

Social and Economic Activities of the People of Gusau and their Neighbours in the Nineteenth Century: (A Survey on Trade and Commerce)

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Abstract: This paper attempts to show the relevance of trade and commerce to the emergence and growth of Gusau town and trade that link between long hold commercial activities. In the growth and development of Gusau, this paper shows that trade and commerce played significant role in the emergence and development of the town. It examines the historical background of Gusau and nature of its geography; describes the settlement and socio-economic activities of the inhabitants and their neighbours respectively. It also shows that agriculture and crafts occupation were the chief economic activities of the people in the area. The nature of crafts occupation industries in the area which include blacksmithing, weaving, dyeing, pottery, wood carving and leather working or tannery. These activities stimulated both internal and external commercial exchanges leading to the emergence of Gusau market and also contributed to the development of markets in the whole of Hausaland. The objective of this paper is to take a look at the evolution and significance of trade and commerce to the emergence and growth of Gusau settlement. To achieve this, the paper involves secondary sources of information; and data collected were used in order to actualize the goal of the study.

Keywords: Agriculture, Commence, Craft Occupation, Trade, Gusau and Hausaland.

1. INTRODUCTION

Trade is one of the important factors identified, having significant effect on the emergence of human habitant in the nineteen centuries in Hausaland and Gusau community as part of its domain (Mas'ud, 2021). The importance of human settlements has been known to emerge and develop into prominent cities due to their position along strategic trade routes; for example, the rise of the prominent city states like Kano, Katsina, Zazzau and Borno, just to mention a few. These cities contributed to trans-Saharan trade which existed for many centuries between the inhabitants of West Africa and their North African counterpart (Adamu, 2010). It is well known that Gusau was founded by an Islamic scholar popularly known as Malam Sabo Dan Ashafa who claimed to have migrated from Yandoto westward till he reached Gusau where he established himself at different areas including Yandoton Daji. Before the Sokoto jihad, Yandoto remained under the influence of Katsina, after the defeat of ancient Yandoto in 1806 that led to the emergence of Gusau (Chafe, 2017; Ibrahim, 2001).

The major reason for the movement of people into the area was due to its fertile nature of the land which attracted people from various parts of Hausaland and Borno since the nineteenth century resulting in the concentration of people from different classes of occupation. While the Katsinawa, Gobirawa, Zamfarawa, Bazarmawa and Kanuri came as sedentary farmers, the Fulani came in as pastoralists who owned large herds of cattle. This was made possible by available farming and grazing land; with principal sources of water supply especially river Gusau which made farming an all year round actively (Swindell and Davis, 1982). In addition, Gusau lies along the all-important trade routes which connect principal

towns and cities in Hausaland and beyond. This was the trans-Saharan trade which connected North Africa empress with the Hausa kingdom of Kano, Katsina, Daura, Zazzau and Gobir among others since time immemorial. The long held trans-Saharan trade largely accounted for the reason why Gusau superseded almost all its neighbouring communities in Hausaland in terms of wealth resulting from agriculture and trade. Thus, Gusau continued to evolve both under Zamfara and Katsina before it was finally brought within the fold of Sokoto caliphate in the nineteenth century (Usman, 2006).

Gusau town is today the headquarters of Gusau Local Government Area (LGA) and the state capital of Zamfara, Nigeria and it is one of the fourteen LGAs in the state. Gusau town is located along Zaria – Sokoto road and the town is placed on latitude $12^{\circ} - 13^{\circ}$ to $12^{\circ} - 18^{\circ}$ N and longitude $6^{\circ} - 29^{\circ}$ to $6^{\circ} - 45^{\circ}$ E (Chubado, *et al.* 2022; Umar, 2015; Ma'ud, 2020). Gusau is bordered today in the east by Katsina and Kotorkoshi, in the north by Kaura Namoda and Birnin Magaji, in the west by Bungudu, Dansadau and Kaduna state in the southern part. A favourable location which has contributed to the growth of commercial activities of the town. Gusau town covers an area of approximately 3469 squares kilometers (Umar, 2015; Ma'ud, 2020). According to 1991 CENSUS, the Gusau Local Government had estimated a total population of 260,446 and by CENSUS 2006 the number has mounted to 383,712 with Gusau town having 241,321 populations (Umar, 2015). The inhabitants are made up of Hausa, Kanuri and Fulani among others; and predominantly inhabited by Muslim. However, modernity coupled with the peculiarities of the Nigerian nation, a considerable number of migrants now lived in the area due to increase in the commercial status (Ibrahim, 2001).

As mentioned earlier, Gusau is a fertile area suitable for agricultural practices. There are two seasonal climates namely; wet and dry season. The wet season usually commence from late April or early May until September or early October. This period is characterized by intensive agricultural activities, because the wet area of land is put to use for cultivation proposes; crops ranging from millet, guinea corn, rice, maize, potatoes, beans and vegetable are widely cultivated by the people. The dry season on other hand commences from October and last until April or May. The period is characterized by low farming activities except in *fadama* area where system of irrigation farming (*noman rani*) is taking place (Nadama, 2009).

The weather is further characterized by two distinct conditions, the hot and the cold seasons. The cold season is from November to early February during the time hamattan occurs (Nadama, 2009). The hot season commences from march and last until May or early June and characterized by very high temperature. In terms of vegetation, the area featured a hybrid of Sudan northern guinea Savannah. The feature is however most noticeable during the rainy season when grass and tree covers reaches their peak. Although, due to the nature of human activities, the tree covers in the area have been largely reduced in number as people use it as local source of fuel energy (Main, 1983).

The whole land in the area is divided into three, depending on the mode of its usage. There is upland area, where crops cultivation takes place during the rainy season. There is *fadama* lowland area where farming activities are restricted to the dry season. The third category is a reserved land area which serves as grazing land for pastoralists Fulani who grazed their cattle in such lands. All geographical features have combined to attract considerable settlement of human population especially along the valley of river Gusau which traversed the entire area (Ibrahim, 2001; Udo, 1971).

2. NATURE OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES OF THE PEOPLE

As noted earlier, Gusau population comprises of indigenous population of Hausa (Zamfarawa, Katsinawa, Gobirawa, Bazarmawa, etc.), Fulani and Kanuri who hailed from various parts of Hausaland and Borno. They moved into the area mainly as a result of the supportive lifestyle, fertile land, sustainable resources and abundant water supply inherent in the area all year (Samir, 1974). Consequently, sedentary farming and pastoralism became established among the inhabitants. In other words, agriculture, rearing of crops and animals became the dominant feature of the social and economic life of the people (Salmanu, 1990). Farming involves an elaborate cultivation of crops both during wet and dry season. Through the wet season agriculture is more extensive as all upland farms are brought under one sort of cultivation or other giving the presence of rainfall. In this regard, each household supplied labour on the farmland in proportion to the strength and needs of its members. The organization of labor includes adult male and female; and elderly women. Children were not left out as they made trips delivering food and water (Olaniyan, 1972).

Varieties of crops are cultivated in the area ranging from millet, guinea-corn, maize, rice, beans, pepper, onion, tuber crops such as sweet potatoes, cocoyam, cassava and vegetables. These crops are also both for their edible fruit and for shade/fuel wood; these include mangoes, guavas, shear, butter tress, baobab and tamarind, etc. in addition to farming include cattle,

sheep, goats, camels, donkeys, horses and poultry. These animals are bred both for subsistence and commercial purposes (Chafe, 1992; Mas'ud, 2020).

Apart from agricultural activities, there exist a number of non-agricultural economic activities engaged upon by the people. The settlement of Gusau served the jihad forces of Zamfara under Sambo, as one of military supply coups. As a result, large number of blacksmiths were stationed almost everywhere in the town. Thus, Iron-smith industry complemented by weaving, tannery, dyeing, serving and leather work. In addition, the people specialized in the trade both short and long distances and they traded in different items, ranging from foodstuff to crafts related items. These were disposed of at various periodic markets abundant in the area. Some of the markets are Rawayya, Mada, Kotorkoshi, Tsafe, Gusau, Kaura Namoda among others (Lovejoy, 1980).

Socially, the people of Gusau are predominately Muslim, who observed the teaching of Islam ever since its founding. This fact is supported by all existing tradition pertaining to the origin of the town, for instance, the reputed founder of Gusau, Malam Sambo Dan Ashafa was said to be a respected scholar just like his father who was a successful scholar with roots in Chad Basin (Kanem-Borno empire). This also explains why the people lend their support as active warriors and craftsmen during the jihad of the nineteenth century. Therefore, Gusau came to have a number of Qur'anic scholars and Friday Mosques in addition to a number of daily prayers Mosque spread in all the residential areas including market places (Ibrahim, 2001).

3. GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF CRAFTS AND COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES

Local crafts industry has always been part and parcel of the trade and economy of Hausaland (Mahdi, 1979). And to show its significance, most scholars have gone to link the development of crafts occupation to the emergence and growth of commercial exchange in Hausaland (Mahdi, 1979; Johnson, 1967). Barth (1851) for example, noted during his extensive travel in Hausaland and in particular Sokoto region between 1851 and 1852 that a number of craft items were on display in most of the country side. The most important of these as he noted were spinning, weaving, dyeing, tailoring, smiting, pottery, wood working and leather working in addition to small crafts occupation engaged upon by the women.

Sources relating to the history of Gusau have shown that the settlement was used as a military armory and a staging post during the nineteenth century jihad in Hausaland (Johnson, 1967). This was as a result of the concentration of blacksmiths in the area and other related occupations which existed and served the needs of the jihadists. The industry employed family members who formed a sort of professional guild. And it is not easily accessible to persons outside the practicing family (Forde and Kabberly, 1969). The industry supplied weapons of war such as sword, knives, arrows or spear, protective shield (*garkuwa*), iron hoofs, catapults and Dane guns, etc. these items are used during war by the traditional fighting forces. There was plenty of Iron bearing rock found in Hausaland, but the quality varied appreciably. It was reported that the Iron smelted around Kano was much in fact or to that of Sokoto (Barth, 1851). In addition, the industry also provides domestic items and ornaments. These include knives, blows, spoons, locks, rings and needles, etc. Iron-hooks for fishermen and traps for hunting purposes are also provided by the smiting industry; farming implements such as hoes, plough, sickle, rake and axes, etc. are also provided (Barth, 1851).

Weaving was a widely established craft occupation in Sokoto and Zamfara areas in the nineteenth century (Mas'ud, 2021). It was also observed that when Muhammadu Bello founded Sokoto in 1909, one of the first things he did was to encourage occupational groups of all kinds to settle in different quarters of the city. He also ordered the emirs to do same for their metropolitan's districts in all the emirates (Chafe, 1992). As a result, various occupational groups were encouraged to settle in district towns and practice their trade.

These include weavers, dyers, blacksmiths, potters, tailors, farmers, leather workers and practicing medicine men-healers, etc. the weavers in Gusau at that time (19th century), produced materials of different kinds through the simple hand, hand-loom spinning process. Using locally produced cotton, they produced materials like *saki and birgima (rigan yantauri)* among others which are mostly worn by women as they also dominated the weaving industry. Male clothing was also produced and made of *gwado, wando, yarshara and babbar riga*, etc. (Ahmadu, 2000). This trade is practiced both in Gusau and neighbouring areas. The cotton is processed by removing the seed and then made into threads of various sizes for making yarn, these are spun into clothing pieces. The clothing items are used both locally and sold at the markets within and outside region. The presence of weavers was complemented by dyers whom are found in the town and neighbouring communities of Gusau. The dyeing industry exists to add colour designs to clothing fabrics. Dyers used locally obtained

indigo plants which abound around the town in addition to Karan-Dafi (cloth stalks) which are in abundant supply. The indigo is prepared in dye pits which are shallow wells-like structures where the cloths are dipped and left to be thoroughly soaked before being dried and beaten to shape (Hill, 1972).

However, the industry even though survived up to the twentieth century, it has almost lost its function by the last quarter of the century owing to forces of modernization which came with colonial era. This is also because dying industry can only exist if there is weaving industry to support it. Although in large urban centres like Sokoto, Kano, Daura, Katsina and Zazzau, the local dyeing industry still survived to service modern fabrics which are being produced (Anagbogu, 2005).

Another important indigenous craft industry in Gusau which provided a number of household items both for domestic and commercial was the pottery industry. Potters obtained clay material around Lake Gusau and this clay is processed by removing all dirty particles and it is then molded to useful needs. Produced items are then baked by firing. The industry supports a sizeable number of old, middle-aged women and children mostly females. It supplies items like earthen pots (for water storage and cooking), safe (*asusu*), earthen kitten (*shentali*), oval shaped storage pot (*tulu*), children toys, etc. Most pottery products find their ways into the Gusau market and other neighbouring markets either transported by foot or donkeys (Buchanan and Pugh, 1976).

Wood working is another indigenous craft industry which supplied societal needs since time immemorial. Wood works involves the use of locally obtained woods for various things such as pestle and mortar (*turmi da tabarya*) for grinding purposes, wooden bowls, wooden spoons (*ludayi*), wooden handles for knives, hoes and digging sticks, etc. wooden chairs, wooden box and calabash decoration, etc. This industry is still surviving though not large scale as before due to the presence of modern manufactured items (Ekudare, 1973). The wood working industry employed locally obtained materials ranging from woods to working tools made of axes of various size and knives.

The leather working industry featured among the oldest crafts occupation in Hausaland. It featured prominently in the long distance trans-Saharan trade where the hide and skins products of Hausaland arrived the countries of Europe through North African middlemen (Anagbogu, 2005). The industry was made attractive in Hausaland due to the abundance of domestic animals especially sheep, goats and cattle. The industry engaged different classes of people such as tanners who received hides and skins from butchers for processing into usable leather. The processed leathers are then utilized by skilled workers or artisans who produced items such as bags, shoes, amour shield, scabbard sword or knives sheaths, sofa, pillows and various decorative items of ornaments. These are either sold by the artisans or middlemen who purchased these items and sold them in various markets (Anagbogu, 2005). Until today, leather working has continued on a significant scale as only unprocessed hide and skins are being shipped out of the area by businessmen and expatriates. The afore mentioned crafts occupation prevailed in Gusau with most of them still existing though on a small scale, servicing indigenous needs. In pre-colonial setting, these occupations provided significant opportunity for commercial relations and exchange. To that end, they in no small way, stimulated the growth of markets as avenues for transactions (Hogben and Kirk Green, 1966).

4. DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL TRADE

The development of trade and commerce in Gusau in the nineteenth century, as in much of Hausaland, owed to the Islamic reform movement which resulted in the formation of Sokoto caliphate (Chafe, 1992; Hogben and Kirk Green, 1966). Before the jihad though, some measure of initial (local or regional) and external trade existed, they cannot be compared with the post-jihad period. This is because the reformation of the caliphate restores peace and political stability which helped economic growth. Similarly, the generation of surplus becomes more noticeable as large towns were settled or repopulated. Infact, it was reported that caliph Muhammadu Bello issued directives to all his flag bearers to keep upon the roads throughout their dominions so as to aid the flow of commercial traffic (Chafe, 1992).

The internal trade in Gusau was conducted within the Gobir, Zamfara and Sokoto areas (Hopkins, 1975). The trade involved on grain products, non-grain food items, livestock and indigenous crafts manufactured. The grains trade involves the sale of locally produced grains which are surplus to requirements. These include millets, corns, beans and tobacco, etc. which are transported on donkeys, camels or human porter age as the case may be. Mode of exchange in the nineteenth century was usually by barter or use of acceptable indigenous currency such as iron, gold coins or ostrich shell. This trade usually involved covering trackable distance that takes half a day or journey of some days stopping from one market after another (Ogunremi, 1980; Palmer, 1927).

Long distance or international trade also featured in Hausaland in the nineteenth century. This trade was conducted across the Sahara connecting North Africans and the West Africans (Johnson, 1967). Until the Portuguese had pioneered the sea-route round Africa, the Sudan had no other links with the outer world then caravan, routes which skirted the Sahara (Palmer, 1927). Johnson, (1967) further showed that some caravan trade routes that guided European explorers such as Clapper ton, Audrey, Denham, Landers and Barth to their discoveries of the interior of West Africa. He also noted that from Kano, a Web of trade route spread out in all direction and that Barth in particular, arrived Hausaland in the company of the salt caravan (*fatake*) from Bilma consisting of about three thousand camel loads of sold and nation (Umar, 2015; Mas'ud, 2021; Chafe, 1992).

The trade routes facilitated trade and exchange, gradual increase in substantial flow of goods and services increased productivity and specialization. These trade routes include: western trade routes from Gusau — Bundudu to Mafara via Sokoto then Jega. While southern trade route starts from Gusau to Magami – Kontagora then Ilorin and to southern parts of the country. The northern route from Gusau to Rawayya, Kaura then Zurmi and Katsina. The eastern trade route: Gusau to Tofa, Kotorkoshi then Tsafe and Katsina (Mas'ud, 2020). Traders exported animals such as sheep and goats and cattle to the south western parts of Nigeria and in return brought glass-ware, palm oil and kolanuts, etc. The routes contributed to the promotion of trade and prosperity in the town. The trade routes were well protected particularly within the Sokoto region. The routes are protected by the services of escorts *Yan-Rakiya* (Mas'ud, 2020).

The trade route which skirted Zamfara region and which brought traders to Gusau was the same route that carried Barth to the discovery of its market in 1853 as he trades from Kano to Sokoto (Chafe, 1992 and Nadama, 2009). At the time of Barth's visit, the main imports from Europe and North Africa were cotton, sugar, red, cloth, beads, needles, mirrors, papers, swords, blades, fine silk red turbans (robes), coarse silks, all kinds of Arab dress from North Africa, and salt were also being imported from Hausaland. Grains, cottons, skins, leather goods and slaves were exported through some import channels. Pieces of ivory and Indian dyed cloths were also exported. There is no doubt that the existence of craft occupations and agricultural combined to assist the evolution of market and commercial transactions not only in Gusau but the whole of Hausaland. This also happened in the case of Gusau because the town lays along major regional and international routes of trade which linked with outside economic forces (Hopkins, 1975).

5. CONCLUSION

The study has gone to demonstrates the significance of trade and commerce in the emergence of Gusau as a commercial town both in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It shows how regional and international trade and trade routes contributed to the emergence and growth of Gusau market and its neighbouring markets in the Hausaland. The available records also show how Gusau and its neighbouring communities played active roles in the regional and international trade of the nineteenth century and even beyond. It further shows the link between the nineteenth century jihad in Hausaland and the development of markets not only in Sokoto region but in the whole of Northern Nigeria. Although commerce and trade function in Gusau and its neighbouring communities and in the Hausaland as a whole, as this and several other studies revealed, most of them appreciate the contributions of trade and commerce to the emergence and development of the settlements in Hausaland. The people recognize the significance of trade and commercial activities in the region. Those economic activities contributed to the establishment of cordial relation or inter-group relation among the inhabitants and their neighbours in terms of socio-economic and other related activities.

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