

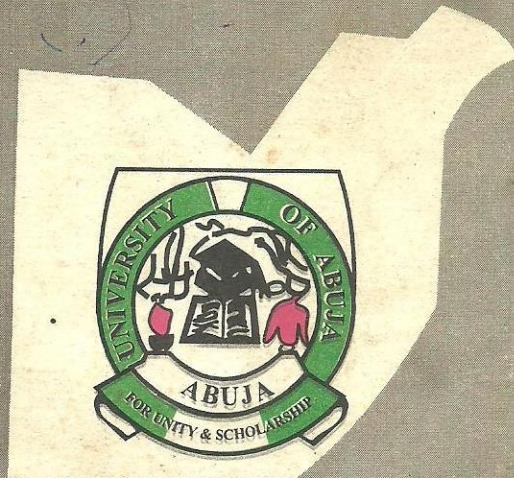
SAPHA

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JOURNAL

OF ISSN:1597-7536

HISTORICAL STUDIES



VOL. 1 NO 1

JUNE 2003

"The Highest Form of Knowledge is revelation"

**Published By The Department Of History
UNIVERSITY OF ABUJA**

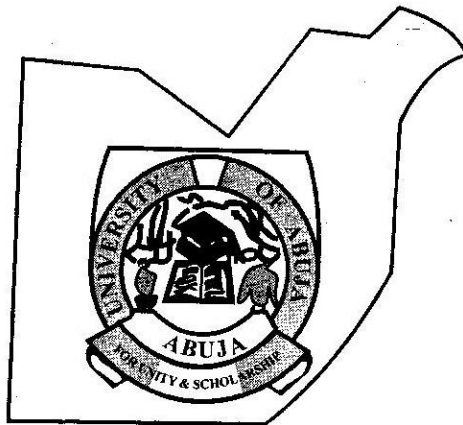
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The Nigerian Economy and Foreign Minority Participation: A Study of the Lebanese Traders in Lagos, 1900-1945*

P.F. Adebayo

Introduction

Nigeria's 'open' and underdeveloped economy like its West African counterpart has a characteristic feature of attracting foreign minorities who are also called 'pariah capitalists' (Weber, 1950, Hamilton, 1970). Such foreign capitalists include Lebanese, Syrians, Indians, Chinese, Greeks and Arabs etc. The availability of unlimited economic opportunities prevalent in African countries coupled with the desire for economic self-advancement have provided the impetus for these emigrants (McNeil, and Jacob, 1975) who probably were dissatisfied with their original place of abode, during the mid-to-late nineteenth century world-wide migratory phenomena (Berghe, 1975). Indeed, the activities of these Diaspora aptly referred to as 'middleman' minorities (Bonacich, 1975) have according to Fallers (1962), become a 'recurrent phenomenon of our time' even as their roles in 'Third World' economies remain a contentious issue. The Lebanese who are regarded as the 'Jews' of West Africa (Winder, 1967) and whose commerce is based on family networks as a reservoir of employees and community networks for supply, (Cruise O'Brien, 1975:107) began to penetrate Nigeria's economy through their various trading activities anchored on business strategies, ingenious middleman role and organizational ability (O'Brien, 1975). By the end of the second world war in 1945, the Lebanese trading activities had reached phenomena importance dominating the wholesale import/export merchandise distributive trade, with some of the entrepreneurs diversifying into other sectors of the growing commercial sector of Lagos economy such as warehousing, produce, transport (haulage) money lending, leisure industry, comprising cinemas, hotels, restaurants, and night clubs etc.

Lagos as the economic and commercial live wire of the nation harbours a large percentage of Lebanese population as well as other foreign nationals than any other commercial cities such as Kano, Aba, Ibadan, Port-Harcourt, Calabar, Enugu to mention but a few. But in spite of the numerous Lebanese, immigrants involved in various aspects of Lagos economy, Lebanese entrepreneurship in Lagos in particular has not received the deserved attention. This is partly due to the supposedly secretive nature of this minority community coupled with the paucity of oral information on their trading exploits. Accordingly, this paper is concerned with some of the highlights of the Lebanese trading activities in Lagos during the first forty-five years of their involvement in the growing commercial sector of Lagos economy. This study is significant as it attempts to fill the existing gaps in both the economic history of Lagos and the Lebanese activities in general. Indeed, the economic history of Lagos needs a critical review as a result of the inadequate attention given to the contributions of the Lebanese in Lagos economy.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first section deals with a synopsis of the background of the migration and the Lebanese involvement in the growing commercial sector of Lagos economy, emphasizing on them as petty traders. The second section, 1919-

1943 deals with the Lebanese merchants and diversification into other sectors of the Lagos economy such as produce, ware housing, transport, money lending, entertainment, industry and the third section states the reasons why they were successful in the colonial era.

Background of the Migration and Involvement of Lebanese in Lagos Economy (1900-1918)

The Lebanese inherited their entrepreneurial prowess from their ancestral progenitor the Phoenician who dominated the Far Eastern oriental trade for centuries (Fallers, 1962:334-336, Johnson, 1986:33-57). The influence of the Phoenicians was also felt in Africa following their trading activities in Mauritania (Johnson, 1986: 33-57). The valuable trading experience acquired from their Phoenician ancestors has proved to be of tremendous benefit to the Lebanese in their various trading activities with other nationals. Indeed, Yusif (1962:67) sums up this background experience and mobility thus:

Like migrant birds, Lebanese instinctively follow the call of clement business climate. Adventurous and dynamic, they are averted neither by strange lands nor by foreign tongues. The joint legacy of their Phoenician and Arab ancestry is unmistakable evidence whether settling in Carthage, Millennia ago, or in Dakar, Sydney, Detroit, or Kuwait today, the Lebanese manifest very much the same qualities.

Consequently, it is not surprising that by the second half of the nineteenth century when prompted by ambition as well as the resources and the hardship of life and in older times by the insecurity culminating in the denominational strife of 1860 as well as the social and political upheavals, hundreds of thousands of Lebanese have emigrated to the America, Australia, New Zealand and Africa (Yusif, 1962, Hutti, 1967). These were evidently the push factors of migration that brought the Lebanese to these places including West Africa. On the other hand, the variety of economic opportunities in West Africa served as the pull factors of attraction for the Lebanese emigrants (Flint, 1974: 380-401, Afigbo 1974-483). The Lebanese in West Africa are therefore only one strand of worldwide emigration (Cruise O'Brien, 1975:101).

Most of the earliest migrants in West Africa were bound for the United States of America, but due to stringent immigration measures and the lack of money, West Africa became an alternative place of settlement. They came to West Africa through Marseilles to Dakar and St Louis from there they moved to other places in coastwise direction (Falola, 1990: 525).

In the case of Nigeria, opinions are divided as to the actual date of arrival of the Lebanese in the country (Oral interview 1996, Omanese, 1978). But by 1890s Lebanese presence had been noticed in Nigeria. They were already references as to men like Michel Elias, Assad Joseph and Elias Minase who were later to become successful in business. (Daily Times, 1928: 14) Generally, migration was organized along family and sub-ethnic lines. New immigrants joined their relations and people from the same area in Lebanon, settled in the same place overseas. For instance many of those in Lagos in the early 20th century were from Mizyara Which is in the north of Lebanon while the Muslim were mainly from other countries. The migrants were of different religions sects, they were Christians who were either members of the Greek Orthodox Church or the Maronite. In South Western Nigeria, which includes Lagos, the Maronites attended the Catholic Church while the Greek

Orthodox chose the Anglican. The Muslim among the migrants also belonged to different organizations the Shiite, the Sunnite and the Ammaddiya. According to Falola {1990}, religious, ethnic and political differences were part of the baggage of transfer of the Lebanese to south western Nigeria including Lagos and these differences influenced some aspects of the interactions among them {Ibid}: They were however joined by other migrants from other countries, for instance, Mr Michael Elias joined the immigrants in Lagos from Brazil {Daily Times, 1923} and Mr. Mohammed El-khalil joined the migrants from Mexico {oral interview, 1996}.

Origin of Lebanese in Lagos Economy

Lagos developed as farming and fishing village with its earliest settler the Awories from Iseri in the 16th century and had trade as its predominant economic activity after the mid- 19th century {Kirsitin, 1974}. Hopkins {1964} has argued that half of the population was employed in commercial activity and that the residents were middle persons involved in the import/export exchange trade. Indeed, unlike the Yoruba towns of the interior, the economy of the colony was based primarily on the exchange of goods import from outside and not on a large-scale domestic production of agricultural commodities and crops. The favourable conditions of trade enabled traders to make profit in Lagos trade between 1860 and 1870. This made Lagos to be called the 'queen' of England's West African settlement. This position of Lagos as an important commercial entreport suited the Lebanese middlemen minority. Lagos therefore exhibited the characteristic tendencies of middlemen minority of which the Lebanese are one.

The favourable economic growth in Lagos trade resulted in the rapid exposition of the population as various immigrants that later included the Lebanese were attracted to the city by the lure of economic opportunity. The number of inhabitant of the community increased for instance five times between 1800 and 1966 and 1921, {Bakers, 1974:33} The population the commercial community in colonial Lagos which the Lebanese were to join consisted of four group of traders with, three of them of African origin, and these were the Afro-Brazilians, exslaves, Sierra Leone librated slaves and other descendants merchants from the indigenous population of Lagos and the European merchants comprising of the Manchester commission house, Messrs Ashton Kinder & co. were good examples of political merchants from Hamburg and Liver pool {Ofonagoro, 1979:70-75}.

These European merchants during this period dominated the Nigeria import trade which comprised of manufactured consumer goods such as textile material, silk spirits, house hold utensils, drugs, mediocre, gunpowder etc {Hopkins, 1973} The favourable foreign trade around this period is manifested in the rise of the value of Nigeria import and export trade. As provided by the summary in Allister {1968:44-47}, from {900-1918}, there was a considerable rise of value of import and export trade which enhanced and benefited the Lebanese traders. The total value of import comprising of merchandise {Commercial, Government and specie} in 1900 was £1,946,053 and by 1918 it had risen to £8,033,770 and amount of customs duties collected in 1900 was £516,847, but by 1918 the total trade was £17,883,250, while the amount of customs duties collected had risen to 1,387,332 {Ibid.}.

The import/export trade was supported by the willingness of the banks especially

the banks of British West-Africa {B.B.W.A} to grant loans and credits to European and African traders. Indeed, between 1894 and 1912, a West African currency board was set up to organize a proper management of the silver coins. Banks of British West Africa still handled receipts, storage and issuance of the coins acting as agent for the board.

Also the import/export trade showed that by 1900 Lagos and Nigeria economic scene generally was in the hands of local farmer, trader and craftsmen with a smaller but nevertheless important group of foreign multinational firms such as Patterson Zochonis and co., John Holt, G.B. Oliver, Niger co, G. Gottschalk and co. These multinational firms largely controlled Nigeria foreign trade, which depended on them, because they could afford the necessary capita, required for it and also exclusively manage ocean shipping on which foreign trade depended. Indeed, the import business was a mixed sector with European and African as importers and general merchants. The European firms had an edge over African importers because of their overseas connection. Nigeria middlemen obviously played a very important part both in the import/export trade and also acted as the agent of the European companies and local chief distributors of the merchandise and collection of local produce respectively.

The retail and auxiliary trade include a vast number of establishment among which were petty traders found in the large and small markets all over the cities selling food stuff, household utensils. Between them are African trade having kiosks, selling clothing materials and various imported goods. Other categories of traders in the retail and auxiliary trade are the large and well-established stores occupying imposing commercial centre. But with particular reference to Lagos the retail and ancillary trade were concentrated mostly on the island and some were established at the mainland, especially the southern part. It should be noted that the traditional centre of old Lagos in the midst of which is the Oba's palace is in the northern part of the island. Other centre of economic life of Lagos are the native markets chief among which are Obun Eko, Egerton, Jankara on Lagos Island, Oyingbo in Ebute Metta, Sabo in Yabo, Tejuosho in Surulere and Awolowo in Mushin {Fapohunda, Rajimoinik and Dijik, 1978:20} But the northern part which forms the central business district of Lagos is in the southern part of the island. It was on this southern part that the European trade landed and had their shops in the nineteenth century {1954}. It was also in this area that, the British administration had their houses and offices during the colonial days and after independence where the Nigeria rulers also had their offices. The central business districts developed along the twin main arteries of the Marina and Broad Street. Apart from being the administrative centre of the city, the business district is also the economic nerve centre of Lagos where the headquarters of most of the banks commercial houses and departmental stores are located {Fapohunda and Lubell, 1978:20}. Most of the large European multinational companies were also located here. These include G.B. Olivand and Co-limited, General merchants, Mame, Paterson Zochonis and Co-Limited, General merchants, {Liverpool} Limited Marina.

The commercial activities of the first group of Lebanese o emigrant who arrived virtually penniless in Lagos were not so significant. In the very early years, their commercial activities were not so significant. They had very little contact and a few trade goods because they had problems of locating themselves in a new society whose language they did not

understand. However, an eyewitness account described their goods as a collection of 'odds and ends' consisting of cheap beads and other junk, which they peddled about {see Daily Times, May 1921}. They supported the small trade with street singing and musical performance to attract aims. They equally engaged in petty trading along side the women of Lagos in Eastern merchandise of which the most famous was the coral beads for which they found a ready market. At that time the cost of original bead ranged from £1 to £3 while the initial bead was sold for a few pence. {See Daily Times, 1921:17}. The lenders of the coral beads used to cry out 'coral', coral by which name the Lebanese become known not only among the Lagosians but to other people of West African countries {see Daily Times, 1921}. Innocent Lagosians and other African customers could hardly distinguish between the Europeans and the Lebanese and started to have a looking for a bead seller who had a remarkable physical resemblance with the colonial administrators and rendered a service that puzzled most natives. Gradually, they added other items such as spectacles, tumblers, looking mirrors, glasses, earrings, razorblades etc to their hawking. The Lebanese also made use of Lagos stream tramway {1902-1933} to display their goods. In fact, the early Lebanese traders were in the habit of displaying their wares by the side of the passengers from Odunlami Street and bordering along Tinubu on the Lagos Island, thereby showing their mobility in business. Agarawu Street on the island of Lagos was the centre of Lebanese commercial activities at that time because most of Lagos was described as 'barren land' (oral interview, 1997). The Lebanese also operated at Ereko Street, Martins, Balogun Street, Victoria Street now Nnamdi Azikiwe street, all on the island. For most of these years especially before 1941 the Lebanese were largely peddlers with few of them participating in retailing of goods but by the end of First World War, in 1918 the Lebanese had acquired a better image as good retailers dealing in textiles, hardware and other fancy grade of goods.

The Lebanese adopted some business tactics that included the bazaar system and provision of short-term loans & credit facilities for finance trade in local food and cash crops and imported merchandise trade. The Bazaar system of transaction was familiar throughout West Africa at least since contract with Arab traders (Cruise O' Brian, 1975:99). The adoption of these business tactics not only enables them to penetrate Lagos economy in particular and that of Nigeria generally but equally attracted indigenous prospective buyers to them. In fact under the system the Lebanese were always willing to bargain accept very low initial profits to enlarge their clientele. The Lebanese were able to sell at relatively low prices because they were buying directly at lower prices from overseas supplies. This process contributed to ensuring a perfect market system where by in a competitive market the trader with the lowest price would attract more customers. This helped in forcing down the prices of various commodities by the European companies and other African counterparts. The role of the Lebanese in forcing down prices and also in inculcating this business strategy in indigenous trader cannot be overemphasized indeed the impact of this system principle of low unit profit and high turn over was manifested by indigenous traders in commercial cities such as Lagos, Ibadan, Kano, Enugu, Port Harcourt and Calabar who adopted this system (Oral interview, 1996). Furthermore, the availability of these varieties of imported merchandize goods through this system, in the words of Professor Lewis (Bauer and Yamey 1957:152) widened people's access to alternatives and this created the

range of human choice that made it easier to alter the consumption habit of the people and commercial orientation in favour of European manufactured goods.

It suffices to state that throughout this period the Lebanese image as retailers continued to improve even after the end of the First World War in 1918 they also extended their business activities to other parts of Lagos and even outside Lagos. Again, it should be noted that the increasing share of Lagos in Nigeria foreign trade and industry which assisted the Lebanese traders to participate effectively in the retail trade was the amalgamation of northern and southern part of Nigeria in 1914 which eventually made Lagos the gateway to an extensive and rich hinterland. The Lebanese participation in retail trade continued to deepen and by the second phase 1919-1945 under a favourable economic climate made possible by the British colonial economic policies, they became deeply involved in merchandise trade and other trading activities as the shall see in the next section.

Expansion into Merchandise Trade and Other Activities {1919-1945}

By 1919/1920s the Lebanese had become so successful in retail and semi wholesale trade to the extent that many Europeans and Nigeria competitors began to see them as threat. In fact, during this phase they had moved from their previous role as petty traders to merchants engaging in large scale wholesale, retail trade importing and exporting to Europe directly or through commission agents and more over competed as member of the new elite. As stated earlier, the most significant import trade by the Lebanese in their shops situated on the Lagos Island along major roads was imported manufactured goods, which were mainly hardware and textiles. They relied mostly on the European firms for their supplies. Of course, a good credit system provided by these firms enabled the Lebanese shopkeepers to enjoy a continuous supply. They bought textile materials from the big European import houses directly on bulk, but sold in Lagos assorted bits to the African traders in Lagos who in turn sold to the final consumers in front of Lebanese shops. The Lebanese were closer to their customers because they could speak Yoruba and English and also offered credit facilities to their African traders. At this stage, it will be appropriate to make some brief remarks about their organization of trade.

The organization of Lebanese commercial activities was versatile. The individual aimed at constant, expansion by ploughing back profits and exploring business in new areas and potentially profitable goods. The first consideration was the choice of a town in which to settle and the location of a shop within it. They preferred large centres and the central market places. Unlike the Europeans who lived in the Reservation Areas, the Lebanese were allowed by law to live and locate their shops among the indigenes. Because of them and a few categories of other aliens, the colonial administration paid attention to regulations on land and the acquisition of shops. The Lebanese had to obtain a lease for their commercial and residential premises. They were quick to master the intricacies of these regulations. Some rules involved transactions between individuals, whose transfer of communal land had to be approved by the chiefs and the town council government was always involved in the approval of the terms and costs of leases (Toyin, 1990).

Their shops in Lagos were not just used to tap the trade of other towns such as Ibadan, Abeokuta, Ijebu Ife, etc. but also to serve as main feeders to these towns and surrounding villages and smaller towns. The goal was to turn the shops into the main

neighbourhood centre for retail or semi-wholesale. They achieved these techniques in two ways. First within Lagos Island and Mainland where they were mostly located their shops acquired the reputation for low price and prompt payment of money when produce was involved. To the consumers who were yet to make up their minds, the Lebanese shops served as the reference place to obtain information on prices and the range of available goods. Second the Lebanese hired agents who received commission to sell (or buy) on their behalf. These agents who were knowledgeable in local language and market conventions travelled to the surrounding villages to distribute or collect goods. In the big centres like Ibadan and Lagos, the agents in textile also had their shops and kiosks close to those of the Lebanese entrepreneur. By making use of indigenes as agents, the Lebanese assured themselves of some support, although the relationship was not without tension. Again, from the main shop, the Lebanese trader could visit the surrounding areas to collect information on economic opportunities.

Labour control was next in importance to location. The goal was to have a small overhead cost so as to maximize profit. The strategy was for the individual to rely on himself and the immediate members of its family (wife and children and extended relations). Consequently, Lebanese business was mainly organized on a family basis (Khuri, 1965: 385-395; Stanley. The members of the family regarded the business as a joint one, although, the man as head enjoyed virtual dictatorial powers. Some were expected to inherit the business and this became another factor of continuity. The integration of the family members into the business enabled the prevention of fraud, reduction of overhead costs, concentration of wealth within a small circle of relations, minimal supervision of staff, and easy contacts to key business associates and customers. "The coherence of the family", noted H.L. Laan, (1970) was the social factor which was the backbone of the economic success of the Lebanese traders: the authority of a man over his wife and children meant that the business was run as resolutely as by a single person and yet was as strong as a group. Both the established traders and the new migrants explored connections offered by the family before trying other means. Relations or friends were sponsored to join others in the country. For instance, Michael Elias and George Solomon sponsored some emigrants to Nigeria. Other new emigrants supplied labour and worked towards integration into the business of the sponsor. They were also the main source from which to draw brides and bridegrooms, since majority of the Lebanese avoided marriages with Nigerians, and some groups among them preferred to marry their cousins. The new ones to commence an independent trade expected to be compensated with resources. The hope of sponsorship enabled the entrepreneur to get the best out of his relations.

Further expansion often necessitated hired labour, although the members of the family continued to dominate the strategic and confidential functions like keeping money and records of sale. A hired labour performed no specialized functions. The earliest workers were called 'shop boys', and they also served as cooks, stewards, messengers and washer men. Their salary was low, as low as 10t per month in Lagos in the 1920s. {Nai com:col 1861} Although it must be stated that as at the time the Lebanese began trading in Lagos in 1900 we have little idea about the earning of peasant farmers, fishermen or petty traders but the annual wages of unskilled workers in Lagos between 1900 and 1920 totalled about £12.

Those of skilled craftsmen have been estimated at between £30 and £60. {Hopkins, 1964:78} The stipend of the Oba himself was higher than £400 throughout most of the period. The daily wage for unskilled Labourers fluctuated between nine pence and one shilling. The unskilled Labourers were to pay one shilling for unskilled labourers they employed in later years {m yrs, 1985:2003}. The big Lebanese shops had clerks, educated young men who received slightly higher wages. The clerks worked in the shops, from 7.00 a.m to 7.00 p.m. six days a week. Their conditions of services compared unfavourably with those in European firms and the civil service, no annual salary increment, no annual leave, and no gratuity or pension rights. There were many stories of ill-treatment, 'the clerks have got to suffer from rough handling, beating, kicking, insult and more evil. (Daily Times, June 1928).

It is within this period that the Lebanese became largely merchandise Evidence of Lebanese trading merchant involvement in imported merchandise especially British textile, goods is shown below the activity of Mr. F.J. Nabatan, a Lebanese trader in Lagos, and obtained from the controller of customs, Nigeria. The following statistics show how far the Lebanese merchants import into Lagos during the period of six months from October in 1927/8 could be seen in the table below:

British (pounds)	Non-British (pounds)	Total
247, 822	21, 298	269, 120
92%	7.9%	

Total import for corresponding period. E3, 747,986.E1055,789.E4,803,775

Source: "The Syrian/Lebanese trader in West Africa" Elder review July 1950 No 8, Vol. 30, p.20.

These figures show that at Lagos, 92.1 percent of the trade of Lebanese importer was in British goods while the average shows 78 percent. The Syrian/Lebanese importer trade in British goods is thus 14 percent above the average and commercially speaking, the Syrian/Lebanese in Nigeria is 14 percent more of a British trader than the average business there. By the 1930s, every Lebanese trader in Nigeria was already in the merchandise trading and more than 90% of them dealt in textile retailing {Misra, 1985}. The period equally witnessed the movement of some Lebanese from retailing to semi-whole sale and whole selling and this ensured their middleman role.

The Lebanese success in retail trading and merchandise business as well during the 1920s and 1930s led to an increase in the number of Lebanese retailers as well as their population in Lagos and other parts of Nigeria. In fact their number increased from 143 to 818 {Misra, 1985}. {Most of these new emigrants were either relatives or friends of the older emigrants who actually sponsored them. For instance, Michael Elias, and George Solomon sponsored some emigrants to Nigeria and upon their arrival in Lagos, they were absorbed into existing Lebanese business particularly the retail trading.

It is however, important for us to bear in mind that within this phase, the Lebanese were not the only retail traders. There is indeed evidence of Nigeria participation in the retail

trading all over the country. But most of the Lebanese as well as African retailers obtained their goods from the European firms and acted in dual capacity as distributors of merchandise and collectors of the local produce, which they sold to the European companies.

The Lebanese trading merchants were able to penetrate the monopoly in the import merchandise trade because the organisation of their commercial activities was versatile. The individual aimed at constant expansion by ploughing back and exploring business in new areas and potentially profitable goods. They were quick to master the intricacies of these regulations. Some rules involved transactions between individuals, whose transfer of communal land had to be approved by the chiefs and town council, government was always involved in the approval of the term and costs leases {Toyin Falola, 1990:523}.

The business strategy of the Lebanese was described in 1928 by one of them as that of quick turn over and small profit {Ibid.}. This is true, although the author failed to explain why he was possible to achieve this. As stated earlier and with what they met in the Lebanese were good at tricks and sharp practices.

They saw nothing wrong in selling imitation goods as genuine, foreign trademarks, adulterated produce, exploiting labour, paying little tax hearing, profiteering and cheating the gullible {Oral evidence, Faysal, Elkhail, 1996}. The economic effect of the Lebanese business behaviours on Nigeria traders and Nigeria economy was the imitation of these negative aspects by Nigeria traders in Lagos, Ibadan, Kano, Port Harcourt, Enugu, Calabar, Kaduna and other big commercial centres. Also the effect on the Nigerian economy was that the nation continued to loose a lot of money through these negative aspects.

Be that as it may, the Lebanese involvement in wholesale merchants import goods led to the construction of warehouse near the ports not only in Lagos but also in other commercial centre such as Port Harcourt, Calabar etc. In Lagos in particular, the merchants import activities were enhanced by the provision of social overhead facilities which were strategically located at the seaports along the rail line and on major roads linked to the rail line to facilitate flow of the increased volume of export and import trade which boosted the Lebanese trade. Indeed, within this commercial milieu and couple with the auxiliary service provided by their warehouses and port facilities an increase in the volume of export and imports became inevitable. In fact, the value of trade passing through Lagos increased for instance from £3.4 million in 1913 to £19.2 million in 1922 and continued for a very long time {David hilling, 1969:370}.

As a result of this, Lagos which was designated the only first class town in 1917 became the main focus of attention in social overhead investment. Lagos harbour expanded to handle the increasing volume of export/import traffic {Usoro, 1987:214}. Indeed, the pre-World I quarry, with a total length of 400 feet and an average annual handling capacity of 383,000 tons had been expanded in 1925 {by an additional, 1,500 feet with four story transit shed} to handle an average annual 2 million tons {Ibid}. In addition a coal wharf and a petroleum jetty were erected in 1919 and 1933 respectively.

The growth in port traffic not only induced a corresponding growth in employment opportunities, but also widened the scope for commercial activities and stimulated the

emergence of specialization in economic functions. With the expansion of harbour facilities the distinctive influence of Nigeria style of export and import promotion on employment creation become evident. The composition of Nigeria, export commodities {Mostly primary products} and its once and for all handling at the final part of shipment, was not as employment creating as was the case with imports. The latter because of its advantages in bulk breaking, a function of the small scale Nigeria retail trade increased local participation in retail trade, multiplied as a result of the Lebanese participation. In fact, the value of trade passing through Lagos increased from £3.4 million in 1913 to £19.2 million in 1923, {Hilling, 1969:370} and continued to increase in subsequent years.

We should however, note that during the 1930s, the Lebanese seem to have continued the import business at a much lower level when compared to European firms, who divided the import trade themselves by the Staple Line Agreement of 1934 and by a Comprehensive Merchandise Agreement in 1937, this survived after the end of the Second World War {Hopkins, 193:259}.

Livestock

Apart from the merchandise trade the Lebanese were also involved in the livestock and animal product as well as produce trade in Lagos during this second phase of the two decades. As stated earlier the first Lebanese to be involved in the cattle trade was Michel Elias who 1898 embark on a caravan journey from Lagos through Kano to Borno with a view to studying the trade. He began the trade in 1920 and in that same year he shifted his base from Lagos to Kano in order to oversee his combined activities as a cattle produce dealer. He became very well known in the cattle trade from Lake Chad to Lagos. His main supplies came from Borno and northern Niger as well as Chad. Elias withstood the competition from Hausa dealers, and in 1920 it was noted that it was from him that Lagos got most of its beef for he sent annually to its market 15,000 head of cattle. However, the economic depression of 1921-23, coupled with his inability to recover his debts and the increasing pressure from Hausa monopoly forced his withdrawal from the trade. By the early 1930s, he had abandoned the cattle trade and concentrated on produce (groundnuts) and merchandise.

The Zard family equally participated in annual production business. Indeed, with the initiative given to them by the Nigerian Agricultural Department, two dairies were opened in Lagos and Ibadan respectively, to supply fresh milk to local consumers. The initial investment for this enterprise was made with a sum of £13,000. After some time, C. Zard seems to have lost interest in this business. His Lagos dairy was first taken by the Agricultural Department but later on another Lebanese Hassan Ibrahim Hazaz operated it under the name of West African Dairy Yaba. The Ibadan dairy continued to remain under the supervision of C. Zard's nephew. The Zard family later grew to become an industrial giant in Nigeria's economic development.

Produce Trade

The Lebanese also, took part in produce trade in raw materials, but it was their middleman position in the produce trade like groundnut and cocoa that was given prominence in Lagos. The Lebanese bought groundnut from the local producers at higher prices than the African intermediaries and the Europeans and also contended themselves

with little gains by selling to those that would ship the produce to Europe from Lagos at moderate prices, thereby forcing the European export houses to depend on them. They were also active in capital and palm kernel trade.

With particular reference to cocoa, the data on the involvement of the Lebanese in cocoa produce described them as small middlemen who collected the product from indigenous traders to sell to European firms. But the earliest cocoa was established in the vicinity of Lagos in the 1880s and 1890s mostly by African merchants based in Lagos whose business suffered from the prolonged decline in prices of palm produce during the late nineteenth century slump in world trade.

The Lebanese participation in this trade was localized in South Western Nigeria, which includes Lagos. In the initial stage, the Lebanese traders acted as middlemen between the cocoa farmers and the European buying companies. By 1925, the Lebanese featured prominently in this business, and there is a documented evidence that one Lebanese firm, the exported coca from Nigeria. During the mid- 1930s the cocoa trade in Nigeria was at its peak and the year 1936 witnessed a record of that commodity. At that time, the leading European companies in Nigeria were actively engaged in cocoa business. These companies were the U.A.C., John Holt, G.B. Olivant {British}, C.F.A.O and S.C.O.A. {French} United Trading Co. Switz are two Greek companies. In the midst of these European firms four Lebanese namely J. Natham, F.J Nabham, N. Abizakhem and Chucyall Zard successfully traded in the cocoa business.⁵¹ {Co. 658/25}. The Lebanese involvement in produce trade became stronger during and after the Second World War.

Indeed, during the Second World War, the marketing of cocoa along with the other exports crops placed under the control of the West African Produce Control Board {WAPCB}, which was authorized to allocate buying quotas to different shippers. According to the WAPCB's report for 1943-44, cocoa season, the U.A.C John Holt and Co. had 85.45% {2.09% and 3.46% for Calabar and Victoria areas respectively}. In Lagos and Benin areas the distribution of quotas was as follows:

Export quotas' of shippers licensed to buy cocoa produce 43-44 season

NAME OF COMPANY	QUOTA ALLOCATION
The U.A.C {British}	37.51%
Cocoa Manufactures Limited	13.51%
John Holt and Co. {British}	13.03%
Paterson Z and Co.	10.02%
Paterson Z and Co.	6.81%
London and African Overseas Ltd	2.55%
C.F.A.O. {French}	4.61%
S.C.O.A {French}	2.11%
Union Trading Co. {Swiss}	3.15%
O. Zard and Co. Ltd. {Lebanese}	5.76%
Total	100% 52

Source: Margery Perham (Ed) *Mining, Commerce and finance in Nigeria* p.56.

The above table indicates that the Lebanese participation in the cocoa trade during the year under discussion was greater than some well-established European companies such as C.F.A.O, S.C.O.A and U.T.C Ltd. In 1947, the Nigeria Cocoa marketing Board was set up and applications were called for the appointment of licensed buying agents. In all the Board received 29 applications from the Lagos and Benin areas and 3 from Calabar and Victoria areas. In the Lagos and Benin areas, 25 applicants were appointed as Buying Agents and out of these four were the Lebanese. All the four had substantial means since one of the rules was that an agent should be able to purchase at least 250 ton. Three of them namely A.K Zard, N.K. Zard, and C. Zard belonged to one family, while the fourth one was a Lebanese named N. Abizakham, were the major beneficiaries and they continued to be influential during the 1950s. {, Misra 1985} Small-scale Lebanese traders served as agents. Like other produce, the Lebanese bought from many producers and small indigenous traders later to sell in bulk to exporters.

Transport Business

The Lebanese were also involved in transport business, which is one of the main infrastructural axes on which any economy revolves. Lebanese participation in the transport business began with the acquisition of lorries. The first documentary evidence of Lebanese ownership of a lorry dates back to 1927. In that year, the Attorney-General of Nigeria docked a Lebanese firm Miniaisse Brothers on charges that their brooks way motor Lorry, bearing L1810 registration mark collided with a government lorry on Lagos- Ibadan road. The plaintiff asked the court ordered the defendants to pay the damages to the plaintiff. (Allister, 1960) it is significant to note that it way also on that year (1927) that one of the most prominent Lebanese transporters Mohammed El-Ekhalil pioneered the transport business in Lagos and South western Nigeria that time, he Western Nigeria. His firm El-Khail Transport Ltd. carried most of the coins of the Bank of British West Africa over a large area as far as Oshogbo and just short of Onitsha to the East (Elbed) His lorries also carried quantities of imported goods in western Nigeria, and even up to Cote d' Ivoire and brought back to Lagos export goods. Below are some Lebanese lorry owners in the 1930s.

Some Lebanese Lorry Owners and Traders in the 1930s

S/N	NAMES	MAIN LOCATION	NUMBER	DATE ESTABLISHED
1	El-Khalil	Lagos	12	1927
2	Hassan	Lagos	10	1928
3	A-Arab	Lagos	11	1930
4	P. Saliba	Ibadan	1	1930
5	A. Sarrough	Lagos	1	1934
6	K. Jamul	Lagos	3	1938
7	T. Saudi	Lagos	1	1937
8	K. Jabber	Lagos	3	1937
9	A. Abet	Ibadan	2	1938
10	P. Dib boy	Ibadan	2	1939

Source: NAICSO 26/37362: Lebanese Motor Transport Owners

It is evidently clear from this table that some traders became successful and went to the extent of combining transport passengers and trade goods. The most successful among them further diverted into selling's spare parts and there were those among them who became shipping and travel agents. Those without lorries use the railways, hired lorries or walked. Their role in the transport business was so powerful that during the Nigerian Transport Union Strike of 1937, the Asian (Lebanese) transporters are reported to have been given police escorts in their attempt to break down the strike. Also in 1945, the Lebanese Transport Union formed in that year expressed its displeasure to the colonial government on problems of fuel scarcity during the Second World War. During the 1940s, the Lebanese involvement in transport business in Lagos, Ibadan and Northern Nigeria reached almost monopolistic stage.

The impact of the Lebanese transport business was that they helped to enlarged the economy and extend trade over an increasingly large area in Nigeria thereby accelerating the motivation of the Nigeria economy.

Entertainment Industry Cinematography

But, apart from their involvement in merchandise, animal livestock, produce trade and transport business, the Lebanese also started penetrating the Nigerian entertainment industry by participating in cinematography. Cinematography as a field of entertainment became noticeable in Lagos when the first exhibit was shown in August 1903 at Glover Memorial Hall.⁸ (Leonard, 1967). By 1921 it had become so popular that there were four halls showing films twice a week. A fifth hall was erected in Oshodi (Daily Times August 1-8th, 1967). It had become an integral part of social life in Lagos. Lebanese involvement in cinematography began in 1939 when Rasek Ahmed alkhalil founded the Rex Cinema at Glover Hall premises in Lagos. Other Lebanese businessmen later joined the cinematography and other forms of entertainment such as restaurant business in subsequent years. The effect of the Lebanese involvement in these businesses was that it encouraged indigenous participation as some Nigerians began to take part in the entertainment industry as from the 1950s and 1960s.

Money Lending

From archival evidence and information gathered from my informants, the Lebanese were involved in money lending which was widespread in Nigeria and later in banking activities during the 50s and 60s. Money lending as a business of acquiring loans from a specialized group of moneylenders charged exorbitant interest and insisted on loan repayment at a fixed date. The tension conflicts and problem created by its existence and practice led the government to enact an ordinance in 1938 to curb its excess. The Lebanese were in good position to participate in the business because in the intelligence report (NAI).

Most moneylenders had cash {roughly estimated at between £20 and £150} and other investments. In general, money lending was combined with other activities such as trading. Many already had lorries and houses, big cocoa and kola nut farms and had acquired some fame in the towns of investors or 'alajo'.⁹⁰

The annual report compiled by the colonial government in the 1940s and 1950s, indicating the number of registered lenders in South- Western Nigeria which included Lagos with approved license published in the gazette showed the Lebanese were among the

lenders apart from the Ijebu and Ijesha men. They in fact engaged in money lending to Nigerian and their own countrymen. But most moneylenders preferred going to the Lebanese because their interest rates were not as high as that charged by the Yoruba and Igbos whose interest amounted to more than 150%. Four of our informants (Oral Interviews 1998) who were clients of the Lebanese moneylenders in the 1950s and 60s in Lagos This fact was confirmed by. Their activities in this sphere continued in 1950s-60s.

Reasons for Lebanese success in colonial Society

The Lebanese success in these forty- five years of their trading activities in Lagos was due to certain factors. First, the Lebanese were working in an open colonial society, tolerant of aliens as long as they were not political competitors with the British. (Falola, 1990) Second, the colonial economy encouraged free trade and the participation of both indigenes and alien traders (Falola, 1990). Third, the economy expanded and many people became salary earners for the first time⁶³. Those who exploited the various opportunities created by these changes, whether indigenes or foreigners, had benefited a great deal. There were Nigerian traders who became rich like their alien competitors or collaborators. The Lebanese exploited three other advantages. First they imitated the indigenous traders in such practices as hawking, hogging, adulteration of goods and so on. Second, they moved closer to the European firms, to obtain goods and credit⁶⁴ (Falola, 1990). More resources were made available by the banks, which had little or no problem in recovering the loans. Relations or friends and members of the Lebanese community, all played a major role in the circulation of trade goods, loans and information. Finally, they added their own distinct contributions by the way they organized their enterprise and their business ethics.

The support of the Lebanese had from the British also served as an encouragement for them in carrying out their trading activities. In appreciation of the support of the colonial government, the Lebanese demonstrated their loyalty publicly. Indeed, their public spirit and expressions of loyalty to the Empire are well known, concluded the commissioner of the colony in October 1936. In the same year {1936}the management of the Lebanese Union of Nigeria {Lagos Branch}communicated its resolution to the government that all the Lebanese would be loyal in every possible respect” and would support all activities sponsored by the government, including “ practical service”. (Ibid) The management advised all its members to co-operate with the British administrators. The Lebanese were true to their words in showing loyalty. They obeyed most laws as long as their interest in trade remained unaffected. They exploited opportunities to show their love for the British; for instance, they were active in official function. During the Second World War not only did they obey instructions on austerity measures they also applied to join the Local Defence Force and contributed to the War Relief Fund. They also made generous donations to the Earl Haig's Fund Appeal, the Nigeria War Fund. They did a number of other things to support the government or indicate continued. Loyalty. Notable examples included the donations of free labour to government projects “ provision of free dental service in Lagos in 1936 by a Lebanese dentist and the erection of an arch for the king George Memorial Park in Lagos, in 1938(NAI Ibadan). The Lebanese did not allow the relationship between them and the colonial administration to wane.

This however, should not lead us to the belief that all was well with the Lebanese and the European traders. The resentment of the Lebanese traders had European firm came into open in the 1930s, when some Lebanese traders had shown their ability to move beyond retail. By dealing in produce on a large scale and selling at wholesale they undermined a number of Europeans firms, especially the small branches outside Lagos (NAIcso). The European firms avoided retail, and they had heavy overheads, two disadvantage of trade. The former excluded them from dealing with the majority of the population who could only afford small purchases while the latter meant that they could not sell as cheaply as the Lebanese. " European firms outside Lagos complained that the Lebanese competed unfairly with them. Some of the firms struggled to push the Lebanese to the native sides where they would be cut off from the main current of the trade of the district (NAI Ibadan). Suggestions for relation were also made in Lagos, although they were not taken up.

The extent to which the European firms went in combating the Lebanese is not too clear. To be sure, they joined in the campaign of calumny against the Lebanese and condemned their business ethics and life style. It is also clear that the Lebanese were aware of this hostility (Toyin Falola 1990). But as it was difficult for them to compete with the European firms for importation and many in fact regarded this sector as outside their competence, they were merely concerned with the domestic level of distribution and they also recognized the need to be tactful in dealing with their major suppliers. One of them denied competition with the Europeans and said that they were in fact subservient to them.

While the European firms saw the Lebanese as competitors, the Lebanese preferred to present themselves as dependent on the European firms, an effective strategy in maintaining a linkage with the importers and minimizing opposition.

Thus, the colonial society was not completely free from tension. It was however, a free trading society in which the European traders and the indigenous trader participated actively. But the Lebanese with the active support of the colonial administration had a lot of advantages over the indigenous traders. These advantage continued to manifest through the participation of the Lebanese in various economic activities in Lagos in particular and Nigeria generally. Bauer (1948) aptly states that:

Ninety percent of the Syrian traders in West Africa are clients of British houses and buy their goods from them the spot and sell them in the same market. Such being the case, it is impossible to understand how a client can afford to be as serious competitors to his supplier, unless he is drafting towards bankruptcy.

Conclusion

The nature and change of the Lebanese involvement in the growing commercial sector of Nigeria's economy was developed through their participation in ancillary and retail trade in Lagos. Starting as peddlers the Lebanese acquired a good image as retailers and eventually became merchants that were deeply engaged in wholesale merchandise goods and distributive trade which was anchored not only on their organizational ability and business strategy but also on their principle of low unit profit and high turn over which enlarge their clientele. The entrepreneurial ability was shown in the areas of trade such as

livestock, coca produce, transport, money lending and entertainment industry, which they embarked upon. The Lebanese penetration of Lagos economy was achieved through various business tactics that included their organizational ability, transportation's system Bazaar system that not only enlarge their clientele but also had the effect of altering the consumption habit of the people and commercial orientation in favours of European manufactured goods many Nigerians especially traders be no fitted from Lebanese business tactics and ethics that was anchored on the principle of low unit Arofia and high turn over, shrewdness and hand work. However, the Lebanese were occasionally accused of sharp practices such as adulteration of goods, cheating, boarding and profiteering, which was also common among ingenuous trader. Buoyed by a Favourable British colonial economic policies the Lebanese succeeded in diversifying into other sectors of the growing and expanding Lagos economy such as livestock, Cocoa produce, transport, money lending and cinematography within the entertainment industry.

* This article is adopted from the authors Ph.D. Thesis, the Lebanese and Economic of Lagos, 1890-1980 that was recently completed in the Department of History, University of Ilorin, December 2003.

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