

Public Reaction to the Lebanese Presence in Nigeria During the Colonial Period

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The actual date of the first arrival of Lebanese in West Africa is controversial. However, there are indications of Lebanese settlement in Sierra Leone in the 1880s, and there is conclusive evidence of Lebanese presence in Nigeria in 1890.¹ The Lebanese in Nigeria have completed a hundred years of settlement in the country.

Yet, although during the early 1960s the Lebanese concentration in Nigeria ranked first among the former British colonies² and their prominence in the economy was apparent, until recently a substantial study of the Lebanese in Nigeria—unlike in Sierra Leone and Ghana—remained a neglected theme.³ My research indicates the uniqueness of the Nigerian experience in the sense that, although public indignation over Lebanese activities in British West African territories emanated from similar causes, the Lebanese in Nigeria were spared physical violence against the community, which they experienced in Sierra Leone and Ghana during the anti-Lebanese riots.

¹ Interview Nasim Younis, Ibadan, 1977 (Mr Younis told me that Elyas Khuri was his real uncle and that he told him about his arrival in Lagos in 1890 from Sierra Leone). Also see R. Bayley Winder, 'The Lebanese in West Africa', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 4 (1962), p. 300.

² Beirut: Lebanese Foreign Ministry's figure on the Lebanese living in Africa, *West Africa*, 7 April 1962, p. 375.

³ Devendra M. Misra, 'The Lebanese in Nigeria 1890-1960', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Calabar (Nigeria), 1985.

This should not lead us to think that the Nigerians were not aware of devious Lebanese economic activities. Like their counterparts in other British West African possessions, the Nigerian critics of the Lebanese viewed them as mere exploiters who drained the country they traded in of its wealth. Chief S. L. Akintola, a Nigerian politician, can be taken as fairly representing African feelings over Lebanese activities in British West Africa. He branded the Lebanese as a 'grabbing and acquisitive' people who had a stranglehold over the Nigerian economy, and whose economic activities were detrimental to the interests of the Nigerian traders, in particular, and to the country at large.⁴ Interestingly, some Nigerian politicians, holding ministerial positions in the federal government, felt that Akintola's accusations were baseless. One federal minister, Kola Balogun, even went to the extent of suggesting that certain business traits of the Lebanese were worthy of emulation by their African counterparts.⁵

Among African scholars opinion on the Lebanese presence remains divided. While one Sierra Leonean historian, A. J. G. Wyse, totally agrees with Chief S. L. Akintola's assessment of the Lebanese,⁶ a Nigerian economic historian, R. O. Ekundare, concedes that although the direct contribution of the Lebanese to the economic growth of Nigeria was not as great as some writers think, they did make some impact on Nigerian trade.⁷ Non-African scholars have also differed in their assessments of Lebanese presence in West Africa. Peter Bauer stands out as the chief spokesman of a school of thought. In his opinion:

Levantines in West Africa represent types of immigrants who have an important part to perform in the economic development of many underdeveloped countries... In West Africa, as in many other parts of the world, the immigrants who could contribute most to economic development are regarded with the greatest suspicion by influential sections of the administration, their admission particularly resisted, and their activities restricted under pressure from local sectional interests and from already established expatriate commercial interests.⁸

⁴ *Debates*, Federation of Nigeria House of Representatives, 'Activities of aliens in Nigeria', 5 April 1955, p. 922.

⁵ *Debates*, Federation of Nigeria House of Representatives, 'Retail trade restriction', 23 August 1955, p. 246.

⁶ Interview Akintola A. J. G. Wyse, Calabar, 1985.

⁷ R. O. Ekundare, *An Economic History of Nigeria 1860-1960* (London, 1973), p. 218.

⁸ Peter Bauer quoted in Winder, op. cit. p. 331.

This paper concentrates mainly on the public reaction to the Lebanese economic activities during the debates in the Nigerian House of Representatives in 1955. However, it is desirable to provide a brief background.

The first documentary evidence of Nigerian public reaction against the Lebanese economic activities dates back to 1938. In that year the district officer in Ife (Western Region) reported to his superiors the grave concern of the *Oni* (traditional ruler of Ife) and the Council over Lebanese intrusion of the Ife market and their wish to prohibit Lebanese trading altogether in that area.⁹ The long correspondence between the *Oni* and the Council and the British administration shows that officialdom was hesitant to permit prohibition of the Lebanese from trading in Ife on legal grounds and believed that the Lebanese were a hard-working and law-abiding people from whom African traders had much to learn.¹⁰ British officialdom apparently maintained a favourable attitude towards the Lebanese, even though it denied the indigenous people the right to decide who should trade in their areas.

The next incident involved the Lebanese in a trade dispute with their African workers in Calabar (Eastern Region) in 1948. In that year workers of the Lebanese in Calabar wrote to the Commissioner of Labour, Lagos, that the Lebanese were in the habit of contracting cheap labour and that their conditions of service were exploitative.¹¹ After an official inquiry proved these charges, the Lebanese community in Calabar was forced to introduce revised salary scales and conditions of service.¹² The Northern Region also witnessed growing tensions between the Lebanese and the Africans. This was quickly recognized by the Resident in Kano who initiated the formation of the Lebanese Friendship Committee, whose membership included prominent Lebanese and Nigerians in the Kano district.¹³ A close look at the minutes of one of the meetings of this committee clearly shows the discontent of local people over the social attitude of the Lebanese and their economic exploitation in the Kano area.¹⁴

The growing discontentment against the Lebanese economic activities manifested itself, for the first time, at provincial legislative level in 1955. During the course of a debate in the Assembly, some members bitterly

⁹ NAI Oyoprof 2/3/C56 'Syrians in Ife Division'. Also see Misra, op. cit., pp. 273-81.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ NAI Calprof. 7/1/1900, 'Syrian and Lebanese Workers' Union', Calabar chapter, to the Commissioner of Labour, Lagos, May 1948. Also see Misra, op. cit., pp. 228-34 for details.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ NAK Kanoprof. 319/51, 'Lebanese Friendly Committee'. Also see Misra, op. cit., pp. 281-7.

¹⁴ Ibid.

complained about Lebanese exploitation. They also charged that the European companies favoured the Lebanese at the cost of indigenous traders.¹⁵

In 1955 the Lebanese *en masse* were subjected to their worst ever criticism at the highest Nigerian legislative body. On 5 April 1955, Chief S. L. Akintola, the leader of the opposition in the Nigerian House of Representatives, moved a motion requesting the government to set up a commission of inquiry to look into the activities of the aliens in Nigeria, with particular reference to their dealing and interests in real estate; their share in the wholesale, retail, import and export trades; their part in the transport business; their interests in the mining industry; and the extent to which these activities had been beneficial or prejudicial to the best interests of the indigenous Nigerians.¹⁶ Akintola defined the term 'alien' in his motion as referring strictly to the 'sleek Syrians and grabbing Lebanese'. He revealed that certain streets in Lagos, such as Balogun and Victoria, were virtually dominated, controlled and owned by Lebanese and Syrians. He made specific reference to an unnamed Syrian, who was reported to have acquired a land on lease a few years ago at the rate of 13 shillings a month, and that he was collecting in 1955 not less than £54 a month from the same property. He accused the Lebanese and Syrians of having played all sorts of tricks to acquire property in Nigeria. It was stated that some kind of Lebanese invasion with regard to real estate could be witnessed in other Nigerian cities such as Kano and Ibadan. Akintola charged that the government had acquired a substantial portion of Lagos for public purposes and what was left was being taken over by the Syrians.¹⁷

Referring to Lebanese and Syrian participation in the country's trade, Chief Akintola stated that they had practically elbowed out the Nigerians from retail trade and their presence was injurious to local traders. He commented that the bulk of the profits from produce trade was pocketed by the Lebanese and Syrians, and that they played the role of money lenders to extract exorbitant profits from indigenous borrowers, particularly the farmers, who had to surrender most of their produce to their Lebanese and Syrian lenders in return for the money lent. Akintola observed that the Lebanese and Syrians had practically monopolized the transport business in the Northern

¹⁵ *Debates*, Northern Region House of Assembly, Fourth Session, 7 March 1955, p. 26. Also see Misra, *op. cit.*, pp. 288-90.

¹⁶ *Debates*, Federation of Nigeria House of Representatives, 5 April 1955, pp. 921-5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Region and that nine out of the ten lorries leaving Jos belonged to them. He added that a similar situation existed in the Western and Eastern Regions.¹⁸

Lebanese involvement in the mining industry was also attacked by Akintola. He lamented that no aspect of business life in Nigeria was untouched by them.¹⁹ He suggested that Lebanese and Syrians were even considered to be involved in smuggling, and international and inter-regional brigandage. He revealed that a certain Lebanese or Syrian was apprehended and convicted in connection with some currency or mining offence in the country and there were many rich Syrians and Lebanese involved in such dealings.²⁰ Akintola stated that an African employed by a Lebanese or Syrian was underpaid and had no job security.²¹ He also expressed his grave concern over the rise in the numbers of the Lebanese and Syrians between 1931 and 1952 and blamed the government's immigration policy for it.²² He said that their numbers had risen from 339 in 1931 to about 1,850 in 1952 and that if, as claimed by the government, no new immigrants had been allowed during the period, the Lebanese and Syrians were breeding at a fabulous rate. He blamed the immigration policy of the government both for the influx of Lebanese and Syrians and their latitude in respect of their economic activities. He warned that Nigeria was in danger because it was economically being encircled by the Lebanese and Syrian communities.²³

In another contribution to the debate, Ayo Rosiji stated that although the members in the House had nothing personally against the Syrians or Lebanese, the fact was that they were unscrupulous people and that if nothing was done then within 10 to 15 years all Nigerians would find themselves at the mercy of these people. Rosiji observed that he had studied these people very closely and that in his capacity as a lawyer, had had occasion to defend them in all sorts of issues.²⁴

In reply to the charges made by Akintola and others, the Chief Secretary of the Federation (J. F. A. Grey), started first by moving an amendment to the original motion, which proposed the endorsement of the existing government immigration policy by the House.²⁵ The Chief Secretary, attacking Akintola's definition of the term 'alien' in his original motion, contended that the

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 926.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 923.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 924-5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 922.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 927.

government was not prepared to support discriminatory legislation against the people of any other country merely because they were the citizens of that country.²⁶

The Chief Secretary then proceeded to refute some of the charges made by Akintola. Referring to alien holdings in real estate in Lagos, he stated that the total area of Lagos municipality was 17,240 acres and that all alien interests in land totalled only 138.5 acres. It was made clear that this did not include the government's share.²⁷ Commenting on alien participation in Nigerian trade, he observed that in 1954 alien companies altogether shipped 14.4 per cent of the export produce, which showed an increase of 2.4 per cent over the past five years. He pointed out that during the same period shipments by the Nigerians increased from 3.6 per cent to 7.3 per cent. Thus the above figures did not suggest alien domination over Nigerian export produce trade. So far as imports were concerned, the Chief Secretary conceded that he had no actual figures; nevertheless, he was sure that they would reveal almost the same trend as exports. Referring to the mining industry, the Chief Secretary informed the House that the total alien share (which included that of the Lebanese and Syrians) in tin and columbite shipped in 1954 stood at 2.4 and 2.89 per cent respectively. On the issue of charges made in the field of transport business, it was stated that the Lebanese and Syrians did not have any stranglehold on that business in Western and Eastern Nigeria. With regard to the Northern Region, the Chief Secretary argued that the region was in desperate need of more transport and in view of that it was not good to clamp down on alien-owned transport if there was nothing to replace it. He commented that it was better to have Syrian lorries than to go on foot.²⁸

Referring to Akintola's accusations against the immigration policy, the Chief Secretary, who controlled the Immigration Department, contended that the new immigration policy of 1952, while seeking to exclude persons whose intention was to participate in a trade or profession which was or could be adequately catered for by Nigerians, welcomed the entry into Nigeria of persons whose presence brought socio-economic benefits to the country.²⁹ He stated that the figures given by Akintola, with respect to the Lebanese and Syrians, referred to the period before the new immigration policy was introduced in 1952. According to the Chief Secretary, there were only 1,795 Lebanese and Syrians in Nigeria in 1952, and this figure included men,

²⁶ Ibid., p. 928.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 929.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 928.

women and children. He pointed out that between 1952 and 1955 the number had increased only by thirty and that this also included men, women and children, and that in view of these figures the particular community was not multiplying fast.³⁰

The Chief Secretary further observed that the government's immigration policy was designed without discrimination to protect Nigerians and that if there were instances and adequate evidence that it had been violated, then such people would be dealt with properly by the authorities. He remarked that the setting up of a commission of inquiry to look into the activities of a particular group of people would be an act of discrimination against aliens and would produce nothing that would be of value to the country.³¹

The amendment proposed by the Chief Secretary was seconded by Chief F. S. Okotie Eboh, the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare.³² Next, a member from Kano, M. Bello Dandogo, endorsed the statement given by the Chief Secretary and submitted that before blaming anybody one must see that some wrong had been done and that there was no sense in condemning people simply because they were not Nigerian.³³ Dandogo supported the amendment. The Chief Secretary's amendment was also supported by T. O. Benson, a member from Lagos West, who described the original motion moved by Akintola as misconceived, speculative, unwarranted and unrealistic.³⁴

But another member, T. T. Solaru, from Ijebu West, while recognizing the capabilities of the Chief Secretary, was not happy with the way he had watered down the original motion. Solaru disclosed that he had enjoyed the friendship of some Lebanese and Syrians and that he had had an opportunity to visit their countries of origin. Solaru remarked that, although the country was barren, all over it there were beautiful mansions and buildings built with the money brought in by its nationals working abroad. He conveyed his unhappiness over Lebanese enrichment at the expense of others. He strongly felt that Lebanese economic activities should be restricted to the wholesale trade, not infringing retail trading, which most of them were involved in.³⁵ After a lengthy debate, notwithstanding the appeals made by Akintola to reconsider his original motion, the House adopted the amended motion proposed by the Chief Secretary. It is significant that the Lebanese question continued to haunt the minds of Nigerian nationalists and in August 1955 once again Lebanese

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid. p. 930.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., pp. 930-1.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 932.

economic activities became the focus of criticism in the House of Representatives.

On 23 August 1955, during the debates in the House of Representatives, F. Mbakogu, a member of the ruling party, proposed a motion to look into foreign interests and introduce some retail trade restrictions to protect Nigerian small traders. He referred to Lebanese and Syrian involvement in corn, garri and rice trading and described the whole situation as appalling. He blamed immigration policy for not protecting the interests of indigenous small traders. Mbakogu accused the Lebanese and Syrian traders of unfair business methods and charged that the European companies granted them generous credit facilities which they denied to Nigerian traders.³⁶

Mbakogu's motion was seconded by C. O. Komolafe, who stated that the big companies—through the establishment of a chain of retail stores throughout the country, and by granting generous credit facilities to the Lebanese and Syrians while refusing the same to Nigerian traders—had driven indigenous traders out of business. He pointed out that lack of capital was one of the important causes leading to the decline of local traders, because without adequate finances they were unable to withstand the foreign price competition. Komolafe proposed that the government should specify the commodities that were to be sold by the expatriates and the Nigerians respectively.³⁷

The original motion, however, was amended by R. A. Njoku, the Federal Minister for Trade and Industry, who proposed that:

This house endorses the immigration policy of the government regarding the entry of non-Nigerians not of African descent for purposes of trade, and calls on the government to be vigilant in protecting the interests of Nigerians in its implementation of this policy, and to be particularly vigilant in protecting the interests of Nigerian small traders.³⁸

Commenting on the existing immigration policy, Njoku observed that the intending immigrants were required to state the purpose for which they wished to enter the country, and permission to enter was conditional on their not changing the nature of activities without the agreement of the Nigerian government. If they did so, they were treated as prohibited immigrants and deported. He further stated that the immigrants who wished to enter Nigeria

³⁶ *Debates*, Federation of Nigeria House of Representatives, 23 August 1955, p. 231.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 233–4.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

to participate in a trade or profession which was adequately served by Nigerians were not permitted to do so. This restriction applied particularly to immigrants wishing to participate in most branches of retail trade.³⁹ The minister, however, admitted that there was an exception in this regard, which was normally made only where a company—presumably the minister had in mind one owned by a migrant—intended to set up branches in areas where there was at that time an inadequate system for the distribution of consumer goods. In addition, the companies—presumably migrant-owned—already engaged in the retail trade were permitted only to maintain the existing number of their foreign staff and not increase it.⁴⁰

The Minister for Trade and Industry defined small Nigerian traders as petty traders, market women, itinerant vendors and the small indigenous wholesale and retail traders. He stressed that there was no invasion of the interests of this category of traders by the foreigners. He added that no complaints whatsoever had been received from this class of people and there was no cause for alarm in this respect. On the other hand, Njoku submitted that there was an improvement in the status of indigenous traders and their trading interests day by day and that more and more of the country's trade was getting into the hands of Nigerian traders.⁴¹

Chief S. L. Akintola disagreed with the views expressed by the Minister of Trade and Industry. He argued that the Lebanese and Syrians engaged in selling pepper, groundnut, garri and corn in the Northern Region and yet the minister claimed that everything was all right.⁴² He observed that often a Lebanese or Syrian allowed to enter the country to do one kind of business ended up doing something else, which was contrary to immigration regulations, and yet nothing was done to prevent him from doing so. Referring to the minister's statement that he had received no complaints from Nigerian small traders regarding their plight in retail trading, Akintola stated that they were not articulate enough to do so.⁴³ He contended that the members in the House were after all their representatives and were expressing their views about the seriousness of the whole situation. It was pointed out that the Syrians and Lebanese came to Nigeria penniless. However, they often succeeded in getting rich due to the assistance of big businesses and banks in the country. Akintola queried if the same kind of assistance was being extended to indigenous traders. He felt that the principle of Nigerianization

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 238–9.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

should animate the country's trade policy. He suggested that the government should adopt the principle that all business activities, especially in retail trade, that could be done effectively by Africans, should not be left to the 'whims and caprices of the Syrians and Lebanese'. He observed that Nigerian traders were victims of unequal trade competition with the foreigners. Akintola argued for the withdrawal of the amendment and appealed to the House to forget party politics and support the original motion moved by the member of the ruling party, because it reflected the feelings of the House.⁴⁴

The Chief Secretary of the government, R. F. A. Grey, replying to the criticism of the immigration policy by the leader of the opposition, stated that similar views were expressed by him during the meeting of the House in the last session (April 1955), and that the existing policy on immigration was overwhelmingly approved by the House.⁴⁵ He made it clear that the government had no intention of changing its immigration policy and that it had the support of the House. Grey, however, conceded that the House did not seem to support the way the immigration policy was carried out. He undertook to carry out the immigration policy as approved by the House and promised to listen carefully to any genuine reports that were made of instances where the Immigration Department had failed in its duty. He further stated that the government would do all that it could do to remedy any failure of which it might have been guilty.⁴⁶ On the issue of financial assistance to indigenous traders by the banking organizations, Grey rather bluntly stated that no bank, not even the state bank, would be able to continue for long if it lent to people who were not credit-worthy.⁴⁷

A member from Kano, K. Maitama Sule, claimed that he was the most competent person to speak on the issue of exploitation of the Syrian and Lebanese traders.⁴⁸ He remarked that the activities of the Lebanese community had adversely affected the poor African traders, who must under all circumstances be protected by the government. Sule charged that the attitude of the Lebanese and Syrians towards the local people was such that the members in the House were compelled to speak their minds. He alleged that the Lebanese and Syrians, instead of helping the poor peasants and traders, relegated them to the background, denying them the chance to participate in their country's trade. He argued that most of the smuggling carried on over the borders of the French territories was done by the Lebanese and Syrians.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 240.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 242.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 243.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 244.

He cautioned the government to take the necessary steps to put an end to it.⁴⁹ Surprisingly, after having levelled the above charges, Sule supported the amendment.

The debate seems to have attracted the attention of members from all parts of the federation. A member from Mamfe (British Cameroons), P. E. Aiyuk posited that although such a trade menace did not exist in the Cameroons, since both Nigeria and the Cameroons were federated, the over-all interests should be borne in mind. He expressed his doubts about the proper implementation of the immigration policy. Aiyuk supported the original motion and appealed to the government to protect the interests of indigenous traders.⁵⁰

In another contribution, D. N. Chukwu, a member from the Eastern Region, who incidentally also happened to be a businessman, while supporting the amendment, made some important observations. He stated that foreign firms had monopolized both wholesale and retail trade in Nigeria. Chukwu disclosed that the foreign firms themselves retailed such items making up to 90 per cent more profit than they would have got by wholesaling these commodities to local petty traders.⁵¹

During the debate, another federal minister, Kola Balogun, adopted a peculiar attitude to the whole problem. He remarked that if there were people who had any grievances against the Syrians, they might as well go outside the House to settle it, and that the House should not be used as an instrument to fight against any foreigner in the country. He stated that the Syrians had been charged for having called their brothers from Lebanon. They helped them to become established by giving them financial assistance, and within a short time the newcomers were flourishing. The minister wanted to know why the Africans did not do likewise. Why was it that the average African was not ready to do business with the other African and why did he not give a helping hand to his brother? Balogun pointed out that people like him were not going to be used as a rubber stamp by anybody in the fight against the Lebanese.⁵²

In a further contribution, T. O. S. Benson, a member from Lagos West stated that although he had some Lebanese friends, national interests were paramount to individual relationships. Referring to the dealings in retail trade he suggested that firms such as UAC (United Africa Company) should stop selling things like pepper, okra and garri. Next he proposed that Lebanese or

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 244-5.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 245.

⁵² Ibid., p. 246.

Syrian traders should be stopped from retail trading and that they should also stop collecting rent from the poor women staying outside their shops. He said that some such petty traders paid up to £10 rent to the Lebanese or Syrian trader to sell things supplied to them from the shop outside their premises. Benson concluded his speech by supporting the amendment.⁵³

This debate finally ended with the approval of the amendment by the House.⁵⁴

An impartial study of the debates in the Nigerian House of Representatives over the Lebanese issue raises the following points:

- 1 It exposed the lack of experience among Nigerian legislators in parliamentary procedures, particularly their inability to introduce properly worded motions on important issues related to national importance. The case in point being Chief S. L. Akintola's deviously applied motion asking for an official inquiry into the activities of the aliens in Nigeria and his subsequent narrowing down of the term 'aliens' to refer strictly to the Lebanese and Syrians.
- 2 Although there is evidence of Lebanese invasion of the local market in Ife, of their exploitation of Nigerian employees in Calabar and of their involvement in devious business practices in the Kano area, the legislators in making reference to such Lebanese activities failed to substantiate the charges.
- 3 During the debate, Chief Akintola presented a pathetic picture of the Lebanese elbowing out Nigerian retailers and charged that the bulk of retail trading in Nigeria was being done by the Syrians and Lebanese.⁵⁵ However, existing evidence indicates that the volume of displacement of Nigerian traders, as painted by Akintola and other critics, was far from the reality. It is reported that according to the census figures in 1953 there were no less than 1.4 million Nigerian women engaged in petty trading all over the country,⁵⁶ whereas the total number of Lebanese and Syrians, including children, in the same year was 1,895.⁵⁷ Although it is true that the Lebanese were partly responsible for the displacement of some indigenous traders, it should be borne in mind that there were other factors equally responsible for their displacement: for example the activities of European combines; the lack of capital and business acumen among the local traders; and to a greater degree

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 246-7.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 248.

⁵⁵ *Debates*, 5 April 1955, p. 922.

⁵⁶ H. W. Ord and I. Livingstone, *An Introduction to West African Economies* (London, 1969), p. 146.

⁵⁷ Marwan I. Hanna, *West Africa*, 3 May, 1958, p. 415.

the lack of credit worthiness among Nigerian traders.⁵⁸ Thus the blame for the elimination of indigenous traders does not solely rest with the Lebanese.

4 A close analysis of the debates reflects the division among the members in the House, which seems to have been based on tribal, regional as well as political differences. This division may also be partly attributed to the well-known British colonial policy of 'divide and rule', which was effectively practised in the British colonies throughout the world.

5 It appears that shrewd British administrators in Nigeria, like J. F. A. Grey, taking advantage of the weaknesses of Nigerian politicians, overtly camouflaged the Lebanese issue under the guise of British 'fair play and justice' to protect expatriate business interests in general and British commercial interests in particular. Some Nigerian legislators, while condemning Lebanese and Syrian commercial activities, did express their dissatisfaction over the near monopoly of Nigerian trade by big foreign combines and the resultant plight of Nigerian traders.

On the eve of Nigerian independence, the Lebanese in Nigeria, particularly those in Kano, were alleged to have been forcibly involved in local politics. The Lebanese community in Kano was reported by the news media to have founded an 'oriental wing' of the NPC (Northern Peoples Congress—a leading party in the Northern Region), and it was alleged that they were forced to contribute money to NPC funds. However, the Lebanese in Kano denied the charge. It is worth pointing out that, although none of my Lebanese informants provided any information on this subject, in view of the relationship of the Lebanese with the Emir of Kano and other prominent northerners, it would seem likely that some discreet Lebanese contributions to the NPC were discovered and exploited by the Action Group (the leading party of the Western Region), and there is a likelihood that the Action Group became resentful because it had not received something similar from the Lebanese.⁵⁹

Although the Nigerians, like their counterparts in other British West African colonies, accused the Lebanese of arrogance, exploitation and unfair business practices, the public reaction did not lead to acts of physical violence against the Lebanese for the following reasons.

- 1 As evidenced from the deliberations of the Lebanese Friendly Committee in Kano, the Lebanese were quick to respond positively to the suggestions made to them to help defuse the mounting tensions.

⁵⁸ Misra, op. cit., pp. 135-7.

⁵⁹ Winder, op. cit., pp. 326-9.

2 The Lebanese in Nigeria were wise enough to enlist the support of some prominent local figures such as the Emir of Kano. Additionally, they also seem to have befriended some leading Nigerian politicians, who looked after Lebanese interests at the highest legislative body in the country, and whose collaboration with the Lebanese might have been based on some vested economic interests.

3 The Lebanese appear to have been merely a link in the long chain of exploitation of the Nigerian economy.⁶⁰ As such any official charges brought against Lebanese traders would automatically have involved other firms (particularly the European combines). Consequently, the colonial government in Nigeria, being aware of these implications, would not want to institute an official inquiry into the economic activities of the Lebanese. The administration, therefore, successfully defused the Lebanese issue through various means at its disposal, to avoid the recurrence of public indignation which took the form of riots against the expatriates in the Gold Coast in 1948 (both Lebanese and European shopkeepers were victims of public wrath) and the riots in Sierra Leone in 1954.

4 Perhaps most importantly, in the light of the existing evidence of Lebanese devious business practices in all the three regions in the country, credit must be given to the patience of the Nigerians in general, and people, like the *Omi* of Ife, in particular without which the story of Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast riots would have been repeated, perhaps in a worse form, in Nigeria.

⁶⁰ Misra, *op. cit.*, pp. 221–8 (see for a detailed study of allegations of profiteering against European firms).

Lebanese Emigration: its Effect on the Political Economy of Sierra Leone

NEIL O. LEIGHTON

The ferocity of the Lebanese Civil War has had an impact as far away as the West Coast of Africa, reinvigorating the influx of Lebanese citizens into the nations composing the region. Particularly in the decade of the 1980s the Lebanese émigré populations have grown considerably. In Sierra Leone the population has increased tenfold from the late 1960s to reach over 30,000, while in Ivory Coast it has grown from 25,000 to more than 100,000. There is some indication that the same growth is occurring in Liberia and Nigeria as well. And in most of these countries there is growing resentment among local African populations of the increased dominance of the local economies by the Lebanese. Reaction has run the gamut from letters to editors in local newspapers accusing the Lebanese of hoarding food and forcing up food prices, to looting of Lebanese shops and homes.¹

Yet reaction to the increased pressure of the Lebanese is only one side of the coin. The other is the official condoning of their presence and 'facilitating' their immigration. For despite their numbers they are a racial minority, visible as well as vulnerable. In 1984 the then president of Sierra Leone, Siaka Stevens, in an interview echoed the sentiments of his predecessors stretching back to colonial officials as early as the Anti Syrian (Lebanese) Riots of 1919. Stevens argued that he was aware of the growing resentment toward the Lebanese but felt it was unjustified.

¹ 'Lebanese in Africa: tale of success (and anxiety)', *The New York Times* (9 July 1984), p.A2.

THE LEBANESE IN THE WORLD:
A Century of Emigration

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The Centre for Lebanese Studies
in association with
I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd
Publishers
London

JV
8749
.L4
L420
1992

Published by
The Centre for Lebanese Studies
in association with
I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd
45 Bloomsbury Square
London WC1A 2HY

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 1-85043-303 8

Printed and Bound in Great Britain

The Centre for Lebanese Studies would like to thank
Mr Joseph Abdo el-Khoury and Mr Wehbe Abdallah Tamari
for their generous donation which made
possible the printing of this book