

ISSN: 0018-2540

JOURNAL OF THE  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
OF NIGERIA

VOLUME 23

2014



A JOURNAL OF AFRICAN HISTORY  
PUBLISHED BY THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NIGERIA

# JOURNAL OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NIGERIA

VOLUME 23, 2014

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THE LEBANESE IN IBADAN, NIGERIA, 1986-2012

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Source: *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. 23 (2014), pp. 131-149

Published by: Historical Society of Nigeria

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24768945>

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# THE LEBANESE IN IBADAN, NIGERIA, 1986-2012

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## Abstract

This paper examines the contributions of Lebanese migrants to the economic development of the city of Ibadan, one of the cities in Nigeria with the highest population of Lebanese, from 1986 to 2012. Since 1986, Lebanese migrants diversified into medium and large-scale industrial production of several consumer products with diverse impacts on the host society. This study lays emphasis on the major developments involving Lebanese activities in Ibadan with particular reference to their contribution to the process of industrialisation and its impact on the society. Using a descriptive and interpretative framework, the study highlights the social, economic and political forces that aided Lebanese economic success in the period under study. Lebanese social networks in the city were analyzed as a way of assessing their relative importance to the host community. The study demonstrates that their utmost loyalty and preference for their own community perpetuated a resolve to limit their dealings within their own ranks.

## Introduction

The Lebanese migrant community has become very important in the analysis of socio-economic development of West African states since the twentieth century. Several studies have detailed their social and economic activities in the West African region.<sup>2</sup> Apart from being arguably the most populous non-African community in most West African states, they have distinguished themselves in the economic development process, becoming one of the most dominant groups of expatriate businessmen to settle in the region. They were instrumental to the opening up of the trade and capital market in West Africa through their industriousness and business skills, especially after the departure of European merchants.<sup>3</sup> Their contributions to the 'industrialisation' of Kano city in Nigeria, and

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<sup>2</sup> Bayly R. Winder, 'The Lebanese in West Africa', *Comparative Studies in Society*, 4 (1962): 3. And Toyin Falola, 'Lebanese Traders in Southwestern Nigeria', *African Affairs*, 89 (1990): 357.

<sup>3</sup> Winder, 'The Lebanese in West Africa', *Comparative Studies in Society*, 3.

their massive exploits in Ghana's industrial development in recent times, have received the attention of scholars.<sup>4</sup> Their tremendous contributions to the economic and social space of Ibadan since the 1980s, especially in the establishment of manufacturing industries, provision of essential goods and in job creation, however, are yet to receive any serious academic attention even in spite of its importance in assessing the role of migrants in economic development of the country. They are arguably the largest foreign investors in the city of Ibadan in recent times with wide interests in almost all the productive sectors of the economy.

The traditions of origin of Lebanese in West Africa indicate that poverty largely contributed to their mass emigration outside their homeland, including the West African region.<sup>5</sup> Given this background, we need to understand why they concentrated all their energies in commercial undertakings. As Falola affirmed, Lebanese would only move into an area when they are convinced that they can make a profit and earn a good living.<sup>6</sup> The nature of their migration to Nigeria in recent decades has changed from one of poor Lebanese going to work for the sustenance of themselves and their families at home to Lebanese investors taking advantage of an already established network with good political ties and a growing economy.<sup>7</sup> The desire to invest and attain economic advancement has contributed more to their migration into Nigeria in particular.

There has been a sharp increase in the migration of Lebanese migrants to West Africa since the mid-nineteenth century. Extrapolation from accounts suggests that the first Lebanese arrived Senegal in the period between 1876 and 1880, being the closest port to Marseille, France, where the early immigrants booked onward passage to New York.<sup>8</sup> French-

<sup>4</sup> Muhammadu Uba Adamu, 'Arab Influences in Kano City', <http://www.kanoonline.com/jmq/s/index.php/history/arab-influences-on-kano-city?tmpl> (accessed 10 September 2013) and Emmanuel K. Akyeampong, 'Race, Identity and Citizenship in Black Africa: The Case of Lebanese in Ghana', *Africa*, 76, 3 (2006): 303, 307-311.

<sup>5</sup> Other factors advanced by scholars for the large-scale emigration of the group to several parts of West Africa include geography, political and religious pressures. See Winder, 'The Lebanese in West Africa', 296; and Falola, 'Lebanese Traders in Southwestern Nigeria', 525-526.

<sup>6</sup> Falola, 'Lebanese Traders in Southwestern Nigeria', 526.

<sup>7</sup> Charles J. Mambula, 'Characteristics of Migrant Entrepreneurs as Agents of Direct Investment in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Observation of the Lebanese in Nigeria', *World Journal of Entrepreneurship, Management and Sustainable Development*, 6, 3 (2010): 200.

<sup>8</sup> Winder, 'The Lebanese in West Africa', 300.

speaking territories in West Africa were the earliest destination of Lebanese immigrants and French shippers dominated their transportation from Marseilles to Dakar and St. Louis. It was from here that they moved to other places in the region.<sup>9</sup> The arrival of the first Lebanese to Nigeria is shrouded in controversy as there are several conflicting accounts regarding the date as well as the name of the first Lebanese to arrive in the country.<sup>10</sup> However, most scholars accept that the first Lebanese may have stepped into the country around 1890. There are also indications that a few Lebanese migrants had arrived Ibadan in the early 1890s.<sup>11</sup>

In 2008, the records from the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) put the population of Lebanese in Nigeria at 30,000, many of whom were third generation Lebanese-Nigerians who hold the Nigerian passport,<sup>12</sup> but, according to Mambula, the Lebanese population reported in Nigeria at the end of 2003, five years earlier, indicated a population of well over 100,000.<sup>13</sup> Although the Nigerian Immigration Service estimated that only 530 Lebanese were resident in Ibadan in 2012<sup>14</sup>, Mudah posits that the Lebanese in Ibadan exceed 5000 and consists of four generations of Lebanese families.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Falola, 'Lebanese Traders in Southwestern Nigeria', 525.

<sup>10</sup> Two recent newspaper accounts cited 1885 and 1886 respectively, and while one records Ilyâs al-Khûrî as the first to step into the country, the other named Michael Elias. Winder earlier established that the first Lebanese in Nigeria was a Maronite from Mizyârah named Ilyâs al-Khûrî who arrived Lagos in 1890. Depending on oral sources produced by the Lebanese and written sources available in 1990, Falola also indicates their presence in the country between early- and mid-1890s but only made reference to men like Michael Elyas and Assad Joseph. Contemporary oral accounts extracted from some Lebanese in Ibadan also point to 1890. See *Explore*, 29 April 2012, 18 and Allan Adebayo, 'Nigerian-Lebanese Relations Take a New Leap', *The Nation*, 17 March 2013. See also Winder, 'The Lebanese in West Africa', 300; Falola, 'Lebanese Traders in Southwestern Nigeria', 525. Interviews with Sammi Mudah, 73 years, Chairman, Jericho Quarters Landlords Association and General Manager, Mouka Foam Depot, Ibadan, 14 May 2013 and Nemetallah Aboud, 77 years, Retired Director, Solo Group of Companies, 12 June 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Many of the Lebanese interviewed in the course of this work were in agreement that a few Lebanese men had stepped into Ibadan about two or three years after landing in Lagos.

<sup>12</sup> Adebayo, 'Nigerian-Lebanese Relations Take a New Leap', *The Nation*, 17 March 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Mambula, Characteristics of Migrant Entrepreneurs as Agents of Direct Investment in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Observation of the Lebanese in Nigeria, 200.

<sup>14</sup> The NIS Administrative Officer, Oyo State Command, Mr. A. O. Abubakar, explained that the ambiguity in arriving at the exact figure of immigrants in Ibadan was as a result of the provisions of the ECOWAS Treaty that permits free entry, residence and establishment for all ECOWAS citizens in member states and that Lebanese from neighbouring West African states had been taking advantage of this to reside and invest in the country without proper registration with the immigration office. Thus, the official figure supplied by the NIS represents only that of naturalized Lebanese who have Nigerian passport. For details on the ECOWAS Treaty and the rights of immigrants, see ECOWAS Revised Treaty from <http://www.google.com/pdf>, accessed 14 January 2013. See also P. Okom and J. A. Dad a, 'ECOWAS Citizenship: A Critical Review', *American Journal of Social Issues and Humanities*, 2, 3 (2012): 100-116.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Sammi Mudah, 14 May 2013.

### Lebanese Commercial Activities in Ibadan Prior to 1986

At the beginning of their commercial adventure in Ibadan, Lebanese were chiefly engaged in trade in imported textiles, export produce and road transport.<sup>16</sup> A few diversified into mining, small-scale manufacturing and the entertainment industry.<sup>17</sup> But, retail stores and wholesale trading became the dominant forms of Lebanese economic activity.<sup>18</sup> They were very active as middlemen in the produce trade especially cocoa and palm kernel trade both of which thrived in Southwestern Nigeria.<sup>19</sup> By the 1930s, a few had become prominent buyers and exporters and were dealing directly in the overseas market. Eight organisations belonging to the group were in the 1940s among the twenty-eight firms the West African Produce Board granted licenses to operate in Nigeria.<sup>20</sup> The Zard family (C. Zard, A. K. Zard and N. K. Zard) was prominent at this period.<sup>21</sup> The family's dominant position in trade had first become manifest in 1925 with their purchase of 8,000 tonnes of cocoa out of the total crop of 49,000 for that year.<sup>22</sup> Their versatility led to constant expansion in their businesses. Profits from a successful trade were ploughed back into many other lucrative ventures. The most basic one was selling imported manufactured goods, especially textiles, for which they relied mostly on European firms for supplies.<sup>23</sup> By and large, they performed the important role of supplying 'the status-giving, brightly coloured cloth that African women wear'.<sup>24</sup> Mrs Theresa Sarkis and Mr and Mrs Abdallah were among the important Lebanese traders in the 1940s who owned shops which sold silk and cotton goods at Ibadan.<sup>25</sup> The Lebanese disrupted the existing monopoly hitherto enjoyed by European firms with the effect that the latter eventually left the textile trade in Ibadan entirely.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>16</sup> J. Mars, 'Extra-Territorial Enterprises', in Margery Perham, (ed.), *Mining, Commerce and Finance in Nigeria*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), 100.

<sup>17</sup> See Falola, 'Lebanese Traders in Southwestern Nigeria', 529.

<sup>18</sup> Winder, 'The Lebanese in West Africa', 308.

<sup>19</sup> Falola, 'Lebanese Traders in Southwestern Nigeria', 531.

<sup>20</sup> Mars, 'Extra-Territorial Enterprises', 98.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>22</sup> Yinka Fabowale, 'The Rise and Rise of a Business Dynasty', *The Sun News Online*, 1 August 2008 <http://www.sunnewsonline.com/webpage...8-2008-004.html> (accessed 9 June 2013).

<sup>23</sup> Falola, 'Lebanese Traders in Southwestern Nigeria', 530.

<sup>24</sup> Winder, 'The Lebanese in West Africa'.

<sup>25</sup> 'Osun Div. 1/1/217' National Archives Ibadan (NAI).

<sup>26</sup> Mars, 'Extra-Territorial Enterprises', 100.

The desire to expand and extend their trading network by transporting trade goods from their shops to adjacent markets and villages and thus make their products available to more people eventually led to the establishment of successful transport business.<sup>27</sup> Some Lebanese became so successful in this enterprise that they combined transporting passengers with trade goods.<sup>28</sup> Messrs Saliba A. Zabet and P. Dibou were prominent motor transport owners during the colonial period.<sup>29</sup>

A few successful ones tried their hands in auto spare parts trade and travel agencies.<sup>30</sup> Some also took to property development, with interests in shops, houses and land. Nigerian Estates and Properties in Ibadan was listed as one of the specialists in real estates in the 1950s.<sup>31</sup> Some of the buildings in Lebanon Street at the Old Gbagi market in Ibadan still bear the inscription of Lebanese ownership. A member of the Zard family opened dairies at the initiative of the Agricultural Department to supply fresh milk in the city during the colonial period.<sup>32</sup> Some of them invested in the mining industry, prospecting for alluvial gold and tin.<sup>33</sup> Falola referred to their illicit activities in gold prospecting<sup>34</sup> as well as their moderate participation in the business of money lending.<sup>35</sup>

From 1960, many of them diverted resources into the pools betting and gambling business which they totally dominated until 1980. The earliest of these pools betting promoters were once agents of pools betting companies in London, England; namely Littlewood, Sherman, Venus, and William Hill, all of which were still in operation by 2012. But due to delays in response to claims, Lebanese agents of European pools companies spearheaded the establishment of wholly indigenous pools promotion businesses in Nigeria with quite a number of them located in Ibadan.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>27</sup> O. Oshin, 'Rail and Road Transport Competition in Nigeria, 1904-1950', in Toyin Falola, (ed.), *Modern Nigeria: A Tribute to G. O. Olusanya* (Lagos: Modelor, 1990), 68.

<sup>28</sup> Falola, 'Lebanese Traders in Southwestern Nigeria', 536.

<sup>29</sup> CSO 26/37362, Lebanese Motor Transport Owners, NAI.

<sup>30</sup> 'Nigerian Trade Journal, 1958' and 'Nigerian Trade Journal, 1960: 7', NAI.

<sup>31</sup> Falola, 'Lebanese Traders in Southwestern Nigeria', 536-537.

<sup>32</sup> Mars, 'Extra-Territorial Enterprises,' 100.

<sup>33</sup> Olufemi R. Ekundare, *An Economic History of Nigeria: 1860-1960* (London: Methuen & Co, 1973), 120 & 218 And P. Bower, 'The Mining Industry', in Margery Perham, (ed.), *Mining, Commerce and Finance in Nigeria* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), 31.

<sup>34</sup> Toyin Falola, 'An ounce is enough': The Gold Industry and the Politics of Control in Colonial Western Nigeria, *African Economic History*, 20, (1992): 35, 36, 40.

<sup>35</sup> Toyin Falola, 'My Friend the Shylock: Money-Lenders and their Clients in South-Western Nigeria', *Journal of African History*, 34, 3, (1993): 417.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Nemetallah Aboud, 77 years, Gbagi-Ibadan, 12 June 2013.

The importance of the business and its operators to the economy was reflected in a report which put the loss in revenue to Oyo State government during the six months it was banned in 1979 by the federal government at more than N1 million.<sup>37</sup> At present, only four—Solo Pools, Zeina Pools, Tana Pools and Rimarock Pools—out of the many Lebanese promotion businesses that spearheaded the foundation of pools betting in the city are left to compete with indigenous operators who have since emerged to provide stiff competition to the migrants.

### **Lebanese Business in Ibadan since 1986**

From the 1980s, Lebanese migrants moved their investments into more sophisticated industrial production in many sectors of the Nigerian economy and established remarkable business empires.<sup>38</sup> Through the full maximisation of the opportunities provided by the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986 and their perfect understanding of the international financial system as well as Nigeria's social, political and economic terrain, they became the first set of expatriates to take advantage of the liberalisation of trade in the country.<sup>39</sup> Some consolidated on the gains from their former businesses while many new ones sprouted up, making the Lebanese the leading industrialists and businessmen in the country. Lebanese migrants in Ibadan now hold major controlling shares in many sectors such as agriculture and agro-allied industries; food, confectioneries and beverages; construction and steel works; printing and industrial packaging; soap making, plastic manufacturing and flour mills, among many other small and medium scale businesses like supermarkets, restaurants and groceries stores. From 2003, a few of them began to establish educational institutions. The bulk of the migrants, in fact, began to occupy prominent positions in the Nigerian economic scene.<sup>40</sup> Their important contributions can, therefore, not be discounted.

They were the first group of investors to seize the opportunity of the dissolution of the Nigerian Cocoa Marketing Board, after the introduction

<sup>37</sup> *Nigerian Tribune*, 29 March 1980, 14.

<sup>38</sup> Allan Adebayo, 'Nigerian-Lebanese Relations Take a New Leap', *The Nation*, 17 March 2013.

<sup>39</sup> Ayodele Walker, 'Happy Days are Here Again: Cocoa Farmers, Middlemen, Traders and the Structural Adjustment Programme in Southwestern Nigeria, 1986-1990s', *Africa Today*, 47, 2 (2000): 151.

<sup>40</sup> Adebayo, 'Nigerian-Lebanese Relations Take a New Leap'.

of SAP, to consolidate their hold on the trade in cocoa and expand their operations in Southwestern Nigeria, with Ibadan as a major depot.<sup>41</sup> Following the enactment of Decree 18 of 1986, licenses were issued to two categories of exporters. The first of these comprised of private exporters who were both indigenous and foreign merchants while in the second group were cooperative organisations which sold their cocoa to agents of the Association of Nigerian Cocoa Exporters (ANCE). But due to the huge capital expenses and massive operating cost as well as the high registration fees fixed by the government, the business became a lot more difficult for the indigenous merchants with the consequence that the Lebanese effectively 'hijacked the cocoa trade'.<sup>42</sup> The two most prominent Lebanese firms in the 1980s and early 1990s were Kopek Agriculture, a company owned by the Zard family, and Wasseli Agriculture, which belonged to Joseph Taktouk (who also established B & Y and Altona Pools Companies, two of the strongest organizations in the betting business in Ibadan in the 1980s and 1990s).<sup>43</sup> These large-scale enterprises received massive assistance in the form of huge loans from Nigerian and international banks on the basis of their ability to provide the necessary security and the trust they had built overtime in the payment of loans hitherto collected.<sup>44</sup> With the Lebanese international banking ties—by which they obtained foreign exchange more easily than their Nigerian counterparts, and without government intervention in form of regulation, apparently in deference to the tenets of adjustment—Lebanese firms were advantageously positioned to fully exploit the cocoa trade and register their dominance by bidding up the domestic price of cocoa.<sup>45</sup>

The importance of Lebanese entrepreneurs in Ibadan is in regard to their efforts at 'industrialization' of Ibadan through the establishment of many medium and large-scale manufacturing businesses from the 1980s onwards. Many important industries in Ibadan are currently in the hands of Lebanese migrant community. The most prominent industrialist is the Zard family, the owner of Zartech Foods, Kopek Construction Limited,

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<sup>41</sup> Walker, 'Happy Days are Here Again', 151.

<sup>42</sup> Goke Olatoye, 'Aliens Hijack Cocoa Trade', *Sunday Sketch*, 18 December 1988.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Walker, 'Happy Days are Here Again', 151.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

Steelworks Limited, Kopek Agriculture, Interpak Limited, Energy Foods Company Limited (EFCO), Sweetco Limited and Ibadan International School. This family business empire, with a collective turnover of N45 billion annually<sup>46</sup>, had a modest beginning in the cocoa business started by Assad Zard, the progenitor of today's Zard brothers—Raymond Zard, the Chairman of the organization; Maurice and Eli Zard).<sup>47</sup> With the establishment of Interpak Limited in 1987, they moved into the printing and light paper packaging and converting business.<sup>48</sup> Lithochrome Press is another equally big and strong organisation in the printing and packaging industry in Ibadan owned by the Lebanese group. A list of the clientele of these organisations testifies to their dominance of the printing and packaging industry in Ibadan.<sup>49</sup>

The sector in which the Lebanese recorded the most significant investment and impact is the food, confectioneries and beverages industry. Their importance to the country's economy in this regard comes to the fore when it is considered that this sector is of high economic value to Nigeria. According to Oyedoyin *et al*, this sector contributed about 13 percent of the nominal GDP by 2008, accounting for almost 20 percent of the total number of manufacturing firms in the country.<sup>50</sup> Their ability to make varieties of consumer products available at relatively cheap prices contributed towards ensuring food security especially following the ban by the Nigerian government on the importation of some food products in 2002.<sup>51</sup> Their boldness in embarking on domestic production in spite of the seemingly unfavourable business climate since the beginning of SAP and providing the necessary competition and alternatives to imported products not only helped in making these products readily available, but also helped to stabilize the prices and market for these

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<sup>46</sup> Source: The Official Website of Interpark Limited, <http://www.interpakng.com/about.htm> (accessed 9 June 2013).

<sup>47</sup> Assad Zard was one of the first generation of Lebanese migrants in Nigeria, having arrived in 1920. He started trading in cocoa as a partner with his uncle. See Fabowale, 'The Rise and Rise of a Business Dynasty'.

<sup>48</sup> Source: The Official Website of Interpark Limited.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>50</sup> B. O. Oyedoyin, A. A. Adeniyi, and M. O. Ilori, 'The Policy on Local Raw Material Substitution in the Food and Beverage Industry in Southwestern Nigeria', *Journal of Industrial Research and Technology*, 2, 1 (2008): 76.

<sup>51</sup> Stephen O. Adejoro, 'Important Role of Poultry for Nigerian Food Security', *World Poultry*, 22, 11 (2006): 11.

products. Apart from producing several varieties of finished consumer products, they rendered important contributions to the economy by offering value-added services to other industries. Zartech Farms and Nigerian Eagle Flour Mills (NEFM) produced livestock feeds for animal consumption and made them available to other farms in the community. Their maize grits were sold to breweries in different parts of Nigeria and in other West African countries while its Eagle Flour was popular among bakers and related industries.<sup>52</sup> According to Adejoro, no other farm in Ibadan, before 2005 could compete with Zartech.<sup>53</sup> Research has shown that industries in this sector accomplished much in the area of providing employment opportunities to Nigerians. More importantly, their activities helped to increase the country's GDP and stabilized the currency through their use of local raw materials in manufacturing<sup>54</sup> and reduction of imported products into the country.

Zartech Foods was another important contributor to the food industry. From a small poultry farm in the outskirts of Ibadan city in the 1980s,<sup>55</sup> the company expanded into fisheries, livestock, horticulture and animal feeds<sup>56</sup>, becoming one of the leading agricultural companies in Nigeria with consumer centres in and outside Ibadan.<sup>57</sup> By 2006, the company had an annual output of 7.5 million day-old chicks and many tons of frozen fish.<sup>58</sup> Other livestock products like live and processed chicken and turkey as well as horticultural products such as vegetables and mushrooms were also produced by Zartech Foods. Another important Lebanese-owned organisation in the foods category is Sumal Foods Limited owned by the Nassar family (Souhail Joseph Nassar and Nouhad Joseph Nassar). The company which started in 1981 began to achieve tremendous growth from about 1989 when the two brothers pulled resources together to start Vital Foods and Yale Foods to extend the

<sup>52</sup> Source: Official Website of the Chagoury Group, <http://www.chagourygroup.com/industrial/nigeria-eagle-flour-mills> (accessed 9 June 2013).

<sup>53</sup> Adejoro, 'Zartech Farm Revolutionizes', 25.

<sup>54</sup> Dickson D. Ajayi, 'Recent Trends and Patterns in Nigeria's Industrial Development', *Africa Development*, 32, 2 (2007): 145.

<sup>55</sup> Stephen Adejoro, 'Zartech Farms Revolutionizes', *World Poultry*, 21, 3 (2005): 24.

<sup>56</sup> Yahaya Mijinyawa, and Nurudeen Samuel Lawal, 'Treatment Efficiency and Economic Benefit of Zartech Poultry Slaughter House Waste Water Treatment Plant, Ibadan, Nigeria', *Scientific Research and Essay*, 3, 6 (2008): 220.

<sup>57</sup> Adejoro, 'Important Role of Poultry for Nigerian Food Security', 11.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

company's production capacities in such products as biscuits, wafers, chewing gum and, lately, bread making.<sup>59</sup>

The strength and value of Seven-Up Bottling Company in the country's economy was brought to the fore by Forrest who affirmed that the organization is one of the manufacturing organizations in Nigeria that not only survived SAP, but also extended its market shares through acquisitions and new investments.<sup>60</sup> It is one of the oldest having been established on October 1 1960 by a Lebanese-Nigerian, Mohammed El-Khalil, who migrated into the country in 1926.<sup>61</sup> The company established a plant in Ibadan in the 1980s to effectively capture the market in Southwestern Nigeria. It was able to maintain its investment profile through the difficult years of the country's economy when other manufacturing companies either pulled out or struggled to make headway. This perseverance was attributed to the backing it received from the multinational parent company, Pepsi USA, which took over Seven Up international in the early 1990s.<sup>62</sup>

Nigerian Eagle Flour Mills, apparently the only functioning flour mill of its type in Ibadan, established in the 1980s by the Chagoury brothers, another of the most prominent and richest Lebanese families in Nigeria, produce varieties of staple foods like wheat flour, semolina, wheat bran, maize grits, corn flour and corn bran. By 2012, its pasta plant had become the largest in Africa and one of the largest in the world.<sup>63</sup> With other Lebanese organisations like Sword Sweets, Energy Foods Company and Bronco Chicken, among others, the Lebanese assumed a leadership position in the foods, confectioneries and beverages industries in Ibadan during the period under study.

Although on a relatively medium scale, when compared to Julius Berger and China Civil Engineering Construction Company (CCECC), some Lebanese firms have emerged as notable construction firms especially in

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<sup>59</sup> Source: The Official Website of Sumal Foods Limited, <http://www.sumalfoods.com/about-us.html> (9 accessed June 2013).

<sup>60</sup> Tom Forrest, *Politics and Economic Development in Nigeria* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1993), 213.

<sup>61</sup> Institute of Developing Economies-Japan External Trade Organization, 'Seven-Up Bottling Company', [http://www.ide.go.jp/English/Data/Africa\\_file/companyNigeria06.html](http://www.ide.go.jp/English/Data/Africa_file/companyNigeria06.html) (accessed 16 June 2013).

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Source: The Official website of Nigerian Flour Mills, <http://www.chagourygroup.com/industrial/nigerian-eagle-flour-mills> (accessed 9 June 2013).

Ibadan.<sup>64</sup> Two of such firms are Kopek Constructions Limited, a branch of the Zard Group, and Alaya Constructions and their partner organisations. Both have remained prominent going by the number of government and private jobs they attracted and executed in the region before 2012. They were particularly favoured in the award of government jobs in the region, ahead of indigenous and other foreign construction firms. Their ability to readily secure these contracts reflects the unscrupulous lobbying members of the group are known for in their dealings with the Nigerian political class, although their rapid improvement and quality delivery on the job cannot be discounted.<sup>65</sup> This has, in fact, been emphasised by Odediran *et al*, who identified Kopek as one of the major construction companies whose activities forecast the general direction of the economy.<sup>66</sup> Alaya has particularly enjoyed huge patronage from the government of Oyo State as indicated below.

TABLE 1

*Contracts executed by Alaya Construction Company in Oyo State as at 2012<sup>67</sup>*

Contract Executed	Client
Construction of Ibadan secular road	Oyo State Ministry of Works & Transport
Rehabilitation of Apapa Odan-Iware Fiditi Road	"
Rehabilitation & asphalt surfacing of Old Ife Road	"
Dualization of Mokola-Sango-UI/Ojoo Road	"
Dulaization of Challenge-Odoona Elewe Apata Roa	"
Construction of Iresa-apa-Ilajue Road	"

Going from the table, this Lebanese construction company successfully 'hijacked' many of the government contract jobs.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>64</sup> S. J. Odediran, B. F. Adeyinka, O. A. Opatunji and K. O. Morakinyo, 'Business Structure of Indigenous Firms in the Nigerian Construction Industry', *International Journal of Business Research & Management*, 3, 5 (2012): 256.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Bassey Etim Ise, 44 year, Senior Accountant/Manager, Arcada Construction Company, 6 June 2013, See also Tom Forrest, *The Advance of African Capital* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 25; and Mambula, *Characteristics of Migrant Entrepreneurs as Agents of Direct Investment in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 201.

<sup>66</sup> Odediran (*et. al.*), 'Business Structure of Indigenous Firms in the Nigerian Construction Industry', 255-256.

<sup>67</sup> Source: The Official website of Alaya Construction Company, [www.alayaconstruction.com](http://www.alayaconstruction.com) (accessed 23 June 2013).

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

Three of the leading plastic manufacturing companies in the country, namely Altak, Black Horse and Cedar Plastics, all based in Ibadan, are owned by Lebanese. These companies have introduced different designs of plastic chairs and tables, which were unprecedented before their emergence in the 1990s. Other businesses in which members of the group had become prominent in Ibadan by 2012 include furniture making, steel works, groundnut oil production, soap making and water bottling. Supermarkets established by them provided a wide range of imported and locally made goods. Their unending versatility in investment has also led to the establishment of educational institutions that 'serve both the local and expatriate communities'.<sup>69</sup>

The business success of Lebanese entrepreneurs has had some significant impact on the social and economic spheres of Ibadan. One, however, that deserves a special treatment is their efforts at providing employments to a great number of youths, by which they helped to reduce the crime rate in the society. As Adejoro has argued, part of the objectives of setting up the Zard Group was to provide job opportunities for youths to keep them from violence.<sup>70</sup> It is estimated that over 53,000 Nigerians worked in Lebanese-owned industries in Ibadan by 2012, apart from many others in the super-markets and other business ventures.<sup>71</sup> When Zaterch Foods started in 1994, it employed 180 local staff. By 2006, the number of Nigerians working in Zartech Foods had exceeded 3,000.<sup>72</sup> This is besides the many thousands working in the other companies under the Zard Group. The figure available for Nigerian Eagle Flour Mill indicates that by 2012 more than 12,000 indigenous people earned their living directly and indirectly from the company.<sup>73</sup> Equally large in terms of staff strength is Sumal Foods Plc, which had on its pay-roll about 8,000

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Bassey Etim Ise, 44 years, Senior Accountant/Manager, Arcada Construction Company, Oluyole Ibadan; and Benson Inyang, 40 years, Staff, Sumal Foods Ltd., Oluyole, Ibadan, 6 June 2013.

<sup>70</sup> Abbey Trosky, 'Zartech Workers Agitate for Improved Welfare Conditions as they seek to Change their Union Affiliation', Democratic Socialist Movement Online (2011), <http://www.socialistnigeria.org/print.php?text=1861> (accessed 21 November 2013).

<sup>69</sup> Source: The Official Website of Ibadan International School, <http://www.ibadaninternationalschool.com> (accessed 22 June 2013).

<sup>70</sup> Adejoro, 'Zartech Farms Revolutionizes', 24.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Sammi Mudah, 73 years, Director, Mouka Foam Depot, Ibadan, 14 May 2013.

<sup>72</sup> Adejoro, 'Important Role of Poultry for Nigerian Food Security', 11.

<sup>73</sup> Source: Official Website of Flour Mills of Nigeria.

Nigerians, although majority of these were 'casual workers'. Apart from providing jobs for a large number of people, these companies performed the important task of adding to the skills and knowhow of their workers through constant training and retraining.<sup>74</sup> This singular contribution of the Lebanese is of great importance in measuring their impact in the society. It has been mooted that their expulsion from the city will massively increase the unemployment situation with grave consequences for human security.<sup>75</sup> The working conditions of Nigerians employed by Lebanese firms attenuate this all important contribution.

A number of researches revealed that the working conditions of most Nigerians employed in Lebanese companies until 2012 was below standard.<sup>76</sup> Lebanese industrialists exploiting the post-SAP structural imbalances in Nigeria's economy, it appears, turned their indigenous employees into 'slave labourers', willfully denying them benefits enjoyed by workers in other large organizations like theirs. There were regular complaints of inhuman treatment and disregard for the fundamental rights of indigenous workers by the managements of these organisations.<sup>77</sup> Most workers complained of being employed on contract basis and, therefore, not entitled to such benefits as gratuity or retirement package no matter the number of years spent in service.<sup>78</sup> No matter how qualified a Nigerian employee may be, he would not earn as much as the least paid Lebanese in any of the companies. According to Inyang, any Nigerian who earned up to N70,000 monthly must have worked for up to 15 years or more, irrespective of his qualifications. Ordinary factory workers were paid far less, their salaries ranging between N18,000 and N24,000.<sup>79</sup> The more qualified Nigerians were seldom given management positions in the organisations because they were believed to be dishonest. Because of the laxity of the Nigerian laws, due to the high level of corruption in the country, the Lebanese always bribed their way out of any situation that arose from these abuses.<sup>80</sup> Radical union leaders have been known to be

<sup>74</sup> Source: The Official Website of the Seven-Up Bottling Company, <http://www.sevenup.or/home> (accessed 22 June 2013).

<sup>77</sup> Public Complaint Half Hour. Radio Nigeria, Ibadan, 1 January 2012, <http://www.radionigeriaibadan.com/programme/audio/214-public-complaint-half-hour> (accessed 9 June 2013).

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Akinyemi Oladunjoye, 50 years, Staff, Foodies Supermarket, Ibadan, 10 June 2013.

<sup>79</sup> Interview with Benson Inyang, 40 years, Staff, Sumal Foods, Ibadan, 25 June 2013.

<sup>80</sup> 104 Mambula, *Characteristics of Migrant Entrepreneurs as Agents of Direct Investment in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 202.

sacked, along with compromised labour union leaders, as a way of muzzling the rest of the work force from fighting for their rights and interests in the face of oppressions and exploitations.<sup>81</sup>

The capitalist tendencies of Lebanese entrepreneurs must be understood in the context of SAP and globalisation both of which expect governments of developing countries to encourage free trade and foreign investment and thus lessen their interventions in the economy.<sup>82</sup> The unfavourable situations in the factories persisted because the state and federal governments neither provided enough jobs for its citizens nor were ready to protect them from labour related oppressions.<sup>83</sup> The problem, thus, became one of systemic failure which the Lebanese exploited. That thousands of Nigerians continued to work, and many more applied daily for employment in these factories in spite of reported ill treatment against local workers during the period of this study, show that the Lebanese efforts to ease the unemployment situation in the country was well acknowledged.<sup>84</sup>

Attitude of Lebanese migrants to their Nigerian employees actually predated the Structural Adjustment Programme, but only became more pronounced thereafter. As Falola has shown, workers employed by Lebanese traders in colonial Southwestern Nigeria were paid low salaries and their conditions of service were appalling. They enjoyed 'no annual salary increment, no annual leave, and no gratuity or pension rights... The clerks ... suffer[ed] from rough handling, beating, kicking, insults and more'.<sup>85</sup> Winder and Bierwirth have both argued that the Lebanese naturally exhibit a feeling of cultural arrogance and superiority over Africans hence their unscrupulous treatment of indigenous people.<sup>86</sup> Bierwirth noted that the Lebanese saw themselves as 'hard-working,

<sup>81</sup> Abbey Trostky, 'Re-instate victimized trade unionist: DSM comrade sacked by Zartech for fighting for workers interests'. The managements of most of these companies were also often guilty of preferential treatment among their workers. Some of the workers that were used for irregular activities or to intimidate the other workers were often better remunerated by the organizations. However, it must be mentioned that the Lebanese always appreciate and specially reward workers who are skilled and prove 'indispensable' to their business.

<sup>82</sup>See, for instance, Alan J. Spector, 'Globalization or imperialism? Neoliberal Globalization in the Age of Capitalist Imperialism', *International Review of Modern Sociology*, (2007): 33.

<sup>83</sup> Basse Etim Ise, interview cited.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Toyin Falola, 'Lebanese Traders in Southwestern Nigeria', 534.

<sup>86</sup> Winder, 'The Lebanese in West Africa', 318-321; and Chris Bierwirth, 'The Lebanese Communities of Cote d'Ivoire', *African Affairs*, (1999): 94.

innovative and natural businessmen... [but] generally characterise Africans as undependable, lazy and ignorant about business.<sup>87</sup> Winder explained that Lebanese use the Arabic term, 'abd' (or its plural form 'abid') in reference to Africans.<sup>88</sup>

It is, therefore, plausible that the continuous ill-treatment of indigenous African workers by the Lebanese derived from the latter's perception of Africans as mere labourers and servants. Many other Arabic (and sometimes English and Yoruba) words were repeatedly used to insult and reprove indigenous employees. The root of these irresponsibilities by the Lebanese is traceable to the condition they found Africans in during the colonial period and the fact that they were accorded a superior status to Africans by respective colonial administrations. This explains why an average Lebanese entrepreneur in Ibadan, decades after the colonial period, expected his workers to address him as 'master'.<sup>89</sup>

The tendency to exploit Nigerian employees in their home country is a reflection of what obtained in Lebanon. According to Hilal and Samy, Lebanon has refused to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. Neither does the Lebanese constitution include any legal provision that clarifies the status of refugees and asylum seekers. It also does not report to any international body about its treatment of migrant workers in the country.<sup>90</sup> Foreign nationals employed in Lebanon after its civil war in 1948, according to Jureidini, were contracted to work for wages lower than the minimum wage, without social security or health insurance cover.<sup>91</sup> There are no laws in Lebanon relating to the protection of migrant workers' rights and benefits that Lebanese nationals enjoy.<sup>92</sup> Exploitation of non-Lebanese workers is inherent in the Lebanese and not just peculiar to Lebanese in Africa alone.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Bierwirth, 'The Lebanese Communities of Cote d'Ivoire', 94.

<sup>88</sup> Winder, 'The Lebanese in West Africa', 318-321.

<sup>89</sup> Some Nigerian workers still refer to their Lebanese employers as 'master' in their conversations with them.

<sup>90</sup> L. Hilal, and S. Samy, *Asylum and Migration in the Mashrek*. Country Fact Sheet: Lebanon. (Copenhagen: Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network, 2008): 3.

<sup>91</sup> R. Jureidini, 'Women Domestic Migrant Workers in Lebanon', in *International Migration Papers* 48 (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2002): 2.

<sup>92</sup> Paul Tabar, 'Lebanon: A Country of Emigration and Immigration' (Beirut: LAU Press, 2010), 13.

<sup>93</sup> The correlate of this is the Biblical account of the exploitation of Jacob by Laban, believed to be the descendant of the modern day Lebanese and from whom the country derived its name. See *The Holy Bible*, Genesis 29: 1-30 and Colbert C. Held, *Lebanon (Country)*, *Microsoft Encarta [DVD]*, (2009).

### Social Networks of Lebanese Migrants in Ibadan

Lebanese migrants have, no doubt, demonstrated an attachment to their host communities since their appearance in the West African region. As Akyeampong noted, 'the Lebanese came [to Africa] in search of a home and nationality. They came to settle, not sojourn ... and [have] displayed signs of permanent settlement'.<sup>94</sup> But this attachment to West African states, and especially its peoples, is particularly tenuous. It is 'an attachment to a place and not to a government or a political community'.<sup>95</sup> Research has shown that the Lebanese distinguish between Lebanon—their place of origin, and, Africa—a place of residence.<sup>96</sup> If indeed they enjoyed cordial relationship with their African hosts in the early years of migration, this declined when the migrants began to prosper and increase in number.<sup>97</sup> They then became apathetic towards their host communities, living in almost temporary isolation from the indigenous people. Because of cultural, economic and even racial factors, Lebanese interactions with their Ibadan hosts also became tense.<sup>98</sup> Undoubtedly, Lebanese remained more committed to their home country<sup>99</sup>, preferred to communicate in Arabic, send their children to Lebanon for schooling and marriage and showed little interest in local affairs. They did not strive for 'belongingness, participation and reciprocity'<sup>100</sup>, but were primarily interested in their economic survival.

Until 2012, Lebanese in Ibadan lived separately, in secluded residential quarters, from the indigenous population. At the beginning of their sojourn in the city, they resided mostly around the Old Gbagi market where their

<sup>94</sup> Akyeampong, 'Race, Identity and Citizenship in Black Africa', 303.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

<sup>97</sup> Fuad I. Khuri,

'The African-Lebanese Mulattoes of West Africa: A Racial Frontier', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 41, 2 (1968): 91.

<sup>98</sup> This, according to Aboud, became more complicated after the arrest of three Lebanese in Kano and Abuja in 2013 in connection with weapons trafficking and stockpiling. The three were linked to the Hezbollah terrorist group in Lebanon. For further information, see <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/national/137026-nigeria-arrests-three-suspected-lebanese-over-weapons-trafficking-stockpiling.html> (accessed 23 November 2013).

<sup>99</sup> Visits to Lebanese residences in the course of gathering information for this work revealed their close connection to their home country. Events in Lebanon were regularly monitored through satellite television and the internet. See also Adebayo, 'Transnational Networks of the Lebanese-Nigerian Diaspora', 72.

<sup>100</sup> 'Why a non-black identity – the Lebanese– as part of Nigeria's national polity has been problematic' (CERS Working Paper, 2012).

shops and offices were located. While Falola considers it a strategy for successful business management<sup>101</sup>; there is no doubt that this accentuated their resolve to relate only with their kith and kin and maintain some distance from the indigenous people. In latter times, they were found mostly in the choice government reserved quarters located in Onireke, Oluyole and Ring-Road areas of Ibadan, where again contacts were limited to few elites in the city.

The Lebanese adhered to the traditional practice of keeping their businesses within the family circle. Their fear that Africans could not be trusted in business dealings, according to Falola, was one reason for the strict organisation of Lebanese businesses around the family.<sup>102</sup> This long-standing mutual distrust has, therefore, prevented positive business collaborations between Lebanese and Nigerian businessmen.<sup>103</sup>

Another index for assessing the social relationship between Lebanese and Nigerians is marriage. Lebanese in Ibadan generally avoided marrying Nigerians, sticking to the practice of endogamy, thereby reinforcing the argument that in Africa they were 'separate and aloof'.<sup>104</sup> Lebanese parents arranged marriages for their children with other Lebanese families and most of these took place in Lebanon.<sup>105</sup> Although there are evidence of Lebanese men who kept local women as concubines, marriage to local women had been few. Meanwhile, they viciously opposed their women getting involved with local men. Few that dared to marry Nigerians were ridiculed and ostracised<sup>106</sup> and children from mixed marriages were seldom accepted by the Lebanese community. Like Winder correctly noted, mixed marriages of this kind were only common among the not-so-successful Lebanese.<sup>107</sup> There were reports of neglect and denial of benefits and entitlements to Nigerian women and their children by organisations their Lebanese husbands and fathers worked for before their demise.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Falola, 'Lebanese Traders in Southwestern Nigeria', 532.

<sup>102</sup> Toyin Falola, 'Lebanese Traders in Southwestern Nigeria', 532. See also Mambula, 'Characteristics of Migrant Entrepreneurs as Agents of Direct Investment in Sub-Saharan Africa', 201-202.

<sup>103</sup> Mambula, 'Characteristics of Migrant Entrepreneurs as Agents of Direct Investment in Sub-Saharan Africa', 210.

<sup>104</sup> Akyeampong, 'Race, Identity and Citizenship in Black Africa', 300.

<sup>105</sup> I. Fuad Khuri, 'Kinship, Emigration and Trade Partnership among the Lebanese of West Africa', *Journal of the International African Institute*, 35, 4 (1965): 186.

<sup>106</sup> The parents of Johnny Nasir were much opposed to his marriage to a Nigerian woman. One of the Lebanese men interviewed said he had already made arrangements to find spouses for his children in Lebanon despite the fact that they were both born and raised in Nigeria.

<sup>107</sup> Winder, 'The Lebanese in West Africa', 321.

<sup>108</sup> The case of John Fadoul who until his death in the 1990s worked for Tana Pools, Ibadan, and the neglect and denial of benefits and entitlements to his Nigerian wife and children are well known.

Cultural differences between Lebanese and Nigerians was among the reasons adduced for Lebanese lack of interest in marrying Nigerians. According to Issa, the Lebanese were wary of marrying local women because they believed they were not always faithful to their husbands; 'and if they cannot be faithful to their Nigerian husbands, how can they be faithful to foreigners', he remarked.<sup>109</sup> He also disclosed that the culture of marrying a Nigerian woman 'with her entire family'<sup>110</sup> is a practice Lebanese have never been comfortable with. Yet, the same practice was observed in Lebanese marriages. To Akyeampong, however, the tradition of family governmentality or 'utilitarian familialism' accounts for Lebanese insistence on marriages among kin groups in order to reproduce family businesses and keep overhead costs at a minimum.<sup>111</sup> By marrying people of same religious denomination and from the same place of origin, they reproduce Lebanese kinship structures and enforce ethnic boundaries already established in Lebanon.<sup>112</sup>

Lastly, the religious orientations of Lebanese was a major baulk in their relationship with the local people. Lebanese traditionally preserve their separate identity in the matter of religion. According to Winder, this phenomenon has its root in Lebanese attachment to extremely strong religious rites which is not only practiced at home but 'exported all over the world'.<sup>113</sup> Lebanese Christians, for example, build Maronite churches everywhere they settle preferring to worship as a separate community instead of congregating with Christians of their host communities.<sup>114</sup> For several years, Lebanese Christians in Ibadan worshipped together with locals at St. Mary's Catholic Church, Oke-Padre.<sup>115</sup> Their desire to preserve a separate identity led to the building of the Lebanese Maronite Church,

<sup>109</sup> Interview with Pierre Issa, 55 years, Staff, Sumal Foods Limited, Oluyole-Ibadan, 20 September 2013.

<sup>110</sup> He referred to the practice in some Nigerian communities that view marriage between two people as one that connects them to their larger families. But this practice is equally well pronounced in Lebanese social practice. Also, sponsorship of in-laws by rich Lebanese was commonly reported in the history of their migration from Lebanon.

<sup>111</sup> Akyeampong, 'Race, Identity and Citizenship in Black Africa', 300, 307-309.

<sup>112</sup> 'Why a Non-Black Identity – the Lebanese – as Part of Nigeria's National Polity has been Problematic'.

<sup>113</sup> Winder, 'The Lebanese in West Africa', 321.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.* See also Adebayo, 'Transnational Networks of the Lebanese-Nigerian Diaspora', 73.

<sup>115</sup> Pierre Issa, interview cited.

'*Saydet El Bichara*' or Our Lady of Annunciation Catholic Church in Ibadan in 2000. With a clergy composed of Lebanese nationals, Lebanese Christians in Ibadan have a liturgy that is in consonance with their Maronite religious practice. On the other hand, Lebanese Muslims in Ibadan, hardly prayed together with local Muslims in the mosques except perhaps on special occasions.<sup>116</sup> By and large, a greater percentage of the migrants, both Christians and Muslims, hardly take religion very seriously.

### Conclusion

This study examined the contributions of Lebanese migrants in Ibadan to the social and economic development of the city especially since the 1980s. As has been demonstrated, the Lebanese, through a good understanding of the intricacies of the international financial system in the years after SAP and their knowledge of the cultural, economic and political landscape of Nigeria, established themselves as leading businessmen and industrialists in the city of Ibadan well before 2012.

Their impact on Ibadan city in terms of economic development has been rather profound. This was especially noticeable in their provision of employment opportunities to thousands of Nigerians. Although the conditions of service in Lebanese industries during the period under survey fell below acceptable standards, their efforts in providing employment nonetheless emphasized the magnitude of their investments in the city of Ibadan. On the social plane, Lebanese attitude to their hosts appeared unfriendly situating them within the class of global exploitive entrepreneurs. By and large, the Lebanese in Ibadan, like their kith and kin in other parts of West Africa, continued to show their utmost loyalty to their home country while doing the minimal that would aid the preservation of their economic interests in their host community.

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*