

The Intricacies of Colonial Transport and Merchandise Regulation in Lokoja Trading District 1900-1960

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to discuss the intricacies of colonial transport and merchandise regulation in Lokoja trading district in Nigeria from 1900 to 1960. This is a contribution to the literature in the economic history of trade, transportation and merchandise control in Lokoja trading district in the Lower Niger region. The Lower Niger River was a dominant mode of transportation in Nigeria in the colonial period. This study is significant because in the colonial period, Lokoja was a trading district for the purchase of groundnuts and other agricultural produce. Measures were taken to regulate imports and to apply austere measures to imports so as to reduce cost. The paper argues that the primary policy guiding colonial importation was to serve the interest of the imperialist countries. As a result, there were strict regulations on the importation, sale and distribution of all imported goods. Most consumer goods were machinery and equipment. Imported items mostly used by the public works department were railing stock, rough iron, consisting of galvanized iron bars, joist plates, constructional materials, timber, pipes, iron sheet, coal for fuel, etc. The research adopts historical methodology using primary and secondary evidence. The paper concludes that in the colonial period there were strict regulations on the importation, sale and distribution of all imported goods to serve the interest of the imperialist countries.

Key Words: Merchandise; Produce; Price; Exports; Imports.

Introduction

This study provides knowledge on the history of trade, transport and merchandise regulations in Lokoja in the colonial period. It has contributed towards a clearer understanding of the nature of merchandise regulation in Lokoja trading district. In the colonial period Lokoja was a transport and merchandise distribution district in the riverside area of Northern Nigeria for the sake of purchase of groundnuts and other agricultural produce for export. The buying stations in the riverside area of Lokoja were; Lokoja, Baro, Makurdi and Yola. Groundnuts and other produce were purchased at a fixed price which remained constant from year to year. This was referred to as minimum naked ex-scale buying station prices. Every department in Lokoja trading district was expected to send an annual estimate of its requirements to the Secretary of the province for preparation of the total ocean freight estimates. This was a measure taken which was intended not only to regulate imports but also to apply austere measures to imports so as to reduce cost. The Lokoja trading district purchased through approved buying agents all groundnuts and produce offered for sale in Northern Nigeria.

For the purpose of strict supervision of imports, Nigeria was divided into trading districts each district was headed by a general manager, who was assisted by a host of officials and executive cadres all of whom were Europeans. Lokoja was a trading district headquarters where the district manager resided and from where he controlled all affairs concerning imports and exports in all the areas under his district. Produce was shipped in bulk so as to cut down costs. The various shipping companies that came up to Lokoja from the sea were responsible for the provision of storage. Produce were usually stored by crediting sheds. The shipping companies were paid a subsidy of 2/6d a ton by the West African produce Board for storage. It was based on this weekly purchase return that the West African Produce Commodity Board in London paid the companies

or agents after the bills of lading has been received in London Prices of produce at all approved buying stations were fixed by law from year to year. Sometimes the prices paid at a certain station vary from that of another station. The long chain of middlemen had consequences for the price of the produce.

Produce, Buying, Transport, and Export

In order to facilitate the purchase shipment and export of produce, the West African Produce Control Board (WAPCB) was set up in 1934. The Board had its headquarters in London and a branch in Nigeria which served as the supply branch of the Nigerian secretariat. The branch purchased through approved buying agents all groundnuts offered for sale in Northern Nigeria, for the sake of purchase of groundnuts in Northern Nigeria. For the sake of purchase of groundnuts and other agricultural produce, Northern Nigeria was divided into buying districts. The buying districts in the riverside area of Northern Nigeria were; Lokoja, Baro, Makurdi and Yola. Groundnuts and other produce were purchased at a fixed price which remained constant from year to year. This was what was referred to as “minimum naked ex-scale buying station prices (Interview, Adeoti, 1/10/90).

The purchasing districts were cut out as follows;

- Lokoja** All buying stations in the Kabba Province and Lokoja and Rumaisha in the Benue province. Lokoja district also comprised of the following towns: Isanlu, Ankpa, Ibillo, Kabba, Ogume, Okene, Kwali, Kwalwa, Auchi, Yewuni, Loko, Amagede, Grenya, Mozuni, Lokoja, Ajeokuta, Itobe, Agenebode, Idah.
- Baro** All buying station in the Niger and Ilorin Province and Yelwa and Warra in the Sokoto Province. It also comprised of the following towns Baro, Katcha, Bakoga, Badeggi, Ebba, Estueggaie, Kateveggi, Minna, Bida, Lemu, Kuchi, Badagi, Lapai Gawun, Abuja, Wuya, Kutigi, Dakpon, Tswegie, Jima, Agaie, Ndaaba, Kut, Gwada, Sarikinpawa Zungeru, Ggarijuko, Kontagora, Kaqara, Ukata, Salta, Ibeto, Palko, Yelwa, Rejai, Zuru, Koko, Kendi, Jabba, Charati, Bodesadu, Loabu, Shonga Rabba, Kudu, Likpatata Baradogi, Wose.
- Yola** All buying stations in the Adamawa province and Duku and Gwoza in the Borne Province and Bajoga, Dadin Kowa (Hinna), Gombe and Kaltungo in the Bauchi province. It also comprise of the following town; ghellen, Lakuma, Banjiram, Numan, Jada, Mayo, Belwa, Madagale, Nichika, Mubi, little Gombe, Yola, Wuro Boko Wafango, Gamadio, Djen, Lav, Ankooverri Gidan Usumanu, Nun Beach, Gossol.
- Makurdi** All buying stations in Gudi in the Plateau province and all stations in Benue province except Loko and Umaisha. It included the following towns; Donga, Ibi Sufa, Abinsi, Makurdi, Gharegba, Kastina Ala, Tor Donga, Gidan Uga, Savav, Ihugh, Gboko, Keffi, Godi, Lafia, Oturkpo.

Source: NAK KAD. MIN.AGRIC 1/1/3173/821 Groundnut Control Schemes and Marketing in River Areas (1943-49).

According to T.O. Adeoti:

Generally, produce was purchased by utilizing the services of agents from time to time from the moment of purchase up to the moment of placing on board the Ocean carrying vessels. Operation date of buying season was fixed as soon as the rain ceased to fall that is as from the beginning of the dry season. This is usually in the month of October or the first week of November. Residents of each province or districts were given the direction to vary the date to suit local conditions in particular districts. The agents for the West African Produce Control Board which had the monopoly of the whole business of buying shipping and exporting produce were multinational companies (Interview, Adeoti, 1/10/90).

The licensed agents recognized by the London headquarters were; (1) Campaigner Francaise de Afrique occidentale with headquarters in Liverpool, (2) John Holt and Co. Ltd with headquarters in Liverpool, and (3) United Africa company Ltd. with headquarter in London. The main function of the buying agents was to purchase at buying stations at not less than the minimum prices and finance purchase until time of shipment after certification. The supply Branch would forward buying agents claims to the board who would make settlement with the United Kingdom Office (NAK KAD.MIN.AGRIC 1/1/3173/821, 1943-49).

Produce was shipped in bulk so as to cut down costs. The various shipping companies were responsible for the provision of storage. Produce were usually stored by crediting sheds. The shipping companies were paid a subsidy of 2/6d a ton by the West African produce Board for storage. The various purchasing and shipping companies usually rendered a weekly return of stocks and purchases made to the Chief Inspector of produce in Lagos. The same weekly returns was also forwarded to the United Kingdom through the United Kingdom representatives in Nigeria, it was based on this weekly purchase return that the West African Produce Commodity Board in London paid the companies or agents after the bills of lading has been received in London (Interview, Alhaji Ozoga, 29/9/90).

Intricacies of Colonial Transport and Merchandise Regulation in Lokoja Trading District 1900-1960

In the colonial period, there was a standard weight for bagging all produce. For groundnuts the standard pack was 184lbs gross. Weight was invariably or finally calculated by multiplying the number of bags by 184lbs. Check - weighing was usually carried out before shipment. All produce were shipped to the United Kingdom and consigned to the Ministry of food unless special instructions were received to the contrary. The West African produce commodity Board paid export duty and Harbour dues to the Nigerian government, the board also paid lighterage and shipping charges to the companies.

Prices at all approved buying stations were fixed by law from year to year. Sometimes the prices paid at a certain station vary from that of another station. For example, in a particular year while the flat-naked-ex-scale prices in the Adamawa area was £8.10.0, In Makurdi, Lokoja and Baro area it was £10 a ton. This was because the authorities in charge wanted to prevent diversion of produce from the river rooted by certain individuals who might like to be economic by using motor transport. Annual prices at buying station cost paid to buying agents or companies by the West African Produce Control Board (WAPCB) in 1943, were:

Table 1: Price Paid to Buying Agents in 1943

S/N	Area	Cost
1	Lokoja Area	£12.17.3
2	Adamawa Area	£11.17.3
3	Makurdi Area	£12.17.3
4	Baro Area	£12.17.3

Source: NAK KAD.MIN.AGRIC 1/1/3173/821 Groundnut Control Schemes and Marketing in River Areas 1943-49.

Shippers usually made claims from the Board in respect of produce storage, freight, insurance, bagging, commission. For example in the Kano area in 1945, a proposed buying allowance for groundnuts was built up as follows:

Table 2: Proposed Buying Allowance for Groundnuts in 1945

S/N	Allowance
a	Bags 16/6d
b	Middleman Commission 7/0
c	Remuneration 8/-
d	Overhead including insurance and interest to June 27 th 23/6d.
e	Total 55/-

Source: A.D. Ali. Nature and Impact of Trade and Inland Water Transport in the Lower Niger Region 1879-1997. Ph.D Thesis, Department of History and Strategic Studies, University of Lagos, December, 2010, 113-5.

In the same year 1945, the proposed buying allowance for groundnuts in river side areas was fixed by the board as follows:

Table 3: Proposed Buying Allowance for Groundnuts in River Side

S/N	Item	Allowance
1	Bags	17/6d
2	Remmunerations	8/-
3	Interest and Insurance for about 2 months	10/-
4	Overhead	9/6d (an increase of 3/6d was allowed for overhead above that of the previous year).

Source: A.D. Ali. *Nature and Impact of Trade and Inland Water Transport in the Lower Niger Region 1879-1997. Ph.D Thesis, Department of History and Strategic Studies, University of Lagos, December, 2010, 113-5.*

The Board normally makes requisitions for the supply of new bags once the existing stocks of second hand bags were exhausted (Ali, 2010, 113-5).

In order to facilitate the purchase of export produce the various European trading firms appointed the service of Nigerians as middlemen. Some of these Nigerian middlemen, had previously engaged in the pre-colonial long distance trade, others were men with business accumen, while in some others were merely picked because they were interpreters (NAK/LOKOPROF 1936-54).

Prominent among these middle men in the 1940s were:

Mallam Audu Otu, Baba Ndeji, Alhaji Zaria, Alhaji Madugu Kambi, Sanni na Mamman Jike, Atta Alhaji Babali, Shehu Dantadi, Yunusa Baban Aya, Innuwa Manaja, Shehu Idirisu, Oga Bolaji.. Others included Aihaji Sirajo, Danbabako, Adikpanda, Aihaji Lasisi, Alhaji Alabi, Gambo Shehu Bida, Mohammed Bida and Hassan Dare. All these men were Lokoja indigenes (Ali, 2012^B).

The chain of purchase of export crops was as follows; a farmer produced cash crops on his farm, the company agent buyer or middleman who must be from the locality, bought the produce, made sure it met the standard requirements, weighed it and then stored it. After doing all the buying from place to place, he then took the produce to the company clerk in one of the buying stations. The company clerk, after inspecting the produce paid the agent buyer and then stored the produce for the trading company he was working for.

When the European manager arrived, the company clerk gave an account of all produce he received or bought from company agents. A stock taking was made. Then the European representing the shipping firm or trading company took control of the rest of the business. He dealt directly with the chief produce inspector who himself was representing the West African Produce Control Board in London at the secretariat in Lagos. This chain of transactions is illustrated below;



Source: NAK LOKOPROF 1936-54 *Produce Buyers.*

From the diagram above, we can see that the produce passed through several stages before it reached its final destination, There is no doubt that this long chain of middlemen had consequences for the price of the produce.

The company licensed buying agent made sure he bought the produce from the farmer at such a low price that he would be able to realize a good profit by the time he took it to the company clerk at the buying station. In this way the various licensed company buying agents accumulated capital through exploiting the farmers. They never informed the farmers about any increase in prices of their produce as in the case of a complaint made by the company Clerk to the Resident of Kabba Province on 18 October 1949, about produce prices, stating that:

I am directed to inform you that a case occurred some time ago in which there was strong evidence to suggest that an unscrupulous buyer had taken advantage of the fact that the local producers did not know that produce prices had increased and had continued for a period to buy produce at the old and lower prices (NAK/LOKPROF 1936-54 Produce Buyers).

To safeguard against the occurrence of such incidents the provincial authority gave the widest publicity through District and village heads of the new season's export prices. For groundnuts, for example, the price per piled-up kerosene tin was used as a guide. The principal export produce were; groundnuts, cotton, sheanuts, palm kernels, beniseed, cow hides, castor seed, tin, cocoa, coffee, sorghum, corn or maize (Macmillan, A., *The Red Book of West Africa. 1978, 44-46*).

Table 4: Bale Output of the Lokoja Ginnery 1906 – 1921

S/N	Year	Bale Output
1	1906	1847
2	1909	510
3	1910	131
4	1911	230
5	1912	213
6	1913	595
7	1914	603
8	1915	305
9	1916	569
10	1917	499
11	1918	566
12	1919	979
13	1920	1127
14	1921	1155

Source: NAK/LOKOPROF ACC.NO.80/1921 LOKOJA Historical Notes.

In 1921, the total Productive Power of the Lokoja Ginnery assuming a continuous flow of cotton and a twelve hour working day was about 2500 bales per annum. The value of a bale of cotton then was roughly £23. A bale of cotton is 400 lbs in weight and the product of about 1300 lbs of seed cotton. Assuming the output of cotton from the Lokola Ginnery was 1500 bales in a year the value would therefore be approximately £345000 (NEDECO Report, 1959, Vol. 2, 675). For the purpose of trade, the companies divided the country into trading areas headed by a general manager who was responsible for the production, purchase, shipment and export of all produce. During the war time period there was an order in Lokoja trading area banning the removal of cotton seed, cotton lint, and cotton thread to be sold outside Lokoja as indicated by this notice;

Public Notice:

Under the power conferred on me by Section 126(1) (a) of the Nigerian General Defense Regulations (No 75 of 1941) I hereby order that the movement out of Kabba Province of seed cotton, cotton lint, and cotton thread is prohibited except under a written permit issued by a competent authority. This order does not affect cotton transported out of Lokoja by river export from Nigeria (Ali, M.A. Thesis, 1991, 100).

This order shall come into force on July 1st 1942.
Residence Kabba Province

Although this was a war-time measure it demonstrates the power of the Resident of a province and the District Manager to control the production, bailing distribution, movement and export of produce within their area of jurisdiction.

Transportation and Distribution of Imports

It is necessary to point out that the primary policy guiding colonial importation was to serve the interest of the imperialist countries. As a result, there were strict regulations on the importation, sale and distribution of all imported goods. They were mostly consumer goods or machinery and equipment. For the purpose of strict supervision of imports, the country was divided into trading districts each district was headed by a general manager, who was assisted by a host of officials and executive cadres all of whom were Europeans (NAK/LOKOPROF 1506/1940 of Merchandise Control) Lokoja was a trading district headquarters where the district manager resided and from where he controlled all affairs concerning imports and exports in all the areas under his district as listed below. Lokoja-Bida District senior District Manager with headquarters at Lokoja controlled the Lokoja Bida District Comprising:

Table 5: Areas in Lokoja-Bida Trading District

Bida	Minna	Idah
Bare	Bodesadu	Charati
Agenebode	Badaggi	Zungeru
Lokoja	Ajaokuta	Abuja
Ggarijuko	Grenya	Atobe
Tswegj	Kentagora	Yewuni
Waya	Jebba	Amagede
Egga	Likpata	Katcha
Baradoji	Rumasha	Mozum
Egumi	Kstereggj	Yelwa
Okne	Ankpa	Auchi
Ebba	Shonga	

Source: NAK/LOKOPROF 1506/1940 OF Merchandise Control.

The distribution of imported merchandise was carried out in such a way as would yield the best result to the advantage of the trading firms and their parent countries. All imported merchandise were sent to areas where they were mostly needed either to stimulate higher production of certain export crops or on the other hand to yield the highest return license. During the Second World War when there was short supply of imported goods due to the disruption of trade, the colonial authorities instructed that preference should be given to areas where needed cash crops were produced so as to serve as an incentive to increased production by the farmers. An example of such regulation is clearly indicated in this letter:

No. 56161/S.24/23
Nigerian Secretariat
Lagos
10th March 1943.

The Resident,
Kabba Province,
Lokoja

Distribution of Imported Merchandise:

At the present time practically all imported goods particularly trade goods so necessary to stimulate production are in short supply. It is therefore necessary to ensure that the imported goods which are available are distributed to the best advantage and in such a

manner that they will have the maximum effect in stimulating production of essential oil seeds and rubber (NAK/LOKOPROF 1506/1940 of Merchandise Control)

From time to time, similar letters of restriction and prohibition of sale of imported goods were issued by the colonial authority as they may deem it necessary. This was to serve as a means of regulating prices of imports. Because if this was not done the market might become flooded with European manufactured goods and the consequence would be a drastic fall in price of European goods and also the aim of creating artificial scarcity to certain areas so as to stimulate production of cash crops would eventually be defeated (Ali, M.A. Thesis, 1991, 103) This was why the colonial authorities made it illegal for trading firms to embark on open sale of its merchandise directly to the public and conveyed in this letter.

13th December 1937
The Resident, Kabba
Province
Lokoja

The District Officer
c/o Igala Division
Idah

Markets

The branch Manager United African Company (UAC) Limited complains that last month while at Ejule he noticed a lorry belonging to the Campagnie Francaise De L'Afrique Occidental and that their goods were being sold in the market. He has asked whether steps can be taken to have this stopped. I understand it is not permissible for European firms to trade in Native markets in this way. Though there is apparently no objection to their employing agents for this purpose (Interview; Alhaji, Ozoga, 29/9/1990).

District Officer
i/c Igala Division

The distribution of imports was supposed to take the following pattern. The general manager resides in a trading District area headquarters such as Lokoja. He oversaw the affairs of the company as the representative of the trading company based in London or Liverpool. He was assisted by Senior District Manager who deputized in the absence of the General Manager. Warehouses were built in the towns with the greatest potential within the trading areas. Nigerians were employed as clerks to take care of sales in these warehouses.

The sales clerk who was placed on a monthly salary was accountable to a branch manager. In other smaller town where no warehouses were built, licensed agents were appointed. These licensed agents deposited a sum of money as security, say about £100 (one hundred pounds), and then they could be given goods to the value of £400 (Four hundred pounds) on credit. They were expected to go back to their area and sell these goods on retail basis to their people after which they refunded the advance. The branch manager, engaged on monthly stock taking and balancing of accounts with the sales clerk and licensed agents (Ali. 1991, 104). The organizational chart is as follows:

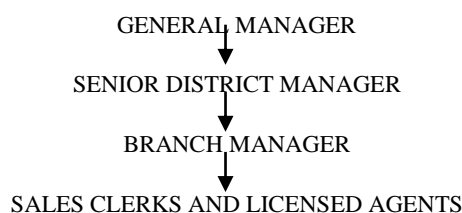


Figure 2: Order of Authority in trading Firms
Source: NAK/LOKOPROF 1506/1940 of Merchandise Control

On the whole, the volume of exports far exceeded the volume of imports. The volume or statistics of export produce were twice as much as the volume of imports. This was due to the fact that imports were highly regulated in such a way as to create artificial scarcity, increase the prices and encourage production of cash crops or export produce (NEDECO Report, 1959, vol. 2 628). Table 3 below shows the common consumer items imported or shipped into the Lokoja trading district.

Table 6: Common Consumer Items Imported to Nigeria

Agricultural implements and machinery	Enamel ware
Artist tools	Glass ware
Bicycle (motor and pedal	Head pans
Bicycle tyres	Iron mongers
Bicycle inner tubes	Lamps
Blankets	Lanterns
Buckets	Weighing machinery
Candles	Tobacco
Cement	Soap
Corrugated galvanized iron sheets	Sewing thread
Cutlery	Machines
Drugs and medicines	Seeds
Dyes	Paints
Earthenware	Nails
Motor vehicles	Motor tyres
Spare parts	Headpans
Nails	Shovels
Hot drinks	Binding wire

Source: NAK/LOKOPROF 196/1929 Ocean Freights Estimates

Other items imported mostly used by the public works department were. Railing stock, Rough iron, consisting of galvanized iron bars, joist plates, constructional materials, timber, pipes, iron sheet, coal for fuel, etc (NAK/LOKOPROF 1506/1940). Every department in the province was expected to send an annual estimate of its requirements to the Secretary of the province for preparation of the total ocean freight estimates. This was a measure taken which was intended not only to regulate imports but also to apply austere measures to imports so as to reduce cost.

Contribution to Knowledge

The study situates its relevance in the economic history of trade, transportation and merchandise control in Lokoja trading district in the Lower Niger region. This study is a contribution to the literature on trade and inland water transportation on the Lower Niger River in Lokoja trading district in the period 1900 to 1960. The study provides knowledge on the history of trade, transport and merchandise regulations in Lokoja in the colonial period. It has contributed towards a clearer understanding of the nature of merchandise regulation in Lokoja trading district. The Lower Niger River was a dominant mode of transportation in Nigeria in the colonial period. This paper improves our knowledge and understanding of trade, transportation, and merchandise control in Lokoja trading district from 1900 to 1960. Data generated could form a basis of improving the Nigerian transportation system by future policy makers in their dream for sustainable transport development.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed trade, transportation, and merchandise control in Lokoja trading district from 1900 to 1960. Data generated could form a basis of improving the Nigerian transportation system by future policy makers in their dream for sustainable transport development. This study has shown that in the colonial period Lokoja was a trading and transportation districts in the riverside area of Northern Nigeria for the sake of purchase and export of groundnuts and other agricultural produce. The buying stations in the riverside area of of Lokoja were; Lokoja, Baro, Makurdi and Yola. Groundnuts and other produce were purchased at a fixed price which remained constant from year to year. Every department in Lokoja trading district was expected to send an annual estimate of its requirements to the Secretary of the province for preparation of the total ocean freight estimates. This was a measure taken intended not only to regulate imports but also to apply austere measures to imports so as to reduce cost. The paper concludes that the primary policy guiding colonial importation was to serve the interest of the imperialist countries. As a result, there were strict regulations on the importation, sale and distribution of all imported goods.

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