
A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REVIEW OF CONTENDING PERSPECTIVES ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MARKETING BOARDS IN COLONIAL NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper analyses the contending debates on the establishment of marketing boards in colonial Nigeria. It analyses their operations within the purview of colonialist and nationalist perspectives. The paper contends that the British established the boards to protect its imperial and economic interests rather than the price stabilization policy they were primarily created for. It submits that the marketing boards were monopoly institutions the British used to cushion the internal contradictions in its post-Second World War economy. It argues that the paltry infrastructural facilities provided by the British administration were not meant to stimulate development but accidental fallouts of colonialism

Keywords: Marketing boards, Marxist, cocoa, groundnut, palm oil, cotton

Introduction

The Marketing boards were public or parastatal trading enterprises for agricultural products. They are state-controlled or state-sanctioned entities legally granted control over the purchase or sale of agricultural commodities. Statutory marketing had existed since the 1920s, as in New Zealand (1922) and Australia (1923). In tropical Africa, agricultural marketing boards were the

products of the Great Economic Depression of the 1930s and the Second World War. In Nigeria and elsewhere in British West Africa, the Secretary of State approved the constitution of the West African Cocoa Control Board (WACCB) in October 1940. In 1942, it was expanded to include other produce such as groundnuts, palm oil, palm kernel, cotton so on leading to its metamorphosis into the West African Produce Control Board (WAPCB). Before the setting up of the boards, the British colonial government established the Cocoa Commission of 1938 to examine the proposals for forming a Marketing Board.¹ The outbreak of the Second World War necessitated the formation of the board in the British West African colonies, due to the trade and shipping disruptions it brought about. As a reaction to this wartime situation, the British Colonial Government declared a state of emergency on produce trade to control the trade of its dependencies and prevent supply to enemy countries.

While the bulk of scholarship on the marketing boards has tended to focus on their monopoly powers in the export of some cash crops-cocoa, groundnut, cotton, and palm oil and kernel, price stabilization policies, government fiscal policies, on the use for economic development, research and quality assurance of crops, but analysis of the reasons for their establishment, objectives, and operations that revolved around colonial and nationalists perspectives remains a neglected theme. This binary conversation throws up a lot of intellectual engagements, polemics, contradictions, and debates. Marketing boards have attracted the attention of scholars as documented in the works of Bauer (1954 & 1963), Rod Alence (2001), Adamu (1979), Meredith (1988), David Meredith (1986), Hawkins (1958), Abbott (1967), Helleiner (1966), Williams (1985), Ekundare (1973), Garvin and Oyemakinde (1980), Onimode (1983), Olusanya

(1980), Nkanga (2014), and Muojama (2019). Adesote (2016) and others.² The significance of these works lies in providing useful insights and good background for textual analysis for the present study. This paper departs from the extant literature as it focuses on a historiographical review of contending perspectives on the establishment of marketing boards in colonial Nigeria.

The extant literature has studied the marketing board institution from nationalist/materialist and colonial/western bourgeoisie perspectives. But an analysis of the contending perspectives that underline the marketing boards in Nigeria is lacking. This marginal attention could be attributed to scholars' focus, persuasions, and prejudices/biases. The extent to which the existing literature has provided its interpretations for the establishment of the statutory boards depends on the following questions. Firstly, the paper addresses the colonialist perspective by interrogating the British colonial government's primary aim for the establishment of the boards? Secondly, it asks whether the peasant producers' prices were stabilized by the marketing boards or not? Did the peasants protest against what they perceived as exploitation from the colonial administration compared to the income that accrued to them before the creation of the marketing boards? Thirdly, it seeks to inquire about the impact of the boards on the people: Did the boards improve the socio-economic conditions of the peasants, and if yes, in what ways? Fourthly: Did the operations of the boards stimulate economic development in Nigeria or rather bring about the underdevelopment of the Nigerian economy?

The paper adopts a qualitative research methodology that involved a close reading of extant literature on the British colonial government's economic policy in Nigeria and Africa. As sources,

contemporary publications by the colonial government and writings by Nigerian scholars are also analyzed. The paper is structured as follows: the first section presents a brief history of the establishment of the marketing boards in Nigeria. The second section deals with the reasons for the setting up of the boards, the third section analyses the colonialists' and Africanist perspectives for the creation and operations of the boards, and the fourth section is the conclusion.

Establishment of Marketing Boards in Colonial Nigeria

The Marketing Board system was established in Nigeria by the British colonial government in the 1940s. The Cocoa Marketing Board was established in 1947, while the Groundnut, Cotton, and Palm Produce marketing boards were created in 1949. The boards were set up primarily to stabilize Nigerian producers' prices and eliminate the seasonal price fluctuations of export produce.³ The paper examines the colonial government's aims in establishing the marketing boards to ascertain whether the price stabilization and fiscal policies of the government were judiciously implemented or not. It argues that the boards succeeded in stabilizing producers' prices, but achieved little in stabilizing the producers' income.

Before the establishment of marketing boards, the export of Nigerian produce such as cocoa, palm oil, groundnut, palm kernel, cotton, and so on was undertaken by the expatriate firms such as United African Company (U.A.C), Compagnie Francaise de l'Afrique Occidentale, (CFAO) G.B. Ollivant, John Holt, A.G. Leventis, Paterson Zochonis, (PZ), Societe Commerciale del'Ouest Africain (SCOA) and a small number of African, Lebanese and Syrian traders. The firms had an immense influence on the market as they were not under the control of the colonial government. The expatriate firms, local agents, and other

intermediaries competed among themselves to purchase commodities from the peasant farmers at low prices and this led to intense conflicts among them.⁴ To end the rivalries, the Ministry of Food in London and later the West African Produce Control Board (WAPCB) decided to take full control of the purchase and sale of these products. The West African Produce Control Board (WAPCB) was formed purposely to enable the British colonial government to exercise effective control over its West African economy. In 1947, the WAPCB was decentralized and nationalized and the British colonial government took over the marketing of export crops from the expatriate firms and local agents. This development paved way for the settling up of the Marketing Boards for the purchase of the major export produce namely: cocoa, groundnut, palm oil, and cotton.⁵

Motives for the Establishment of Marketing Boards

The Nigerian Cocoa Marketing Board was established in 1947 by the Nigerian Cocoa Marketing Ordinance of 1947 primarily "to assist in the development by all possible means of (sic) the cocoa industry of Nigeria for the benefit and prosperity of the producers".⁶ Similar provisions were included in the ordinance which set up the other three boards two years later. The Nigerian Palm Produce Marketing Boards, Nigerian Groundnut Marketing Boards, and Nigerian Cotton Marketing Board were established in 1949. In doing so, the British colonial government declared that "the experience of the war years has shown that government can achieve stabilization of seasonal prices to the West African producers..."⁷ The British colonial government's main objective for the setting up of the Marketing Boards was to ensure price stabilization or equalization. Initially, when the boards were

created, their operations were constrained by price fluctuations which ranged from £4:19s:9d in 1930-1931, £3:7s:4d in 1938-1939, to £12 in 1945 and £19:1s:0d in 1949.⁸ The direct intervention in the purchase and sale of these export crops was to ensure stable prices for the product and in this way eliminate the annual price fluctuation. The boards had exclusive rights for the purchase of export produce: cocoa, groundnuts, cotton, and oil palm and it was believed that the price stabilization would help to reduce the effect of annual price fluctuation. The Marketing Boards carried out this onerous function by fixing the price for the purchase of these crops at the beginning of the season very much below the "world market prices" and the reserve funds accumulated in favourable years were used to cover up the losses in the unfavourable or lean years.⁹

Marketing boards were also set up to provide funds for the economic development of the areas of production (that is, areas where the crops were produced) and also for scientific research in agriculture. The accumulated funds were to be used for the eradication of diseases and similar purposes. The boards were expected to adopt different grades for the produce and payment of different prices for each grade. The grading system was to ensure improvement of the quality of the export crops and to motivate the producers to take extra care in preparing their export crops to increase their incomes.

The boards were established to prevent the series of peasant producers' protests caused by the exploitation of the peasant farmers by the expatriate firms and the intermediaries. The protests culminated in the outbreak of the Gold Coast Cocoa Hold-up of 1937. This made the British colonial government in setting up the Norwell Commission in 1938 to investigate the causes of the protests. The Commission made some suggestions

and recommended the establishment of the Marketing boards for the export of crops in British West Africa. The Commission's report contained some aspects of the criticisms of the pre-war marketing system and it made a lot of suggestions and recommendations for the establishment of the Cocoa Marketing Board.¹⁰

The constitutional changes in 1954 led to the regionalization of the boards and their designation as the Western Nigeria Cocoa Board, Eastern Nigeria Palm oil Board, and Northern Nigeria Groundnut and Cotton Boards to reflect regional character. This development gave more power to the regions which made agriculture to become a regional affair and as a result, the purchase of agricultural produce was reorganized on a regional basis. The regionalized Marketing Boards were responsible for the marketing of all export crops produced within their regions.¹¹ This meant that the Eastern Region Marketing Board did the bulk of its business in palm oil and palm kernels, while the Northern Region Marketing Board had the sole control of the sale of groundnut and cotton in Northern Nigeria and the Western Region was responsible for the marketing of cocoa.¹² As a result of the regional arrangement of 1954 and the devolution of powers to the regional governments, the assets of the Commodity Boards were allocated to the regional boards as follows: Western Regional Marketing Boards £42 million, Eastern Regional Marketing Boards £11.5million and Northern Regional Marketing Board £32.7 million. Each board employed expatriate buying agents such as United African Company, John Holts, Leventis, G.B. Ollivant, and so forth that formerly bought the product directly from the producers.¹³ These expatriate trading firms and local agents also employed hordes of middlemen/intermediaries,

who collected the produce from the producers, usually at a very low price below the prices fixed by the marketing boards.¹² By 1963, Nigerian export handled by the Marketing Boards accounted for about 63% of the value of total export from Nigeria.¹⁴

Contending Perspectives/Debates

The impact of European imperial control in Africa has been a subject of intense academic debate among economists, economic historians, and other scholars in related disciplines. The establishment of the marketing boards in Nigeria has generated intense debates among scholars from two dominant perspectives. The paper evaluates this polemical divide to ascertain whether the primary motive(s) advanced by the British colonial government for the creation of the boards were achieved or not. In this regard, contending perspectives are broadly categorized into the colonialist perspective which perceives the marketing boards as institutions that were established for the promotion of economic development, while scholars of the nationalist/materialist perspective contend that the boards are public trading institutions established by the colonial authorities for exploitation, oppression, and underdevelopment of Nigeria.

Colonialist/Western Bourgeoisie Perspective

This perspective seeks to explain that the British colonial government activities in Africa could be viewed from two perspectives, it was either a blessing or at worst, not harmful to Africa. The proponents of this perspective comprised European colonialists, imperial personnel, and colonial apologists such as Perham¹⁵, Lugard¹⁶, Lloyd¹⁷, John Hopkins¹⁸, Gann, and Duignan¹⁹. They contend that the colonial enterprise in Africa was

very rewarding and assisted in the development of African states. They argue further that the colonial authorities had built the railways, roads, and other social infrastructure which stimulated economic development in the colonies. These scholars applaud colonialism and cite the physical infrastructure as evidence of the positive outcome of colonialism which had helped to transform African economies. This perspective explores the contributions of the boards as follows:

The proponents argue that the marketing boards provided funds for the regional governments for development in agriculture, banking, and commerce.²⁰ The boards had served as effective instruments for mobilization of savings for governments in carrying out economic development projects in their respective regions. They also provided the capital for the establishment of regional development boards, known as Development Corporations,²¹ which were later renamed as Northern Nigeria Development Corporation (NNDC), Western Nigeria Development Corporation (WNDC), and Eastern Nigeria Development Corporation (ENDC). The accumulated surplus funds of the boards in the form of loans and grants were allocated to three regional governments to purchase equity in private companies and Nigerian Government Securities. This made the regional governments the greatest beneficiaries of the reserve disposal policy of the boards. In this regard, it was reported that in 1961, grants totalling over £33 million and loans of about £16.8 million were made available to the boards and an additional sum of £140 million was disbursed to the Federal Government of Nigeria.²²

To ensure agricultural development of areas of production, the boards disbursed grants for scientific research in agriculture.

For example, the Western Regional Government spent £5 million in support of cocoa research and extension work by the Western Regional Government's Department of Agriculture. An additional sum of £59,000 was also spent on disease control on Cocoa trees. The Northern Regional Government spent over £1.6 million on the development of the agricultural research centre at Ahmadu Bello University, Samaru, Zaria. The Northern Regional Government utilized the sum of £1.2 million for cotton production and other development projects in the region. In the Eastern Region, the board supported the West Africa Institute for Oil Research and the West African Store Produce Research Unit.²³

The boards equally made allocations to specific projects, especially in the field of education in the three regions. The Eastern Regional Government utilized £3^{1/2} million reserve funds for the building of the University of Nigeria Nsukka. It also allocated the sum of £5 for the construction of the Niger Bridge at Onitsha. The Eastern Nigeria Marketing Board disbursed about £500,000 to the Eastern Region Development Corporation for the economic development of the area.²⁶ The Western Regional Government used the funds to build the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife) and road construction programmes in the Western Region, while the Northern regional government built Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.²⁵ Marketing boards provided funds for the building of reputable hotels in the three regions namely: Hamdala Hotel in Kaduna, Hotel Presidential in Enugu, and Premier Hotel in Ibadan.

The bulk of allocations from the marketing boards was channelled to the regional governments for accelerated development of their regions.²⁶ Ogunremi and Faluyi believe that the marketing boards policy of using accumulated reserve funds for accelerating infrastructural development of areas of

production and provision of education is justifiable in the sense that if much money had been left in the hands of producers, it would have given rise to inflation which in the long run would have brought about a disincentive to farmers.²⁷ The fixing of relatively low producer prices, to some extent, reduced the severity of inflation to the advantage of the colonial authorities and the producers, especially in a period when there was no alternative anti-inflationary measure. The accumulated stabilization reserves were used to assure producers the benefit of relatively stable prices for many years and this enabled the boards to lend some loans and grants to governments for development purposes. The price differentials policy had enabled the boards to accumulate huge trading surpluses. It was reported that by 1954, the boards had accumulated huge funds of about £24 million which was disbursed to the Production Development Boards later known as Development Corporations.²⁸

The boards paved way for Nigerians` participation in the export trade during the period. In the pre-Second World War era, the marketing of virtually all the Nigerian export crops was handled by European firms. By the end of the 1952/53 buying season, the Cocoa Marketing Board had seventeen Nigerian licensed buying agents compared with only six in 1949/50, while the number of expatriate buying agents reduced from nineteen to eighteen.²⁹ The reorganization of the structure of the boards from 1954 made it possible for more Nigerians to take part in the export trade. Among the local licensed buying agents of the Western Nigeria Cocoa Marketing Board were Ibadan Traders Association, United Trading Development Company, Odutola Brothers, and Kajola Kawusi Stores.³⁰ Similarly, by November 1953, out of twenty-six licensed buying agents for palm oil, ten

were indigenous people and eighteen out of forty for palm kernels.³¹ By 1960, out of the fifty-four licensed buying agents, forty-two were Nigerian firms and the remaining thirty-two were expatriate firms. Out of thirty-four palm kernel buying agents, twenty-four were Nigerian firms while expatriate firms were ten in number.³²

The indigenous licensed produce buying agents of the Eastern Nigeria Regional Marketing Board included firms such as African Development Corporation, African Produce Dealers Ltd., and individuals such as Mathias Nwafor Ugochukwu, Mr. B.C. Atuchukwu, Mr. L.N. Obioha and Chief A.N. Okoye.³³ In the northern region, the twenty-one licensed buying agents for Northern Nigeria Groundnuts and Cotton Boards were all expatriates and no local agents from Northern Nigeria. By 1954, nine local Northern Nigeria enterprises participated in the region's produce trade as licensed agents.³⁴ In the 1960/61 session, the number of local licensed buying agents increased to forty-three, among them were Alhasan Dantata, Salim Bilawa, and Alhaji Labaran.³⁵ The increased participation of Nigerian firms and individuals enabled them to have some share in the export produce trade which invariably widened the scope of both internal and external trade.

In the realm of politics, local politicians used the accumulated surplus funds as alternative means of executing development projects without relying exclusively on taxes and levies.³⁶ The boards served as major sources for raising revenue for governments as it was stated that in the 1965/1966 season alone about £15.4 million or 10% of Federal government revenue came from agricultural produce.³⁷ Politicians used the funds in supporting various governments' policies and meeting political obligations to their people. For example, the Western Nigeria

Marketing Board invested huge reserve funds in private enterprises such as National Investment and Properties Co. Ltd., (NIPC), which received £7 million in loans from the Western Nigeria Marketing Board.³⁸ The Eastern Regional Government had investments in securities abroad, founded an indigenous bank, African Continental Bank, (ACB), and purchased shares in promising manufacturing companies such as Nigerian Cement Company, Nkalagu. The Northern Regional Government lent over £11million as loans to establishments like Kaduna Textiles Ltd. and Bank of the North.³⁹ In this way, the surplus reserves of the boards became a veritable source for funding the regional governments` development plans.

It could be deduced from the following that the colonialists` scholars contend that the colonialism in Nigeria and other parts of Africa was rewarding and beneficial to the colonial subjects. They maintain that colonialism laid the foundations for the economic development and transformation of Africa and point to the physical infrastructure of railways, roads, and other development projects as evidence of the positive outcome of imperial rule.

Another strand of the argument is that the marketing boards provided funds for the regional governments which they used in the development of banking, commerce, and agriculture as well as mobilized capital for development projects and the establishment of regional development boards. They maintain that funds in the form of loans and grants were allocated to the regional governments to invest in private and public enterprises. The colonists argue further that the bulk of the boards' allocations was shared by the regional governments for development purposes and that by 1954, the boards disbursed £24 million to the regional

Development Corporations. Colonialists' commentators conclude that the regional governments were the main beneficiaries of the fiscal policy of the boards. They cite an example that in 1961, the sum of £189.8 was earmarked for scientific research in agriculture, while an additional sum of £59,006.2 was allocated to the regional governments for research, disease control, and education.

Another genre of the argument is that the accumulated surplus funds served as a major source of revenue for the regional governments. In the 1965/1966 season alone, the sum of £15.4 million, or 10% of the Federal Government's revenue was derived from the marketing boards. They contend that it was from the funds the politicians used in the execution of governments' development projects, investments in private and public enterprises, and the establishment of industries, and banks amongst others. Indigenous entrepreneurs emerged and participated in the export trade, unlike the pre-war era when the British colonial government and expatriate firms dominated export trade.

Nationalist/Materialist Perspective

This perspective emerged as a criticism of the colonialist/Western bourgeoisie perspective and explores "dependency" or "underdevelopment" as its theoretical underpinning. Despite the positive roles of the Marketing Boards highlighted above, the operations and policies of the boards have attracted many criticisms from the works of economists and economic historians of nationalist/materialist perspective such as Bauer, Helleiner, Anthony Hopkins, Ekundare, Eicher, Lieldholm, Boahen, Crowder, Ogunremi, Onimode, Ake, Offiong, Mujuoma, Nkanga, Adesote, and Rodney.⁴⁰ These scholars argue that European

enterprises/colonial administrations in Africa/Nigeria were exploitative, which ultimately laid the foundation for the underdevelopment of Nigerian/African economies.

Scholars who subscribe to this perspective perceive the marketing boards as an instrument of exploitation of Nigerian peasants by the British colonial government, expatriate firms, and local licensed produce buying agents. However, Hopkins and Shelton observe that the boards were created in the post-war period to cushion the effects of the Second World War on the British economy.⁴⁰ Economists, Bauer, and Africanist economic historians such as Fieldhouse and Morgan view the marketing boards as war-time statutory agencies, whose continued existence after the Second World War was a result of the strong self-perpetuating forces within the British colonial government.⁴² The surplus profits of the boards were used by the British colonial government for rebuilding her economy that was devastated during the Second World War. The marketing boards served as veritable institutions that helped immensely for the British post-war economic recovery. The low-buying price fixed by the boards was tantamount to a forced loan in aid towards the war efforts. The British appropriation of the producers' incomes for the post-war economic recovery amounts to exploitation and oppression of the peasantry. The British withheld the farmers' incomes to get foreign reserves and their justification for investing the funds in Britain was on the grounds of a lack of investment opportunities or outlets in Nigeria. The result was a capital flight which helped in stimulating her economy in the post-Second World War era.

John Hopkins, one of the proponents of the colonial perspective, in his defence of the roles of the boards, argues that the peasant producers, expatriates, and local agents benefitted

from the operation and policies of the marketing board system.⁴³ Countering John Hopkins' assertion, Ekundare argues that the price stabilization policy of the boards represents a high degree of forced savings and/or imposition of tax on the agricultural sector. He affirms that it was unfair for the boards to withhold a substantial part of what ought to be the farmer's income through the price stabilization policy and, therefore, the marketing boards were instruments used by the British for taxing the peasant farmers excessively and this invariably killed their incentive to increase production as a result of low prices.⁴⁴ He maintains that between 1947 and 1954, the boards had accumulated huge reserves of £120 million and an additional "trading profits" of £100 million. During the period, it was only in the 1948/1949 season that the boards subsidized producers' prices when the sum of £16 million was paid out of the surpluses to maintain minimum prices. For the rest of the period, the 'boards' accumulated surpluses, and each board was said to have withheld between 40% and 66% of producers' income.⁴⁵

Helleiner, on her part, posits that from 1954 onwards, the fiscal policy of the marketing boards was equivalent to the imposition of a heavy tax on export producers. She further observed that after the regional arrangement of the boards from 1954, the allocation formula of using 70% of the reserve funds for stabilization purposes, 22½% for development, and 7½% on agricultural research was jettisoned and not adhered to or implemented as the marketing boards used the accumulated reserve funds for other purposes rather than price stabilization.⁴⁶ Hopkins states that the imposition of heavy taxes by the boards prevented the producers from benefiting from the boards which were primarily set up to stabilize their product prices and incomes. The low-buying prices fixed by the boards, he

maintains, were akin to a forced loan in aid towards the war efforts. He opines that the British colonial government, the expatriate firms, and intermediaries were the main beneficiaries of the marketing boards system and not the peasant producers.⁴⁷ The policy of setting the price below the world market price during the times of prosperity and using the differentials to form reserves which were used to support producers' prices in the unfavourable years when the world market was depressed, was not judiciously followed but rather, in practice, the boards, pursued a different policy altogether. For instance, in the 1950s when the world prices were high, substantial reserves were accumulated as envisaged, but the demand for these export crops declined, the boards still fixed prices below the levels obtainable in the world market and continued to accumulate funds. It was estimated that Nigerian peasant farmers lost an average of 27% of their incomes as a result of the policies of the boards.⁴⁸ This huge of the farmers' income is an indication that the boards only succeeded in safeguarding the interests of the British colonial government and expatriate firms at the expense of the peasant producers. This is so because no proper measure was put in place to return the greater percentage of the surplus funds to the peasants.

Onimode views the marketing boards system as an instrument used by the British not only for imposing heavy taxation on the peasant producers but also as a means of perpetuating exploitation of the peasant producers. He adds that since the peasant producers had no representation on the boards, they, therefore, had no say in the determination of the exploitative and arbitrary prices including the surplus disposal policies imposed by the boards. He notes that the peasants had paid as much as 62% implicit tax on the "world prices" of their products

in the form of the differential between the world market prices and those offered to the peasant producers by the boards. He declares that the imposition of heavy taxation on the peasant producers coupled with incessant oppression of the pauperized peasantry partly provoked the Agbekoya riots of 1969 in the defunct Western Region. He considers the so-called "world prices" as the imperialist dictated exploitative prices because of the unequal exchange of the imperialist foreign trade and, this tendency made the structure of the "world market" to ensure that only exploitative convenient prices were dictated for the peasants' produce.⁴⁹

Bauer in his prodigious work⁵⁰ criticizes the operations and stabilization policy of the boards and believes that the boards and the licensed buying agents who formed a complicated network of intermediaries, made marketing arrangements of the export crops to be wasteful and exploitative as they were before the Second World War. He points out that the boards only eliminated inter-seasonal price fluctuations, but achieved little success in stabilizing producers' incomes. He affirms that the producers' incomes were largely unstable under the marketing boards system and therefore, the boards had a depressive effect on the Nigerian economy due to a reduction in demand and the incentive to invest in productive enterprises within and outside the agricultural sector. The neglect of agriculture by the colonial authorities made Bauer assert that the marketing boards system was incompetent because agriculture collapsed as a result of the colonial government's policies. The marketing boards' appropriation of what ought to be the producers' incomes was used by the colonial authorities for the post-war economic recovery, making the policies of the boards amount to exploitation and oppression of the peasantry. This meant that boards exploited

the peasants by withholding their incomes because the governments wanted to obtain foreign reserves. Between 1949 and 1953, 70% of surplus funds were invested as securities in Britain, while the remaining 30% was distributed as grants to the Production Development Boards, and some were spent on road construction, repairs, and other related development projects.⁵¹ The British justified the investment of the funds in Britain on the grounds of the lack of investment opportunities or outlets in Nigeria. The British justification for investing the funds abroad is a biased imperial view. The main rationale for the capital flight was to ensure the stimulation of her economy which was devastated during the Second World War.

Recent works on the marketing boards in Nigeria include Nkanga`a article titled: "The Role of Marketing Board in Nigeria, 1947-1986: Development or Exploitation?"⁵² assesses the operations and fiscal policies of the boards and argues that the boards were exploitative that served the British interest at the expenses of the peasants leading to their replacement by seven Regional National Boards in 1977. It contends that the new faced the challenges of high production costs, low market prices, and harsh economic conditions caused by the adoption of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank-sponsored Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and the Second-Tier Foreign Exchange Market (SFEM) policy by General Ibrahim Babaginda military regime led to the dissolution of the marketing boards in 1986.

Adesote, in chapter four of his thesis⁵³ discusses the evolution of the Cocoa Marketing Board in 1947 and how it was scrapped in 1986 following the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme during the military regime of General

Ibrahim Babaginda. He argues that although the marketing boards had their defects which contributed to some of the reasons they were disbanded, the need to implement a new international economic policy of liberalization sponsored by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank was a major factor for their dissolution in 1986. Muojama`s work⁵⁴ focuses on the role of the Cocoa Marketing Board in the improvement and sustenance of the cocoa industry in colonial Nigeria. It argues that the cocoa marketing board was a post-war creation aimed at controlling the cocoa trade in Nigeria. It posits that the cocoa marketing board apart from the price stabilization and fiscal roles, it had contributed significantly in the areas of disease control, soil survey, and rehabilitation of infected areas, quality assurance, and research in cocoa production.

Walter Rodney, one of the leading critics of colonialism and exponents of the nationalist/materialist perspective, while criticizing the colonial administration`s trump card of the provision of infrastructural facilities and social services such as roads and railways, as evidence of their achievements, proves that the social services "were as foreign at the end of the colonial period as they were in the beginning...and the scanty social services were meant only to facilitate exploitation"⁵⁵ He further declares that: "it would be an act of the most brazen fraud to weigh the paltry social amenities provided during the colonial epoch against the exploitation, and arrive at the conclusion that the good outweighed the bad" and that the limited social services were distributed in a manner which reflected the pattern of domination and exploitation.⁵⁶ He succulently reinforces his views when he asserts that

...the argument suggests that on one hand, there was exploitation and oppression, but on the other

hand, colonial governments did much for the benefit of Africans and they developed Africa. We contend that this is completely false. Colonialism had only one hand. it was a one-armed bandit.⁵⁷

Rodney sums up his postulations when he maintains that the British colonial authorities used the Marketing Boards system as a "bush to hide their imperialistic capitalist interests".⁵⁸

The nationalist scholars counter the colonialists' position and blame the British colonists for appropriating the surplus profits that accrued from the marketing boards to restructure their war-torn economy. Another strand of the nationalists' claims is that the surplus profits that were supposed to go to the farmers were used for other purposes rather than the aim they were meant for. They argue that the British colonial government used the boards as instruments of exploitation of the Nigerian peasant producers. They aver that the British withholding of farmer's income through the price stabilization policy is tantamount to forced savings on the poor producers. The argument is that the boards served the British imperial interests at the expense of the Nigerian peasant farmers.

Nationalist scholars observe that the boards' allocation formula that 70% of the reserve funds will be for stabilization purposes, 22½% for development, and 7½% for agricultural research was not implemented, rather the funds were used for other purposes... They observe that the boards' policy of setting the price below the world market price during the periods of high price and using the differentials as reserves to offset farmers' prices in the unfavourable years was not followed leading to a loss of 27% of farmers' incomes. The nationalists opine that

excessive taxation of the peasants reduced their incentive to produce more crops in the wake of prevailing low prices and exploitative policies and therefore, was one of the triggers of the Agbekoya protests in the Western Region in 1969. They contend that the marketing board system led to the collapse of agriculture because of the British colonial government's focus on the production and export of cash crops to the neglect of food crop production.

Analysis of the Contending Debates

The foregoing discourse has shown that the marketing boards were created by the British colonial government because it needed money to undertake some development projects in Britain as well as the development of infrastructure in the colonial territory in the post-war period. This singular objective prompted the British intervention in the purchase and sale of agricultural produce to accumulate funds to cushion the devastating effects of the Second World War on her economy. The price stabilization policy was designed to enable her to secure a stable marketing arrangement for the Nigerian produce and have firm control over the Nigerian economy. Besides, the surplus disposal policy of the boards was based on the idea that the colonial administration should execute some development projects for the people ranging from agricultural research to the provision of infrastructural facilities than giving the money to the producers. The mobilization of reserve funds for development projects, therefore, represented an easy means of extracting money for research purposes and the development of the areas of production.

Scholars of the nationalist/materialist perspective perceive the marketing boards as monopolistic institutions created to exploit, dominate and oppress the peasant producers and their

activities were partly responsible for Nigerian underdevelopment. This is evident in the uneven pattern of development of the country as areas or regions outside the "production areas" were neglected and did not attract any significant development projects, while paltry developmental projects were concentrated in the production areas or regions. Despite the valid reasons advanced for their creation, the boards derailed from their main objectives, especially from 1954 onwards. Helleiner notes, that "they exceeded the limit originally set for their activities in this area".⁵⁹ It was stated that between 1947 and 1961, the income accruable to farmers which comprised 42% for cotton, 40% for groundnuts, 39% for cocoa, 17% for palm oil, and 29% for palm kernels was appropriated by the boards on behalf of the British colonial government. This portends that in the years the price of produce was higher, farmers were paid prices grossly lower than the world prices which range from 44% high to 66% of all the produce.⁶⁰ The huge profit withheld from 1947 to 1954 marked the beginning of the decline in the fortunes of the boards. The 70% surplus that was supposed to be the farmers` profit amounted to £66 million for the seven years.⁶¹ The surpluses which were withheld were meant to be the boards` working capital earmarked for development and price stabilization in the ratio of 7.5%, for scientific research in agriculture, and 22.5% for the development of the producing areas. A significant percentage of the profits accumulated over the years which were supposed to be used to pay farmers in the years when produce prices were very low especially, in 1954 was not used but rather transferred and invested in Britain. The table below illustrates how the surpluses from the produce accumulated from the Marketing Boards were transferred to Britain between 1947 and 1954.

Table 1: Total Surplus Accumulation of Produce Transferred to Britain Between 1947 and 1954 (£thousand)

	Groundnut	Cocoa	Cotton	Palm oil	Palm kernel	Total
Initial Reservoir	448.7	8896.6	250.0	11457.0		25091.0
Net Trading Surplus	22483.6	33797.4	6968.6	2269.7	18790.8	84310.1
Excess of other income over expenditure	3563.9	3349.3	1102.7	2497.3		105136
Total	30535.3	46043.3	83213	16124.0	18790.8	119914.7

Source: *Annual Reports of Marketing Boards* as cited in Mike Odey: 2009, 131.

The boards held some accumulated reserves as stabilization funds in the form of the United Kingdom and Commonwealth securities. The Nigerian Regional Marketing Board's disbursement of funds, grants, investments, and loans to the Regional governments between 1955 and 1961 could be seen below:

Table 2: Disposal of Nigerian Regional Marketing Boards Funds: Cumulative Grants, Investments and Loans Outstanding, 1955-1961 (£000`s)

	Eastern Region (Dec.31, 1961)	Northern Region (Oct. 31, 1961)	Western Region (Sept. 30,1961)	Total (Sept. 30- Dec. 31, 1961)
Cumulative Grants to Regional Governments	7,500.00	-	25,589.1	33,089.1
Cumulative Grants to Regional Development & Finance Corporations	2,800.0	1,883.3	-	4,683.2
Other Cumulative Grants & Expenditures	212.1	3,226.7	5,717.4	9,156.2
Loans Outstanding to Federal Government	1,816.9	3,323.6	-	5,140.5
Loans Outstanding to Regional Government	-	6,811.2	10,000.0	16,811.2
Loans Outstanding to Regional Development & Finance Corporations	500.0	-	4,200.0	4,700.0
Equity Investment in Nigerian Private Companies	3,545.0	276.0	3,080.0	6,901.0

Loans Outstanding to Nigerian Private Companies	-	800.0	6,288.2	7,088.2
United Kingdom Securities	3,202.2	6,578.0	1,721.6	11,501.8
Federation of Nigeria Securities	-	3,025.1	-	3,025.1

Source: Annual Reports of the Marketing Boards, as cited in Helleiner, 175.

Analysis of the Contending Perspectives

This paper has examined the two contending perspectives of the operations of the marketing boards within the purview of the colonialist/western bourgeoisie and nationalist/materialist lens. The colonial/western bourgeoisie perspective espouses the development-oriented impact of the boards and maintains that the boards had served as a veritable source of revenue earner and agency utilized by colonial authorities in revamping its post-war economy. The Nigerian regional governments also utilized the surplus funds in executing various development projects in their respective regions. Admittedly, some of the accumulated surplus funds of the Marketing Boards were used for investments in agriculture, research, communication, financing of development projects in the areas of production, and improvements in the quality of the produce. The boards also provided infrastructural facilities and disbursed grants and loans to the Regional Development Corporations, indigenous banks, and local industries. Local politicians used the reserve funds in executing development projects in their respective regions as well as prosecuting political activities. Marketing boards, therefore, had played both economic and political roles in the evolution of

Nigeria's state. The relative success the boards achieved, was partly, due to the support they received from the local licensed agents, intermediaries, and the leading politicians of the regional political parties. This made the boards "...convoluted collaboration of government, party, corporation and private business"⁶²

The contribution of the boards as an agency for development as embodied in the colonialist/Western bourgeoisie school of thought, but the positive impacts of the marketing boards have not diminished their negative impact as expressed by scholars of nationalist/materialist perspective, who were very critical of the activities of the boards. One of the exponents of the nationalist/materialist perspective, Adu Boahen correctly contends that many of the so-called benefits of colonialism were "accidental by-products of the activities or measures intended to promote the interests of the colonizers" and supposed benefits were true, but the "defaults of the iron law of unintended consequences".⁶³ The provision of roads and rail lines and other infrastructure were built purposely to facilitate the exploitation of the colonies and were not intended for the interests of Nigerian peasant producers. The price stabilization policies of the boards have been criticized by scholars for withholding from the peasants their substantial share of higher world prices. The peasants' produce prices were stabilized but not their incomes. The boards acted as a conduit pipe for exploitation and oppression of the peasants as the British did not put in place any effective measure to return a significant percentage of the surplus funds to the peasant farmers who generated it. The Regional governments lent a substantial percentage of the boards' funds to banks, and real estate firms and invested in private enterprises with a questionable

worth in which the politicians had immense interests. Thus, this paper demonstrates that the destructive outcome of the boards outweighs their positive impact. Reinforcing this view, Hopkins asserts that the boards allowed colonial authorities to appropriate a substantial part of the farmers' income through the accumulation of the boards' surpluses. The profits were initially solely used to finance the post-war marketing scheme and smaller developmental projects, but this policy serves as an avenue for the massive exploitation of the peasant producers by the boards, especially from 1954 and the years that followed.⁶⁴ This shows that the marketing board institution was largely exploitative and oppressive in the sense that the British colonial administration in collaboration with Nigerian compradors used the accumulated funds for other purposes rather than the aims they were meant for. Although motivated by different ideological leanings, intellectual persuasions, and instincts, the two positions have one thing in common: both agree that the boards were created as statutory institutions meant to stabilize prices of export products in the world market; provide funds for research in agriculture and development of areas of production and stabilize the British in the immediate postwar era. However, both narratives cast the regional governments and Nigerian politicians as major beneficiaries of the marketing board system.

Conclusion

A historiographic review of two dominant perspectives advanced by scholars in their interpretations of the marketing boards was informed by their scholarly persuasions and prejudices. As part of the ongoing debates on the establishment and operations of the marketing boards, this paper has provided an objective and nuanced analysis that the primary aim for the creation of the

boards was to stabilize produce's export prices and encourage Nigerians' participation in the export trade. Colonists and Africanist scholars have studied the marketing boards as major statutory development agencies in colonial Nigeria. However, scholars of the colonialist persuasion have linked it to the broader discourse of fostering economic development, while the Africanist scholars have maintained that the boards were exploitative, and oppressive and subsequently, laid the foundation for Nigeria's underdevelopment. Scholars have debated the creation of the marketing boards without reaching a definite consensus on the British colonial government's objectives for the creation of the boards relative to the dynamics of the post-Second World war economic recovery. A historiographic review of this subject has either been missed out or attracted marginal attention in the existing literature. This paper has to fill this knowledge gap by examining the historiographical analysis of the two dominant perspectives to establish that the operations of the boards were a two-way traffic-there was economic development and there was also exploitation. To emphasize the roles of the boards, this paper has critically analyzed the existing scholarship to avoid a reductionist account that will distort the historical trajectory of the marketing board institution. As this paper has shown, stimulating debates from the existing literature have established that economic reasons were central to the establishment of the marketing boards. The foregoing analysis points to some conclusions. The boards served as agencies for the acceleration of the economic development of Nigeria. The boards also insulated the producers' prices from annual fluctuation, but not their incomes. It encouraged Nigerians' participation in the export trade. Conversely, the ulterior motive of the boards is clear; they

served as instruments of exploitation and oppression of peasants; integrated the Nigerian economy into the web of the world capitalist system characterized by unequal economic relationships leading to dependency and underdevelopment of the economy. The boards served as conduit pipes to siphon Nigeria's wealth to Britain which laid the foundation for the underdevelopment of the Nigerian economy in the colonial period which continued in the post-colonial era.

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Notes

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5. Bode Onimode, *Imperialism and Underdevelopment in Nigeria: The Dialectics of Mass Poverty*. (London: Macmillan Press, 1983), 50, See R.O. Ekundare, *An Economic History*, 286.

6. Bode Onimode, *Imperialism and Underdevelopment....*, 50

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8. Helleiner, *Peasant Agriculture...*, 1973, 228.

9. *ibid.*

10. Ekundare, *An Economic History of Nigeria* 286-289.
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- 35.D. J. Musawa, "The Development Export Trade in Musawa-Mutazu Area of Katsina Emirate" (B.A. Dissertation Bayero University, Kano, 1981), 34.
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