⁴

Alade emphasizes that the British officials did not in any way empower the Africans, or provide an enabling atmosphere for their equal participation in regular trade and commerce. Instead, all their attention was geared towards acquiring raw materials, while opening new markets for their manufactured products.⁸⁵ Bello argues that the Industrial Revolution facilitated the production of assorted manufactured goods in Europe such as textiles, tobacco, liquor, firearms, and gunpowder, while Africa provided the export produce required by the industries in Europe.⁸⁶ The African and European trade relations were decidedly unequal: while the European capitalist economy thrived, the African economy remained hopefully underdeveloped.⁸⁷

Conclusion

After the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, colonial Nigeria entered yet another period of exploitation. Numerous studies have recorded the history of economic exploitation by European powers in Africa. The primary justification for the European colonial conquest of northern Nigeria was the fulfillment of the dual mandate, to 'bring light to the dark continent' and to secure the economic superiority of Europe. The creation of the overseas dominions has immensely benefitted the colonial powers, and little or no consideration was given to the concerns of the colonies and their prospects.

The transatlantic slave trade paved the way for the continued underdevelopment of the Akwanga division in northern Nigeria. The slave trade caused intertribal conflicts as a result of slave raids which caused only death and destruction.⁸⁸ The slave trade resulted in the loss of indigenous manpower that was essential to the local economy, while also destroying the social order.⁸⁹ Overall, the transatlantic slave trade resulted in a negative 'demographic effect' that kept the region in a state of perpetual underdevelopment.⁹⁰ Thus, the economic, political, and social backwardness of many African countries is at least partially explainable by what happened to the African population between the 15th and 19th centuries. It cannot be denied that the slave trade had a devastating and lasting effect on the economic development of the affected countries.⁹¹ The relative proximity between Latin America and West Africa facilitated the development of trade relations between African and European slave traders in terms of suitable locations of demand and supply.⁹² The underdevelopment of the Akwanga division in northern Nigeria is linked to the excessive drainage of manpower out of West Africa and into the New World across the Atlantic. Without the transatlantic slave trade, the West African economies would have been able to develop naturally and reach a higher level of development, which could have prevented their subsequent domination by foreign imperialistic powers.

Finally, the transatlantic slave trade had a measurable impact on the history of Nigeria, in particular the history of the Akwanga division. It undoubtedly weakened the area politically, economically, and socially and thus prepared the ground for later colonization and exploitation by European powers. The economic system of cash crop farming as applied in the Akwanga division was devised and implemented by the same agencies that benefitted directly from the slave trade. Slave labour in the New World was required for the cultivation of cash crops, and the increased

level of mechanization in Europe only intensified the demand for raw materials, while at the same time reducing the demand for manual labour. The collective attention was shifted to the hinterland through the assistance of Lebanese, Syrian, and later Nigerian agents. Crowther writes:

“The African found himself the cultivator of export crops and the expatriate agents, middlemen, multinationals corporations perfected the distributive chain. On the other hand, the finished goods are brought back to the Africans for sales through their middlemen. The farmers were compelled to buy with the little they accrued from the sale of cash crops .the situation did not permit the locals to export their produce at will. Such privileges were granted in very rare cases to trusted middlemen”.⁹³

The European imperialists succeeded in subjugating northern Nigeria economically, politically, and socially, and controlled every aspect of commerce. While the various western powers had been forced to ‘share’ the African continent for strategic reasons, the relationship that each power had with its former colonies continued to be exploitative and forestalled any form of significant development in the future.

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Notes

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