

## **The Nigerian Motor Transporters since the 1920s**

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### **Abstract**

*The road transport sector today constitutes one of the greatest employers of labour in the Nigerian economy. The impact of road transporters can be felt in every aspect of the Nigerian society. Yet previous studies on road transportation in Nigeria have largely concentrated on the infrastructural aspects of the transport industry. This paper differs from previous studies because its focus is on the operators of the system (i.e. the road transporters) and the ways in which they have impacted on the economy right from the 1920s when the use of motor transportation became generalized in Nigeria. The study depends on archival documents and these are supplemented with oral evidence and some secondary source materials. The paper finds that the road transporters have played very significant roles in the Nigerian economy, leading to the conclusion that they can indeed serve as agents of national economic development.*

**Key words:** Nigerian, Motor, Transporters, 1920s

### **1.0 Introduction**

Scholars generally agree that transportation occupies an important place in the process of economic development (Norton, 1963; Camemark, 1979; Mallon, 1980; Olanrewaju and Falola, 1986; Olukaju, 1996). For this reason, researchers have shown considerable interest in transportation studies. In Nigeria however, previous studies on the subject of road transportation have tended to concentrate on the physical and infrastructural aspects of the transport system. For example, Njoku (1978/79) and Olubomehin (2001) looked at the physical development of road infrastructure in Eastern and Western Nigeria respectively. The other aspects of road transportation that researchers have studied include the issue of rail road competition (Oshin, 1990, 1991), the geography of road transportation (Hay, 1968) and road transportation as a business enterprise (Hawkins, 1958). The exception to this trend is the study by Drummond-Thompson (1993) which focused on the rise of entrepreneurs in Nigerian motor transport industry. In spite of this, we can still say that there has been a general neglect of the study of the role and impact of the Nigerian motor road transporters. Today, the road transporters in Nigeria number over one and a half million people. Given their sheer number, the group exerts a considerable influence on the country's national life. Yet this impact is often over-looked. This paper attempts to fill this gap. It provides a historical documentation of the roles and impact of the motor road transporters on the Nigerian economy since the early decades of the colonial period. Our concern in this paper is not to talk about how roads were constructed or how road construction was financed. We are also not concerned about road networks or the vehicles which plied the roads; rather we are looking at the operators in the road transport sector, their organization and impact on the economy. This is an important way in which this paper differs from previous studies on road transportation in Nigeria.

### **2.0 The Road Transporters during the Colonial Period**

Although the first roads in Nigeria were built within the first decade of the twentieth century, road transportation did not become generalized until the 1920s. The first road transport services in Nigeria were provided by the colonial government and a few private individuals. In southern Nigeria, these included services provided by the railway motor transport and the Egba United Government. The situation was not different in northern Nigeria where the railway motor transport department became established in Zaria in the early 1920s.

There, the railway motor service transported hides and skins, cotton and groundnuts from the districts lying to the north and west of the Zaria-Kano line to the railway stations (Oshin, 1990: 66). As the provision of road transport services were then limited more or less to the government, private road transporters were very few indeed. However, things began to change as from the mid-1920s because from that time the colonial government began an aggressive programme of road development having realized that road transportation held the key to the exploitation of the material resources of the interior of Nigeria. Indeed, by 1929/30, the road maintained by the Nigerian government outside township roads was estimated at 3,606 miles compared to 2,000 miles in 1914 (Ekundare, 1960:144). The expansion of road infrastructure brought more people into the road transport business. Although the road transporters did not, as at this time, operate within any defined organization, they nevertheless impacted on the economy in many important ways.

The first discernable way in which the motor transporters impacted on the society was that they constituted an important segment within the economy. Such was their growing importance that by 1934 they formed a union, the Nigerian Road Transport Union. We do not have detailed information on the structure and *modus operandis* of this early motor transport union but we know that the Union had offices in several cities in the country. The formation of a motor transport union was a new development in colonial Nigeria as such never previously existed. The union was meant to defend and further the collective interests of the motor transporters within the colonial setting. Thus in the 1930s, it fought and successfully resisted attempts by the colonial government to impose higher duties on vehicles in areas where road transport was competing with the railway (Oshin, 1990:75-77). The early motor transporters in Nigeria were concentrated in the Southern part of the country. Many of them were in South Western Nigeria and a few in the Eastern part of the country. In Lagos, the leading transporter was W.A. Dawodu while Messrs S.O. Ojo and Maiyegun operated in Abeokuta. From his base in Lagos, Dawodu expanded his transport services to the environs of Kano in northern Nigeria. Apart from being a large vehicle importer, he also ran a freight service with eight two-ton trucks. Another early Nigerian transporter was Dr. Orisadipe Obasa of Ikeja, Lagos. He had buses and vans which operated in Lagos in 1915. Obasa's wife named Olajumoke was also reputed to be a wealthy road transport owner. But apart from the Dawodu and Obasas, records also talk of Anfanni Motors owned by an African woman who was in the business of hiring out car and trucks in Lagos (Drummond-Thompson, 1993:54-55).

Away from developments in Lagos, there were twenty-one lorries operating in Egba division alone, in addition to many others working in the district, but which were registered outside the province. In Ijebu, there were two leading transporters, namely T.A. Odotola and Obafemi Awolowo. Indeed, there were at least thirty lorries operating in Ijebu province in 1924. Most of the roads were well served by motor transport services. Many of the transport services in Ijebu and Egba divisions were being run by private motor transporters.

Oyo and Ondo provinces were not left out in the services of motor transporters. Mr. Salami Agbaje was a leading motor transporter based in Ibadan, Oyo province. Agbaje had a successful transport enterprise and the operation of his business was cited as one of the reasons for the closure of the government motor services in Southern Nigeria. By the 1930s Agbaje was still running his transport business in Oyo province and he was said to have participated in the 1937 general motor strike (Drummond-Thompson, 1993:55). By 1921, there were 174 motor vehicles in Oyo province and by 1924, the number had increased to 504.

The eastern and other regions of Nigeria were not left out by the activities of the motor transporters. In the East, one of the earliest transport undertakings was Messrs Summers Transport of Aba. This was a private European undertaking established between 1918 and 1919. Its operation covered the whole of the Eastern provinces. Another motor transporter which emerged in this region was Messrs Ojukwu Transport. The motor transporters in eastern Nigeria carried bunker coal from Enugu to the river fleet at Onitsha where they competed for a share of the palm produce, and carried groundnuts and other produce from Katsina to Kano. They also carried passengers and cotton in competition with the lorries of the Railway Road Motor Service.

Drummond-Thompson (1993:55) writes that one Chief Elijah Henshaw also operated in Eastern Nigeria in the region between Oron, Opobo and Ikot Ekpene providing motor transport services which included government contract for mail, loads and passengers. Another transport outfit in the Eastern Nigeria was M.N. Effiom's Transport Company which by 1928 had "a considerable fleet of lorries" (Njoku, 1978:492).

In the mid-west region, there was Messrs Armels Transport of Benin which ran mail contract from Osogbo to Asaba while in the northern region, Messrs Arab of Jos carried mails to Maiduguri. Apart from transporting mails, the transporters generally provided rural and inter-city services (Oshin 1990:69).

In northern Nigeria, record talks of T.H. Jackson of Lagos who in 1913 rented ten plots in Kano for the purposes of motor transport. There were also applications for plots from a large number of non-Europeans for the purposes of setting up motor transport in the 'Sabon Gari' area of the northern region (Drummond-Thompson, 1993:55). While the private transporters were busy with their operations, the government railway motor transport continued to operate in the 1920s and 30s in the northern region. Indeed, by 1932 it had in its fleet of motor vehicles 24 lorries and 20 trailers. Many of the vehicles reportedly plied the "unpaved roads of Northern Nigeria" (Oshin 1990:68).

Our account of the activities of the Nigerian motor road transporters will be incomplete without mentioning the roles played by some foreigners who were also involved in the motor transport business. The foreigners were mainly Syrians and the Lebanese and a few Europeans. Although they were not Nigerians, they constituted a significant part of the road transport sector. To that extent, a look at their activities would give us a more complete picture of the role and impact of the transporters on the indigenous economy during the colonial period.

Whereas the African transporters rarely owned more than three or four trucks at a time, the Levantines ran a fleet of vehicles which "in the thirties, were in the range of thirty or more vehicles apiece" (Oshin 1990:68). Describing the Levantine transporters, Oshin observes that they had offices, yards, and sheds that were equipped as maintenance shops; in some cases, they had warehouses and transit sheds. They also had tractors and trucks drawing trailers. The lorries of the Syrians and Lebanese were the largest and heaviest load-carriers on the roads....They hauled heavy traffic between Lagos and Ibadan and worked from Kano and Jos to Maiduguri ... (Oshin, 1990:68).

One of the European road transport enterprises named Weekes Transport expanded its operation from eastern Nigeria to Osogbo, Oyo province in 1927. Weekes was later sold to Beeres Transport Company in 1934. This operated between Ibadan and Abeokuta, Ife, Ijebu Ode and Ogbomosho; its operations also extended to Oyo and Ede. Several other European exporting firms which had become established in western Nigeria during this period had lorries for transporting produce and distributing imported goods. From the above analysis, we can see that motor transporters contributed to the transformation of the economic terrain of Nigeria, thereby supporting the thesis that the motor transporters played an important role as an agent of economic change in colonial Nigeria.

Another important way in which the road transporters impacted on the economy was that their services paved the way for the European trading firms to move from the coast into the hinterland of Nigeria. From 1920, many of the firms started opening shops in different parts of Nigeria.

In western Nigeria, Messrs John Holt and Miller Brothers which had been in the Ijebu lagoon market of Ejinrin since 1917 moved to the in-land town of Ijebu Ode and opened a store there in 1923. Further in-land, Messrs G.B. Ollivant and Paterson Zochonis started business in Oyo in 1921. Between 1923 and 1924, Messrs MacIver Limited and MacNeil Limited operated in parts of Ondo province. In northern Nigeria, the British Cotton Growing Association took advantage of roads which had been built to move their operations into that part of the country. The presence of the European trading firms injected life to the economic activities of country. The firms acted as agents for the exploitation of the agricultural wealth of the region. They purchased produce through their African agents who acted as middlemen between the farmers and the exporting companies. They also distributed imported merchandise to smaller markets in villages through these African middlemen. In this way, these trading companies intensified the economic activities in their areas of operation.

Related to the above is the way in which the activities of the motor transporters aided the evacuation of agricultural produce from the Nigerian interior to the coast. From the 1920s, many of the major towns in western and eastern Nigeria had been linked by road. Roads had also been constructed in many parts of northern Nigeria. These roads were built to link the railway, for the railway ran vertically from Lagos through Ibadan, Ilorin, Jebba to the northern part of the country. Another line ran vertically from the eastern region to the northern provinces. The roads were constructed as feeder roads. They were meant to bring produce from the interior to the railway stations. In Western Nigeria, these roads made it possible for the lagoon or coastal markets to receive commodities from the hinterland.

From these lagoon markets produce got transported to Lagos for onward shipment overseas. From the lagoon markets also, imported goods found their way to various markets located in the interior. From Northern Nigeria, the railway brought produce which both the traditional transport system and road transportation had delivered to the railheads. Motor transporters contributed to the conduct of internal trade in Nigeria during the colonial days. The transporters had fixed days of the week when they went to the villages to convey farm products to town markets. Nigeria had important local markets spread across the length and breadth of the country and traders patronized these markets moving back and forth their merchandise. Just as motor transportation was useful to the indigenous traders, the European trading companies also made use of the services provided by the motor transporters to distribute European manufactured goods within the country. Related to this point is the way in which the activities of the road transporters led to an increase in the number of markets in our study area. There is no doubt that the services provided by motor transporters contributed to economic growth in Nigeria. An evidence of this was the establishment of new markets. Although we do not know the actual number of new markets established but there is evidence that road transport services brought about an increase in the number of existing markets. For example, B.W. Hodder observes that as from the 1920s when motor transport system became more widespread in Western Nigeria, application for opening of new markets increased. Applications also came in for the improvement of stalls and sheds in the existing markets (Hodder, 1963:70).

Furthermore, the services provided by the motor transporters promoted inter-regional trade between the people of Nigeria and their neighbours. A good example of this existed in South Western Nigeria where motor transportation connected traders in Egbaland with their neighbours in Dahomey (now known as Benin Republic). On the basis of its impact on trade, we can say that the motor transportation brought about an expansion in trade and also intensified the pre-colonial trade relations between the peoples of Nigeria and their neighbours. The point must also be made that the services provided by the motor transporters brought about a reduction in the cost of production and it also tamed distance (Broeze, 1989: 1-21), both of which, in the days before the introduction of motor transportation had constituted serious inhibition to the growth of the economy. As such, road transporters enabled Nigerians to gain access to, and harness extant and new resources, thereby releasing labour and capital previously tied up in less productive enterprise or isolated by distance. The road transporters aided the smooth movement of both capital and labour from regions where they were formerly less engaged or less productive to regions where they were adequately engaged thereby contributing significantly to the dynamism of the Nigerian economy during the colonial period.

In a sense it can also be said that the motor transport workers made up for the failure of the railway transport system. But for the motor transport system, Nigeria would have suffered heavily due to the failure of the railway transport system. Indeed, the economy would have experienced serious setback as a result of this. The lorries and trailers owned by the transporters intervened in moving heavy goods which otherwise would have been transported by the railway, had the railway been in a good working condition. Of course, we are aware of arguments that road transportation contributed to the decline of the railway (Oshin, 1990: 62-89 and Oshin, 1991: 11-36). For example, road transportation was accused of taking much of the freight which ought to have been carried by the railway. While this view is true, we also need to realize that road transportation at times complemented the services of the railway. The impact of the railway was generally limited to the areas where its tracks passed, thereby making it difficult for goods produced in areas beyond this track-range to reach the final consumers. In such places, the situation was saved by motor transport, which through its flexibility, got to the very remote areas and helped producers in getting their goods to the market. In this important respect, the motor transporters contributed to the development of trade and market in Nigeria during the colonial days and as such, acted as engine of economic development.

More than this, the motor transport sector provided employment for many Nigerians. This was an invaluable service to the Nigerian economy. Generally, a road transporter either began as a driver or as a bus conductor. Few started as vehicle owners. During the colonial era, there were many notable vehicle owners in the country. Some examples have already been cited in this paper. The significant point to note is that many of the major transporters were in themselves employers of labour. For example, W.A. Dawodu's transport firm had a workshop in Osogbo which employed "fifty men" (Drummond-Thompson, 1993:54) while Salami Agbaje also had a big transport enterprise in Oyo province which by 1924 engaged the services of a European mechanic in addition to other workers. In 1925, Agbaje reportedly made an offer to rent the government services' garages at Oyo and Iseyin. This is an evidence of the expansion of his operations.

In their own right, therefore, these transporters provided employment for many people, Nigerians and foreigners alike. Beyond this however, the road transport system by its very nature created employment for many people. It was the usual practice for a licensed driver to engage some two to four apprentices, who accompanied him on his journeys. In so far as they remained with the master-driver, such apprentices were in gainful employment. Apart from this, an important industry which grew out of the road transport business was that of motor repairing. Originally, the few Nigerians who began to provide this service obtained their training and experience while in the service of either the government or a commercial firm (e.g. UAC Motors). They in turn trained a number of apprentices to handle simple mechanical faults in vehicles. It is estimated that Nigeria had about 47,000 people employed in the road transport sector by 1960 (Ekundare, 1960:268-269).

Many of the Nigerian motor transporters entered into the transport business first as drivers, but they later became vehicle owners. Others started as owners with only one vehicle but later acquired more vehicles. One Ijebu businessman named Timothy Odutayo Kutu popularly called "Abusi Odumare" is a one good example of such people who entered into the transport business with a very humble beginning. Abusi went into the road transport business in 1942 with the money he realised from the sale of a house he built when he was a class teacher (Jatula, 2010: 123-133). Later on, he bought more lorries which he used for transporting produce from Ondo to Lagos. Through shrewd management, the number of lorries he owned grew from one to six. When the vehicles became too many for him to manage as an individual, he went into the business of selling vehicles on hire-purchase basis. At a point he was importing vehicles from Europe which he sold to other indigenous road transporters. We can imagine the number of people who were employed by Chief Kutu, an evidence of how the motor transporters in Nigeria contributed to the provision of employment for many people.

Many of these indigenous businessmen personally raised the capital to start their businesses as it was often difficult to get loans from the bank in those days. It is necessary to point out that by venturing into a transport business, road transporters were demonstrating initiative, boldness and ingenuity which is often denied by apologists of colonial rule. Many of the Nigerian road transporters made a lot of money from the transport business. Chief Kutu, for instance, built over a dozen houses from the profit realised from the transport business. Apart from this, many of the transporters sent their children to schools, married more wives, performed their social obligations in the society and bought some of the best cars available in the society at that time for their personal use. The exploits and success story of other road transporters like Dawodu of Lagos and Salami Agbaje of Ibadan have been well documented ((Drummond-Thompson, 1993:46-63; Adeboye, 2001:1-15).

The involvement of these Nigerians in the motor transport business brings out the dimension of indigenous involvement in the colonial economy. Whereas the government at various levels was deeply involved in the building of roads, the transporters mainly provided the transport services. Without this, it would have been difficult for motor transportation to serve the economy. The motor transporters not only sustained the various economic activities engaged in by the people, but they also provided employment opportunities for thousands of people who ordinarily would have been unemployed. Furthermore, the transporters boosted agricultural production as harvested products are readily moved from the farms to the market centres. This reduced the problem of crops getting spoiled after harvesting. Perishable goods which used to get spoiled before due to transport constraints were now moved more speedily to the markets. This brought a great encouragement to farmers and served as an important boost for the Nigerian agricultural sector.

### ***3.0 The Nigerian Motor Transporters since the time of Independence***

Nigeria got her independence in 1960. From this date up to the present time, Nigeria was ruled at different times by both the civilians and the military. The period provides an opportunity for us to look at the dimension of continuity, change and adaptation in our examination of the role of the motor transporters within the Nigerian economy. One important area in which the road transporters have continued to impact on the economy since 1960 is in the provision of employment opportunities for many Nigerians. This is a very important impact in a country which overtime has found it difficult to proffer adequate and lasting solution to the high rate of unemployment in the economy. Particularly since the 1980s, unemployment has led to widespread poverty, increased crime rate and frustration within the country. Frustration arising from unemployment has been linked with the various aggressive behaviour prevalent in the society including the menace of kidnapping currently facing the country.

In this particular regard, the road transporters have made significant contributions towards reducing the rate of unemployment in the country. It is estimated that over 1.5 million people are toady engaged in the road transport sector. An important change in this regard is the increasing number of university and polytechnic graduates among the membership of the motor transporters. Since the 1980s, the austerity condition in the country and the difficulty of getting office jobs have driven many to seek employment in the road transport sector. This is a good development for the economy because it means that people are becoming self-employed unlike in the past when young graduates had to wait for white-caller jobs in the towns and cities. This author knows some of these graduates operating in the Remo area of Ogun State and there are many of them located in cities across the length and breathe of the country. A very good example is the Eastern Nigeria based transporter, Mr. Frank Nneji who is the owner of the popular transport service known as Associated Bus Company Ltd. (ABC Transport). The company operates on routes not only within the country but also along the West African sub-region. Mr Nneji is a Biology graduate from a Nigerian University. His transport business is a leader in the inter-city road transport business in Nigeria. (Adekunle and Kasumu, 2005: 26-42). Perhaps because of their level of education, graduates like Mr. Nneji who have gone into the transport business appear to be doing very well.

Another positive development in the history of the road transporters in post-colonial Nigeria is the entry of big time Igbo transporters into the transport business. They owned luxurious buses which plied different routes to the northern and western part of the country from their base in Igbo land. This is a new factor of change in the transport sector and indeed, in the evolving history of the road transporters in Nigeria. The pioneers in this respect included individuals like D.D. Onyemelukwe, J.C. Ulas, Louis Philip Ojukwu and Chief Augustine Ilodibe the owner of the popular transport outfit known as “Ekene Dili Chukwu”. Other transporters were Chidi Ebere, Izuchukwu and Chief C.N. Okwunwa. The new entrants into the road transport business in Eastern Nigeria include the owners of Emenike Motors, Micmerah International Agency, G.U.O. Okeke transport service, F.G. Onyenwe, Dan Dollars, The Young Shall Grow Motors and ABC Transport Service (Iweze, 2011). Of these luxurious bus enterprises, ABC Transport has witnessed a most phenomenal growth, with the company employing many Nigerians and the outfit spreading its transport services from Nigeria to the West African sub-region.

As part of their contribution to the growth of the national economy, the road transport workers have continued to provide millions of naira in revenue to the government through the payment of various duties for hackney permits, drivers’ licenses, vehicle licenses, vehicle plate numbers and insurance, to mention just a few. In all, we can say in this particular regard that the transporters have served as partners with the government in the process of national economic development. In 1978, a milestone occurred in the history of the road transporters in Nigeria with the formation of the National Union of Road Transport Workers popularly known as the (NURTW). Since this date, the activities of the road transporters have revolved around the NURTW. For a paper of this nature, it will be a big omission if we do not dwell a little bit on the structure and operations of the NURTW.

The NURTW membership, broadly defined, include individuals (mainly male), who are involved in the use of different modes of transport such as motorbikes (motorcycles), buses, cabs, tankers and tricycles - for conveying passengers and goods from one destination within the country to another. The need for orderliness prompted members of the sector to form two associations, namely the Road Transport Employers Association of Nigeria [RTEAN] and the National Union of Road Transport Workers [NURTW]. Though the RTEAN predates NURTW, it is less active than the NURTW, which was registered as a trade union in 1978, and is an affiliate of the Central Labour Organisation [CLO], now known as the Nigerian Labour Congress [NLC]. While the RTEAN is less known, the NURTW has grown overtime, with its membership burgeoning on daily basis. Thus, it boasts of over “1.5 million membership throughout the federation” (The *NURTW Diary*, 2011: 6). With the exclusion of petroleum tanker drivers, all professional commercial drivers are automatic members of the Union. As such, the NURTW serves as an umbrella body for drivers operating motorbikes, taxi cabs, tricycles, buses (both intra and inter-state services), trailers and lorries that engage in the conveyance of passengers and goods. The main objective of the Union is to promote the economic welfare of its members. This explains the *raison d’etre* for its engagement in the series of programmes like Road Safety, Immunisation, Family Economic Advancement Program [FEAP], Mass Transit Implementation, HIV/AIDS, and the Road Accident Medical Aid [RAMACHE] – a scheme that provides first aid for accident victims.

In order to manage the affairs of the union, the road transport workers set up an administrative structure. Two officers of the workers union confirmed this in an interview with them.

They pointed out that the “secretariats of the union are established in units, branches, zones and states. Each of these has secretaries and elected officers, who are headed by chairmen, to coordinate the activities of the transport union throughout the federation, FCT inclusive” (Personal Communication with Mr Jide Sodipo and Mr Sina Afuwape, 4 March 2011). Each of the state secretariats has between ten and twenty elected officials. This is in addition to the State Secretary and some other staff, whose efforts contribute to the everyday coordination of the activities of the local branches, under each state council’s jurisdiction. Given the coherent and sound administrative organization of the road transporters described above, the transporters have become partners with the government in the process of national political and socio-economic development. Let us consider the situation during the era of military government in the country. The Nigerian military dictated policies that were used in governing the country during this period. During this period, the military influenced state policies to suit their own whims and fancies. But during the period, the road transport workers operated as a form of pressure group, out to fight for what they considered to be in the best interest of the country.

Following the cancellation of the 1993 Presidential election and the emergence of late Gen. Sanni Abacha as the military head of state, the new ruler attempted to transform himself into a civilian President. This move was opposed by Nigerians including the road transport workers operating under the bigger umbrella of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC). The road workers joined others in opposing the ambition of General Abacha. Since 1999 when Nigeria returned to democratic rule, the politicians have continued to seek the support of the road transporters while seeking to be elected into political offices. The politicians usually take advantage of the large population of the road transporters, which is one of the largest that any union could boast of in the country. Not only this, because many of the road transporters are very close to the people at the grass root level, politicians often used them to influence the people at that level in order to achieve their political end.

Due to the evolving rapport between the politicians and the road transporters, a particular scenario developed in the political terrain of Nigeria whereby some state governors give officers of the NURTW who have supported their candidature into political office so much freedom to operate within the society. Thus, the officials of the road transport workers can be seen perpetrating all kinds of offensive acts within the society without the police lifting a finger to arrest the offenders. This is so because the offenders already have the support of the state governor who, in any case, is the chief security officer of the state. In return for the support they get from the government of the day, the officers of the road transport union often pledged their continued support for the governor. In some of the states in Western Nigeria this scenario played out between 1999 and 2011. Ibadan, Oyo State in particular presents a most vivid example of this scenario. There, the road transport workers’ chieftains especially that of National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), constituted ominous personalities that were dreaded during the tenure of the immediate past governor of the state, Alao Akala. This is because of their various illegal acts, which the police preferred to permit because of the free rein that the state governor covertly gave them. The war-like scenario in Oyo state, which can be regarded as the negative extreme, did not obtain in other states. The road transporters in other states of the country did not behave like their counterpart in Oyo State. It gives one the room to say that perhaps the Oyo state scenario was an isolated case. This, therefore, tends to support the view that the road transport workers can equally prove to be responsible citizens of the country. For instance, the Chairman of the Ekiti branch of NURTW admonished members of the state’s branch to eschew violence, an advice which they held on to.

Apart from their involvement in politics, oral evidence reveals that the NURTW carried out important activities in the society. In partnership with government and non-government organizations, the NURTW successfully participated in road safety campaigns, immunization programmes, family economic advancement programmes, mass transit implementation and Road Accident Health Insurance Scheme (RHIS). The RHIS is a medical treatment and compensation scheme for accident victims. In Ado Ekiti, Southwest Nigeria, an officer of the NURTW explained that the union takes care of road accident victims for 48 hours before family members arrive to take over from union officers (personal communication with Evangelist Bolade Ojo, 50years in Ado Ekiti on 30 November, 2011).

The NURTW has also been particularly active in the campaign against the spread of HIV/AIDS. In various states of the federation, the union has collaborated with the Family Health International in Nigeria, Society for Family Health, American Centre for International Labour Solidarity, National Action Committee on AIDS (NACA) to create awareness on modes of transmission and prevention.

The union works actively with these agencies to teach drivers the dangers involved in HIV/AIDS. The union therefore, contributes to the government's efforts at checking the spread of the disease in the country. Away from health matters, the NURTW also contributes to the society in other important respects. The union holds regular meetings with Vehicle Inspection Officers (VIOs), the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) and other government road traffic agencies. At such meetings drivers are told the importance of having valid vehicle particulars and keeping their vehicles in good and road worthy state. They also teach drivers to behave well to passengers. The height of such training workshops is usually from September of every year through to December when there is high traffic of vehicles on the road. The FRSC usually intensify its activities in teaching drivers to avoid over-speeding and drinking alcohol while driving. All these, of course, have helped to reduce accidents on the roads (personal communication with Mr. Akinbolade Smart, 48years, in Ijebu Ode on 30 November, 2011 and Mr. Olusesan Oladimeji, 52years, interviewed in Alimosho area of Lagos on 2 December, 2011). Oral evidence also shows that members of the union engage in road maintenance particularly in areas where government has failed to carry out such work. Hence, members of the NURTW can be seen filling pot holes on roads and cutting grass to aid driver's visibility in corners and other dangerous spots on the road. Of course, when such good works are done both commercial and private vehicle owners benefit from the community effort (personal communication with Comrade Moibi Adekoya, 58years in Ijebu Ode on 30 November, 2011).

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

The foregoing analysis has been used to explain the roles and impact of the road transporters on the Nigerian state and economy. The study reveals that through their services, the road transporters had, and are still contributing significantly to the attempts at developing the Nigerian economy. We can therefore, say that the motor road transporters were (and are still) very pertinent to the development of the Nigerian economy. Beyond this, the paper brings to the fore the dimension of indigenous initiative and participation in the local economy. Although the Europeans and Levantines participated actively in the economy, indigenous motor road transporters were not passive. They were key players not only in the colonial but also the post-colonial economy of Nigeria.

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