

THE WEST AFRICAN RESPONSE TO TRADE INTEGRATION: 1880-1940

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SUMMARY

Few studies have explored the process of internal trade integration in Africa. In that light, this dissertation examines the extent of growth and patterns of internal trade from the period when West Africa was under high Western domination; 1880-1940. Using mainly British West African statistical and descriptive sources, it presents an analysis of both foreign and internal trade in chronologically and spatially comparable form. These findings are then used as lessons on the process of internal trade integration, to understand the dynamics of local and regional economies. It emerges that the scrutiny of recorded and uncaptured data affords a vastly improved historical understanding of local and regional economies. The analysis indicates that the actual volume of internal trade in West Africa must have been around 18%-20% of recorded foreign and internal trade, markedly higher than previously assumed. Institutional and infrastructural frameworks that bolstered internal trade include (1) innovations in the network of regional and local merchants, (2) the transportation system, (3) currency and financial services, and (4) fiscal policies. A key effect of the land-borne transportation and fiscal policies emergent during the period was the 'de-regionalization' and internalization of trade. This thesis suggests that continued adaptability of local and regional economic forces assisted the sustenance of trade responses in regional integration while emergent trade routes offered a degree of economic unity across political boundaries, partially integrating socio-ecological spheres. The dynamism of local and regional trade underscores the need for deeper appreciation and understanding the role of indigenous agencies in local and regional economic development as well as a re-consideration of the view that privileges external trade as the source of growth of global trade.