

Animal Transport in the Early Indigenous Market Economy of Northern Nigeria

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Abstract: *Man is a social evolving being who has over the years, tried to understand and even tame his environment so as to make the best out of it. The natural environment was and has never been homogenous in its content and therefore did not provide all that man needed. This therefore forced him to undertake some form of exchange of goods and services. Such an exercise warranted the creation of markets where people could meet at least once or twice every week and exchange what they had, with what they did not. In the light of this effort, it became a necessity for man to move from one market to another since different communities set different days for this meeting. Transportation to the markets on foot and with goods on the head certainly became worrisome and uncomfortable to man. This forced him to look for alternative ways of movement. This paper, therefore, examines some of the animals man used as alternative mode of transportation during the early periods in some parts of northern Nigeria. Oral evidence, personal observations and some documents were vital data in carrying out this study.*

The study reveals that, after a careful examination of the animals which he domesticated the preferable ones man chose were the horse, donkey, camel and to an extent, oxen. It concludes by observing that despite the increase in the importation of western cars with its advantages over animals and the drastic decrease in the use of animals for transportation, animal transport is still very relevant in the market economy of this region, especially where there are only foot paths and also where most motorable roads remain seasonal.

Keywords: *Animal, Transport, Camel, Horse, Donkey and Nigeria*

1. INTRODUCTION

Transport according to Hornby (2000:1275) is conveying, or being conveyed or a means of conveyance from one place to another. It is the movement or displacement of persons, goods and other movable possessions in time and space for a particular purpose. In human societies, this is not chaotically done because recognised paths marked out by individuals or the societies are usually followed (Sube 1982: 265). This could be by water, land or air. It is possible that since man from origin is a mobile being, the word transport must have entered his vocabulary as early as when he developed the act of speech. This paper, therefore, examines some of the animals man used as mode of transportation during the early periods in some parts of northern Nigeria. Oral evidence, personal observations and some documents were vital data in carrying out this study

Man's first means of movement as a hunter-gatherer were his legs, and this apparently limited his area of influence as he then operated a society, which could be termed "closed". But when he started a settled life with the domestication of animals and plants, he realized that his immediate milieu could not satisfy all his multiple desires and worries. He had to seek for answers to some of his problems or needs in other areas probably different from his. Most importantly, there was also the need for the exchange of goods and services with neighbours since different environments produced different crops and services. As time went by, and with the necessity to exchange what he did not have with what he had, he was forced to produce surpluses. This led to the introduction of a market economy which provided the opportunity for people to meet and exchange or trade their goods and services in one way or the other. In most of the societies it was first done through

the barter system where goods were exchanged for goods. It was later that different media of exchange such as cowries, were introduced.

Some communities decided on a day when their members could meet and exchange their goods. To ensure that the place became a permanent meeting place for traders of the village, indigenous leaders made sacrifices of animals like the dog, which was believed could bark off evil spirits and also planted an “umbrella” tree on the spot. The pace at which this tree grew determined the effectiveness and survival of the market (Nuhu Samu 12 April 2010 Personal Communication). If the tree died, it was believed that a wrong place was chosen by the elders for the market and the ancestors were not happy. This practice is still common amongst most communities in the area today (Kiloh 20 March 2010, Personal Communication).

If on the other hand the tree grew very well and the villagers started meeting at the chosen spot, this with time, attracted the attention of and visits from their neighbours who had goods and services to sell and also needed the goods and services provided by that community. Most indigenous societies had an eight-day calendar week. The day chosen as the market-day was in most cases, a day of great significance in the indigenous calendar of the people. Such days were referred to as *countri* Sunday (local public holiday) because it was a day of no farm work either because in their history of migration, they rested on that day or some great event happened (Haruna David 20 March 2010 Personal Communication).

There were instances where more than two communities agreed on a day, and a neutral place where they could meet and exchange their goods and services. The neutral places became settled by a multi-ethnic population made up of mostly traders from far and near who by doing so, overcame the problem of distance. A good example is the market at Nguroje a Mambilla village in the Mambilla Plateau which used to hold once every eight day week and served a number of villages in the area, before the jihadists came and imposed Friday, a day of worship for the Muslims who now dominate the area, (Nuhu Samu 12 April 2010 Personal Communication). This actually marked the beginning of a more organised market economy in this part of the world.

In spite of this, some of the markets were located in far off places for some of the communities who had to travel long distances to such places to sell their goods. It obviously became tedious and time consuming for man to move on foot to such distant market places with his goods. He was therefore forced to pick some of his domesticated animals to comfortably convey him and his goods to the market. The choice of animals was surely not easy, but one believes this was done after a careful visual physiognomic and anatomic study of the animals he domesticated.

The use of animals for transport certainly had been in existence elsewhere because, archaeological evidence points to the fact that during the full Neolithic period, man used the *Boef-poteur*, a large animal, in the Sahara for transport. (Andah 1992:105, Connah 2004:107-108). The desiccation of the Sahara, which reached its apex around 3000 B.C., is said to have forced people who already knew the art of food production southwards looking for greener pastures. According to Shaw (1979:686) it was probably during this time (the late Neolithic and Early Prehistoric periods) that the immigrants into West Africa abandoned the use of legs and large animals such as *Boef-poteur* for the horse, donkey, and camel. Some scholars believe that these man's major beasts of burden were introduced into Africa from Asia through Egypt in the 7th Century B.C. Since Northern Nigeria lies close to the Southern limits of the desert, it is believed their introduction and use for transport were not much later as some of the immigrants moved to occupy the area around Lake Chad (Mega-Chad). (Ajayi et al 1979:6)

Generally, northern Nigeria experiences two drastic climatic seasons – wet and dry. The wet season reduces in length as you move further north, while the reverse is true for the dry season. The vegetation is generally grassland. The further north one moves, the shorter the grass becomes. The shorter grass is common with the Sudan and Sahel Savannah where, there is lower rainfall. Geomorphologically, the area is characterized by sloping and elevated features such as the Adamawa Highlands and valleys occupied by major streams of cultural and economic interests to the populations concerned.

Above all, the relative absence of the tsetse fly in the Sudan and Sahel Savannas (compared to the Guinea Savannah) as well as the presence of good pasture, has over the years made it possible for the rearing of larger livestock like goats, sheep, cattle, donkeys, horses and camel, some of which

were used for transportation in one way or the other (Onokala 1999: 161). The next part of this study examines what was chosen for transportation and why.

2. HORSE

The horse has four hoofed legs, which enables it to crisscross rough surfaces without serious difficulties. It has a flowing mane and tail, and in most cases, it is reared together with cattle, the reason why most of its owners are pastoralists. Ardo Goni (10 January 2009. Personal Communication), a local Fulani Chief in Maisamarri, Southern Taraba State of Nigeria, maintains that the horse has a very stable structure, which makes it convenient for human transport and not necessarily the transportation of goods. Where it was used for the transportation of goods it had to be accompanied by a chariot as depicted by the Rock Arts of the Sahara (Andah 1992:108). We do not have evidence of that in the early societies of Northern Nigeria.

Apart from that, the horse is also very agile and could be swerved with ease even on very high speed enabling the rider to reach its destination as fast as possible. It can accelerate very well if on form and also ascend and descend hills with a terrific speed, although it gets frazzled or tired faster than the camel.

Horses have very good visibility. Regardless of the intensity of darkness, the rider does not need any artificial light to make it move. The horse uses its natural instincts to detect with ease any obstacle in front. For example, Alhaji Garba, a Fulani pastoralist on the outskirts of Maiduguri town, maintains that if there is a snake in front of the road, and the rider does not know, the horse will not proceed even if whipped. It will only carry its forelegs up and make noise. If forced to move, it can throw off the rider and become barmy. Owners therefore stayed late in the markets and came back by night with no problems. The energy reserve of the horse depended principally on the amount of nutritious grass, water, potash and salt it took as well as how healthy it was (Garba 11 September 2009 Personal Communication).

As a result of these qualities, Garba further maintains that most nomadic pastoralists who also domesticated horses depended on it for transportation to the nearby local markets where they sold their cattle and got some money to buy goods which they did not have. Pastoralists stayed in isolated homesteads on the open outskirts of villages where the markets were found. We should also understand that riding a horse was and is still a male affair in this society. The women trekked to town or the market carrying milk, cheese and butter in calabash bowls on their heads. These were either sold to the local farming population or exchanged for corn which they pounded into powder to prepare *fufu* corn, a staple dish in this part of the country.

The Saharan Rock Arts depict paintings of horse-drawn chariots along two routes through the Sahara to the bend of Niger and their use in transporting goods destined for sale in markets in this part of the world dating to about 2000 years ago (Andah 1992:108). This puts to question the well-acclaimed view that it was the camel that first permeated the Sahara desert (Fisher 1972, Shaw 1979:706). In the early years, most western and central Sudanic kingdoms depended on horse cavalry for trade with their neighbours like Nigeria and to crush their enemies in times of wars (Connah 1998:149-150 and 2004: 187 and Levtzion 1979:114). Horses unlike the camels were and are still not good for arid regions where water and nutritious grass are scarce.

3. CAMEL

The camel, which is believed to have preceded the horse in this region was and is still used for long distance movements (Shaw 1979 706:7). The camel, a long necked animal, with either one or two humps, also has four solid hoofed legs longer than those of the horse. According to Alhaji Gambo Dada (3 September 2009 Personal Communication), a camel transporter in Moundgounu, Borno state, it can withstand arid and abnormal (hot) conditions more than the other animals. It can also eat thorny plant leaves, carry more than 300kg of goods and cover 20 to 25 km a day for extended periods. Camels with one hump move faster than those with two humps.

In addition, it can go without water for 10 days and can drink up to 180 litres of water when it becomes available in 24 hours. This explains why it was and is still good for transporting humans and goods in the Sahel and dry zones of northern Nigeria. With its introduction at the beginning of the Christian era, the volume of Transaharan trade is said to have increased as the Berbers on the northern fringes of the deserts could now easily penetrate the desert into West Africa more

than what they did with the horses before (Connah 1998:148). However, it cannot survive under humid conditions like the donkey and horse.

Camel stores energy in the form of water in its hump, consequently the size of the hump determines the energy in reserve. The larger the hump, the bigger the energy stored and vice versa. It can take 50 gallons of water at a time and be able to inexorably, move for a considerable distance through distressing conditions. The four long hooped legs make movement in fine sandy dunes easy. Since it is tall, the passenger sits in a cosy position as far as contacts with the unfriendly winds of the region are concerned. It was and is still used for both cargo and human transport and very good for long distance travels in areas in north eastern Nigeria and even neighbouring northern Cameroon which lie on the fringes of the desert. Above all, the camel like the donkey is relatively, a docile animal, which can be easily domesticated.

4. DONKEY

The third most important transport animal in this region was and is still the donkey. It is mainly a cargo transport animal though, occasionally, it transports its owners after offloading its load. It was principally used for transporting millet and maize and other farm products from the farms to the market since farm to market roads were and are still almost inexistence in this part of the country. It also belongs to the horse family but unlike the horse, it is small in size, with short legs. Also, unlike the horse, it can move for a longer distance with very heavy load without showing any signs of fatigue.

Though, they are stoic, they are like the horse; easily affected by extreme arid conditions. With a very strong spinal chord, its energy reserve also depends on the grass and other food eaten as well as the amount of water taken. Alexander Gaji (14 July 2009 Personal Communication)), a donkey transporter in Taraba State, is of the opinion that the physiognomy of the donkey is very good for human and cargo transport. He adds that it is probably as a result of this that the Son of God, Jesus Christ chose it for his triumphant entry into Jerusalem (See Luke 19 in the Holy Bible). The black cross-like mark on the back of the donkey is said to signify its sacredness as a holy animal and people like Alexander consider it a diadem.

5. OXEN

It has also been noted that where the above animals were absent, castrated male cows called oxen, were used principally not for commercial purposes, but cargo transport by pastoralists during nomadic movements. This, unlike the camel, horse and donkey is not a docile animal but can be friendly in most cases with the pastoralist who is on daily contact with it to the extent of being used as a means of conveyance. A castrated cow is stronger, grows faster and becomes fatter than the rest of the cattle because it cannot perform its natural functions. It only eats and drinks water. The use of oxen today is very prevalent with pastoralists on transhumance from Bauchi State towards the River Gongola valley during the dry season. It should also be noted that some people use oxen for ploughing farms though this is recent and is also not very common.

6. EMPLOYING THE ANIMALS FOR TRANSPORTATION

Unless there is a mutual understanding between man and the animal, it cannot be possible to use it for any service. In order to make these animals do what man wanted, man must have hob-nobbed with the animal over a period, presenting himself as a friend. These contacts enabled him to determine the likes and dislikes of the animal concerned so as to prevent it from becoming frigid and aggressive towards him.

The general belief is that, in the early periods, man sat on the bare back of the horse and camel with a minimum load as he moved from place to place. The flowing mane of the horse and camel were used to control their movement because when dragged, the animal feel severe pains forcing it at times to do whatever the rider wanted. If for example the mane was dragged to the left, the animal swerved to that direction. For it to stop; the mane had to be dragged straight with the rider tilting his head to the left or right to avoid direct contact with the animal's head.

It is believed this was the practice until at a certain unknown point in time that man discovered that this was not comfortable since the mane is slippery making control of the animal difficult at times. Sani Bala, a popular horse rider in the cavalry of the Lamido of Gembu in Taraba State,

seems to agree when he maintained that the continuous pulling of the mane was becoming hurtful to the animals (5 May 2010. Personal Communication). As a result of this, man decided to tie a rope around the neck of the animal and part of it inserted into its mouth to prevent it from eating while on a journey.

The rope gave the rider a good grip and command of the animal but with time, according to Garba Ali (1 May 2010. Personal Communication) a royal horse rider in the palace of the Lamido of Banyo, the horse began chewing the rope or chord so as to eat grass and drink water while on a journey. It was probably at that point that blacksmiths or iron smelters were contacted and a bridle made of metal was prepared and inserted into the animal's mouth. To it was tied a rein which served as a "steering wheel" doing what the mane or rope used to do. This is still very much in use today. If the rein is dragged, the bridle inserted into the animal's mouth caused uncomfortable pains and forced it to do what the rider wanted. The bridle also prevents it from eating while on "duty"

On the other hand, sitting or loading on the bare back of the animal became uncomfortable both to rider's buttocks and the animal's back. A saddle made of sewn soft materials was prepared and placed on the back of the animal. This was well knotted below the belly of the animal to make it static and prevent it from falling off. Attached to this saddle was a pair of sharp tooth wheels referred to as stir-ups, which are sown on the heels of the rider's shoes and used to gee the animal. Nowadays, people prefer to use hand whips made of rubber or animal skin because stir-ups, which are a product of metal, tended to wound and at times inflicted pains on the animal which became a family member.

For mainly load carrying animals like the donkey, a pile of soft empty weaved bag was and is still placed on it overlapping to its sides. This serves as a saddle preventing the load from having direct contact with the body of the animal – a contact, which might injure the animal or cause an illness called fibrosis. The load usually put in bags is divided into two equal halves and tied slightly to the sides of the donkey on the saddle. This gives the donkey a balanced stamina while on a journey. Instead of using a bridle like with the horse or camel, the donkey's mouth is inserted into a net-like bag, which is well knotted at its neck to prevent it from trying to eat while on a journey. A whip is also used to make it move faster if need be, and to direct its movement since there is no rein.

According to Noka (4 April 2009. Personal Communication), a farmer and donkey owner in the town of Gambouru-Ngala, Bornu State, donkeys usually get tired if they are not carrying enough load because they are easily distracted by things around them and this makes them to lose focus. When they carry enough load, they become preoccupied with the load and try to move faster so as to off load it and rest. If the load is not enough, it must then be whipped from time to time to be focused; otherwise, it will be restless as it tries to eat while on the journey.

Descending especially from the camel was not as easy as from a horse or donkey, which are relatively shorter. As witnessed in Banki, a cosmopolitan commercial hop on the northern borders of Cameroon and Nigeria, before the rider descends, he gently taps the camel at the rear, making it to lie or stoop for him to easily get down since it is very tall. Any attempt to jump down from a camel might not be a good idea because this could cause the rider some injuries. As far as the ox is concerned, the load is tied directly to its back on soft sewn bags. They are allowed to chew grass and drink water while on a journey so as to replenish their energy. No bridle or net-like bag is used. If they are not allowed to eat like the other cows in their midst, they will become very weak or might probably become sick and die while on a journey. It should be noted that they are not primarily, transport animals and it is a great worry for a pastoralist to lose one. They are as earlier mentioned, only used for transport during nomadic movements in the dry season because immediate circumstances warranted that. On no occasion were they used for transportation of people or goods to the market. If there was no nomadism, Ibrahim Abdul a former Fulani nomad (21 March 2010 Personal Communication) argues that, pastoralists would certainly not have used oxen for transport.

7. CARE OF THE ANIMALS

Generally since animals are living things, it is but normal that the owners should take good care of them so as to continuously ensure their sustainability. The animals were and are still taken care of

before, during and after a journey. The donkey, horse and camel are allowed to graze in the open fields after a journey so as to replenish the lost energy. This is necessary because they are not allowed to eat while on a journey. As for the oxen, they are allowed to graze while on a journey and when the nomads are resting.

Apart from allowing the animals to rest and graze in the open nearby fields, the animals were and are still visually examined by its owners for any signs of illness, which might be visible on the lips, eyes and tongue (Ibrahim Abdul 21 March 2010 Personal Communication). The nature of the faeces is also examined for signs of stomach problems. If any sign of illness is detected, necessary herbs were identified, squeezed, admixed with salt and administered to the animal. If for example the faeces of the animal was watery, this might signify stomach troubles and the animal was immediately not allowed to graze again on very fresh grass growing in newly burnt areas. This is because fresh grass causes stomach problems in some animals just as fresh vegetables do in some humans. The animal concerned was then served with a concoction of potash and salt, which cleanses the stomach. If the illness is contagious, the affected animal was isolated from the lot while receiving treatment (Ibrahim Abdul 21 March 2010 Personal Communication).

In these modern times, the attention of a veterinary doctor is usually called as the use of local herbs is fast waning. This in some cases leads to the vaccination of the animal though at times the vaccine might react negatively in the animal and kill it. According to Ndukong, (11March 2010 Personal Communication), this has made some owners of the animals to still prefer the use of the local herbs to the vaccine

It should, however, be understood that it is not very easy to maintain animals health wise. This is because, they are living things, which unlike human beings do not talk and we can only use the strong bond we have developed with them over the years of domestication to detect what is wrong from their physical appearance or actions. If an animal is exhausted, or sick, it cannot be forced to move except you want to push it towards death. It is not like a motorcar where parts worn out or spoiled can be replaced. It is difficult to replace a broken leg of a donkey while it is easy to replace the punctured tyre of a car, the more reason why animals demand serious attention and care as its use for transportation of persons and goods to and from the market in this part of the country is still compelling.

8. DISCUSSION

The use of animals for transport has today drastically reduced in northern Nigeria compared to the period before the introduction of the automobile and motorcycles popularly referred to in this region as *Okada*. It is only thriving as a means of transporting people and goods to and from the market in areas where no motorable roads (especially farm to market) exist. It should be noted that, except for roads linking principal towns in this region, most of the roads are untarred and impassable during the rainy season. The soils are loose in most areas hence, when the rains come, the roads are destroyed. In the northernmost parts of the country where the desert is fast approaching, fine sandy soils are blown around by continuous winds forming dunes and thereby making road construction and its maintenance difficult. Transport fares in this region are therefore, not determined by distance to be covered but by the nature or state of the road.

In this light, the camel still plays a very important role as far as economic or market activities of this area are concerned. In areas where roads are available and are well maintained, animals like the horse are used for ceremonial or leisure purposes while the donkey still serves in conveying goods or farm products from the farm to the market. The reduction in the use of animals for transport has witnessed an increase in the sale of such animals for consumption. Camel and horse meats are sold openly in some markets like Gamborou – Ngala in Borno State.

It is not the presence of roads that has negatively influenced the use of animals for transport in this region. Some owners of animals have been influenced by western culture to consider its use for transportation archaic in these modern times when most people are using cars. It is as a result of this that a good number of the pastoralists prefer to sell their animals and buy cars; some of which are parked in towns because of no motorable roads linking their isolated homesteads and the towns. Some have even personally paid for the construction of farm to market roads from their isolated homesteads to the main or trunk “A” roads. Other animal owners even prefer to move on

foot to the markets rather than use a horse, according to Ali Adamu, (7 March 2009 Personal Communication),.

Most of them seem to be in a fix as they struggle to blend indigenous culture with modernity or western culture. The presence of cars and tarred roads does and should not stall the use of animals for transportation in an area like the suburbs of northern Nigeria with no roads. Although, an animal might not move faster than a car, it is still needed for the numerous foot paths linking most villages in this part of the country to the markets around.

It is an open secret that corruption and the weak economy has made the federal and state government financially weak not to embark on the construction of new roads and the maintenance of old ones; however, one of the best alternatives could be to encourage the use of animals for transport in this region. This is because the lack of good roads in this region and the reduction of animal transport, has negatively affected movement especially in the wet season and is responsible for the low economic activities and economic conservatism noted in this area today.

To positively move forward in this direction, government should open donkey, camel and horse ranches like the cattle ranches which already exist in most parts of this region, in suitable parts of the north. This will permit intensive researches into these animals by veterinary doctors and experts and hence, leading to an increase production of healthy animals, good for transportation. These animals could be made available to the public at subsidized prices and people other than the pastoralists who today dominated this domain could also afford them for transport. This will not only boast market related activities but also tourism in the region, which will consequently witness an upsurge in economic activities since communication plays a greater part in the promotion of economic activities.

People who have been carried away by the niceties of the motorcar might argue that this is an outdated proposal in a time when modern technology is determining or detecting the pace of things. They are very right, but as earlier noted; the poor nature of roads in this area makes transportation by motor car expensive. The existing untarred roads are hardly or poorly maintained. At times, the poor nature of the roads has to do with the exploitative tendencies of some multinational companies which constructed the roads. They intentionally construct low quality roads so as to create an opportunity to be called up again for maintenance – double financial expenditure which seriously drains the usually weak economy.

On the other hand, since roads are not good and are hardly maintained, cars imported into the country with foreign currency, easily get spoilt when used on them. With no spare part industries and a practical maintenance culture policy, we either throw or discard these vehicles and import others or spare parts (since we do not manufacture them) to repair the damaged cars – another serious drain on the already weak and structurally adjusted economy.

9. CONCLUSION

Our continuous dependence on foreign forms of transport in areas not very conducive for it, has put us in a disadvantageous situation or circle in which we import, utilize, discard and again import, since we have no effective or practically recycling policy. In a situation like this, we tend to destroy the bases of our local economies as we try to be what we are not and by doing so assist in strengthening the foundations of capitalist oriented western economies with which we cannot compete.

Although animal transport demands intensive care of the animals concerned, it does not on the other hand demand for the construction and maintenance of roads by multinational companies or importation of cars and spare parts which dwindles our foreign reserves. Despite the relative advantages associated with automobile transport, it would be impossible for us with our poorly shaped economy to continuously sustain a transport system based on ideological and materials imported from without. In hard times like these, we do not have to be ashamed of who we were and are. Instead, we should borrow from without only what if blended with what we have, will discourage the dependency syndrome and economically thrust us forward.

If we continue to disown our local resources, as it is the case with animal transport in Northern Nigeria, then we are assisting in writing off our heritage. Challenges should make us first look inward and explore the possibilities within before looking outwards. It is only when our political

leaders will reorient our policies towards mental and psychological de-linking from the West that, we would be able to positively appreciate ourselves and past achievements, and a positive way forward primed. As Okpoko (1999:5) notes

“While borrowing necessary clues from foreign technology, Africa must do away with the phobia for colossal and gigantic projects some of which are not relevant to our cultural settings...There is the need to revert to very simple technologies which depend upon a variety of local conditions for their success as a basic foundation for advancement”.

In this direction, archaeologists, historians and ethnographers could certainly be of great help in revealing our past resources.

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