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The Development of the Railway System and its Impact in Offa, Kwara State; 1912-1955

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Abstract- The construction of a railway line up to Offa in 1912 was part of the plan to facilitate the legitimate trade and connect the interior part of the country. It became a mode of transport to evacuate large quantities of agricultural produce from the interior to the coast for onward transfer to the Western world. The railway system also became the only powerful means of communication to indigenous people in what became Nigeria. Further development of rail transport from Lagos to other areas from 1901 led to the construction of railway system in Offa. Indeed, the construction of rail tracks up to Offa brought rapid development to the people as the first Terminus was built in Offa after Ibadan and was regarded as a Sub-district, while Ibadan Terminus was known as District. Offa became the administrative headquarters for Oshogbo and Ilorin which are both state capitals in Nigeria today. This attracted many foreign experts to Offa, as an administrative office controlling Oshogbo, Inisha, Okuku, Erin-Ile, Ijagbo and Ilorin. This paper seeks to examine the development and impact of railway transport in Offa since 1912.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The ultimate purpose of transport is to serve mankind. It is an integral part of the economy of every society whether advanced or simple economies; and both production and distribution of goods at all levels rely heavily on transport. Transport economists such as Bonavia, Norton, Sharp and Healey see transport as being indispensable to any economy which necessitated the construction of rail roads in Nigeria in the pre-colonial and colonial times. According to Hugh Norton, transportation enables society to enjoy the advantages of specialization of resources, and the benefits of division of labour by making it possible for products to be brought from great distances thus avoiding the necessity for local production of needs.¹

More importantly, the earliest demand for transportation of things arose from the fact that men wanted a variety of natural products but nature did not provide them in one place. This buttresses Walsh Healey's assertion which says "man as a hunter and gatherer carried himself to wherever there was a surplus to meet his needs." To satisfy immediate future needs, he had to carry some with him²

By 1886 the British Colonial activities and intentions under Governor Macgregor and Edgerton was to extend the construction of rail line to the furthestmost part of Northern Nigeria³. The issues regarding development of railway system in Nigeria through Offa were well articulated by different authors in line with the aim of British to annex the legitimate products in hinterland.

Rail construction in Nigeria served as a major catalyst to the socio-economic development of major towns in Nigeria, Offa and other communities in Kwara State as an integral part of the country benefited immensely from it since 1912. The construction of rail terminus in Offa boosted economic activities of Offa and its environs because it attracted many people to Offa. This paper analyzes why it is necessary to formulate a policy that would hasten the rehabilitation of existing rail lines, particularly the existing structures at Offa terminus erected by the colonial master for the benefit of Offa community and travellers. It is important to look at the geographic location of Offa as a strategic point for white men during the period of railway construction.

II. THE GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF OFFA

The present day of Offa is located in South-East of Ilorin, the capital of Kwara State of Nigeria. The town is situated on longitude 500E and latitude 800N. It is about 56 kilometres from the state capital. Offa is situated on a gentle Plateau, which is about 1429 feet (408.9m) above sea level. It has indeed been aptly described as a watershed between the Ogun-Osun River Basin and Niger Basin. It is also situated on 215 miles (344km) on the South/ North (SN) rail line from Lagos⁴. It is regarded geographically as a "gap town" and has always been a major Railway Depot Station. Offa is regarded as a gateway to the old Northern Region of Nigeria. The climate in Offa is divided into two seasons; the rainy season, characterized by heavy rainfalls which usually start from April and end in October, with little shower to mark the end of rain in early November. The dry season is characterized by excessive sunshine, leading to the hotness and dryness of the land. It usually starts in November ending and end in March. Offa is bounded in the South by Ijagbo, in the North by Erin-Ile, in the East by Ira, and in the West by Ipee. Offa, the headquarters of Offa Local Government is one of the 16 Local Government Areas in Kwara

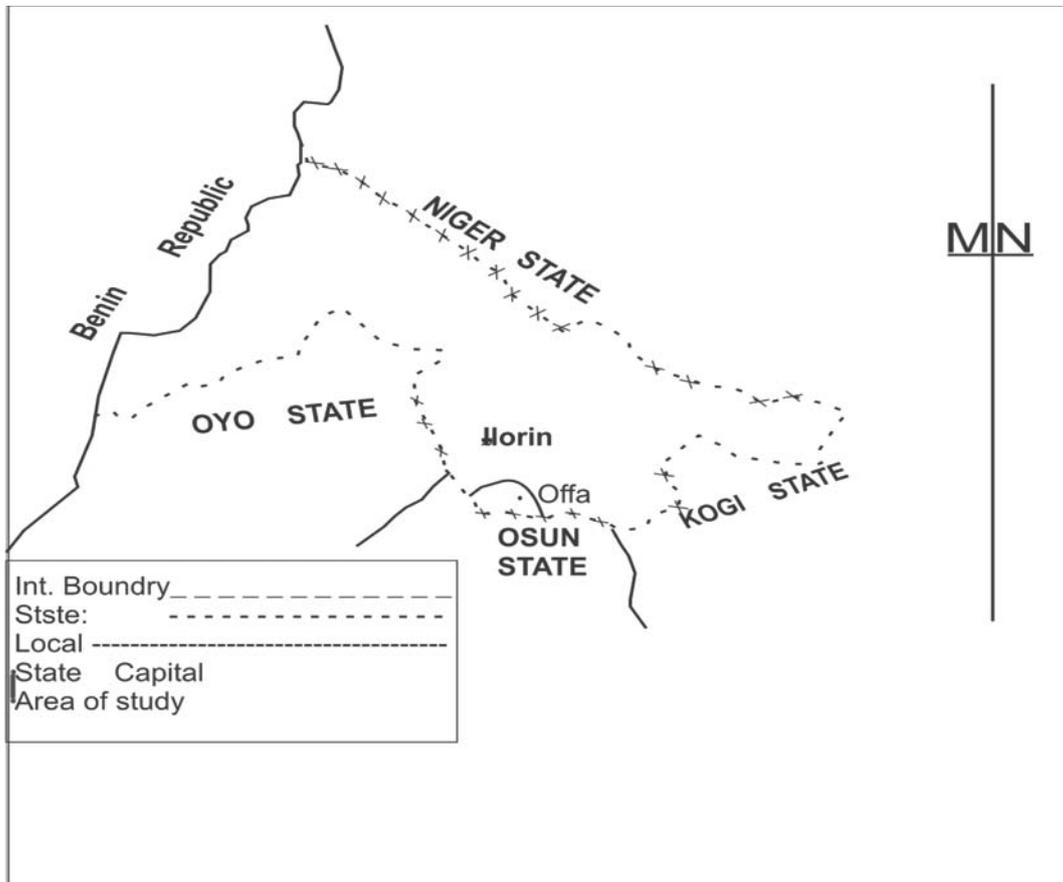
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State⁵. The language spoken by people of Offa is Yoruba.

Offa is located in Ibolo province and was a major town in the province. The Ibolo province lies to the South-East of the Ekun-Osi towns as far down as Ede, Iresa being the chief town. The other towns are: Oyan,

Okuku, Ikirun, Oshogbo, Ido, Ilobu, Ejigbe and Ede. In 19th century, the Fulani Jihadist from Ilorin, the present capital of Kwara State destroyed Iresa, which was regarded as chief town in the Ibolo province, and the mantle of leadership for the control of that province fell on Offa⁶.

Map 1: Showing The Location of Offa



Source: Kwara State survey Ilorin 2014⁷

III. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

For better understanding of this research, it is imperative to clarify the concept of development. A clarification of this concept in historical enquiry of railway development will illuminate its substance, pattern and direction. More importantly, it clears issues raised in a proper direction by strengthen the trend of discussion. On this note, the researcher tends to clarify the concept of development.

Development comes from the French verbe-developer- meaning to wrap, that is, "to cause to grow gradually, fuller, larger, stronger and better." It is because development is conceived as a steady movement towards a better graduation that is seen as "a progression towards maturity and better exemplification of the nature of the type in question⁸

The word "Development" in general usage is an incident that causes a situation to change or

progress; it is a process of change and becoming larger, stronger, or more impressive, successful, or advanced, or causing somebody or something to change. It also regarded as a state in which the developing of something is not yet completed⁹.

According Walter Rodney, development in human society is a many-sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being¹⁰.

Construction of rail line to Offa was a monumental development in the life of Offa people which caused a great change in the manner and way of carrying out their internal and external trade. It increased freedom of movement from one place to another, not at short distance alone but long distance to negotiate new deals. Opportunity to annex greater responsibility and material well-being were been carried out which brought a colossal change.

As Rodney notes that, some of these features mentioned are virtually moral categories and are difficult to evaluate depending as they do on the age in which one lives, one's class origin, and one's personal code of what is right and what is wrong¹¹. What is visible in this concept is economic and social gains for both parties (colonial masters and Nigerians) involved in the development of rail lines across Nigeria which Offa tapped the benefit immensely. Development of railway was a process which brought change in socio-economic activities of Offa.

IV. DEVELOPMENT/GROWTH OF RAIL TRANSPORT SYSTEM IN OFFA

According to Howard Gauthier "the economic development requires adequate and effective transport services"¹² the advent of rail transport in economy all over the world herald a clear departure from difficulty of bringing goods needed for production.

The clamour for railway network in West Africa started with private interest from the middle of the nineteenth century. Many of the railway promoters were enthusiasts who formulated grandiose plans but lacked the financial capacity to execute them.

Railway construction in Nigeria by colonial masters was directed at two main targets; these were commerce and administration. In July 1898 Mr. Joseph Chamberlin set up a Committee of six members to decide where the Nigerian railway should begin and where it should end. This Committee was called the Niger committee comprising of Lord Salborne, Chairman and Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Colonies; Reginald Antrobus, Assistant Under Secretary of state in charge of West African business at the colonial office; Sir Ralph Moor, Commissioner and Consul-General of the Niger Coast protectorate; and Sir Henry Mccallum, Governor of Lagos Colony. The remaining two members were Sir Clement Hill representing the foreign office, and Sir George Goldie, head of the Royal Niger Company¹³.

The committee agreed that a railway to the far north should be built; they further agreed that the northern terminus should be the commercial city of Kano, and finally they agreed that southern terminus should be a port on the coast that could handle ocean-going steamers¹⁴.

In Nigeria, the construction of rail lines began in Lagos in 1898 and the line was extended to Ibadan in 1901, thence to Jebba on the Niger in 1909 and Kano in 1911. The Port Harcourt-Enugu-Jos line, linking the northern and eastern parts of the country, was completed in 1926. Thus, by 1940, there were 5,200 miles of railways in British and French West Africa colonies.¹⁵

The development of railway system in Offa which originated from Lagos railway was later converted

to Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC). The Nigerian Railway Corporation traces its history to the year 1898, when the first railroad in Nigeria was constructed by the British colonial government¹⁶. In October 3, 1912 the Lagos Government Railway and Baro-Kano Railway were amalgamated, the birth of first amalgamation was hatched for the benefit of colonial masters and inhabitants for easy movement of goods and services from one location to the other. This marked the beginning of a nationwide rail service under the name Government Department of Railways. The company gained its current name with the passing of Nigeria Railway Corporation Act on 1st October, 1955, this gave the company legal backing to construct and operate rail service in Nigeria¹⁷.

Thus, in 1898 railway construction terminal at Iddo was erected to connect the Lagos Island with the Mainland and act as a transit stop for the trains using the railroad bridge constructed along two major road networks that connected the Island with other parts of Lagos, then Carter bridge and the Denton bridge. Also in 1898 railway construction began from the Iddo area with extension made along the Lagos route with stop over at Otta, Ifo, Arigbajo, Papa-Alantoro, Abeokuta. December, 1900 railway reached Ibadan and it was opened to traffic in March 4, 1901¹⁸.

However, financial crisis hampered further development of railway in Southern Nigeria; financial crisis loomed because British home government did not give adequate backing to the construction of rail lines initially. In 1904, official approval was given for the commencement of rail linking to Ibadan and Oshogbo the present capital of Osun state¹⁹. The official approval originated from the fear expressed by the British authority on the possible diversion of trade in British colonies to railway lines in the adjoining French colonies.

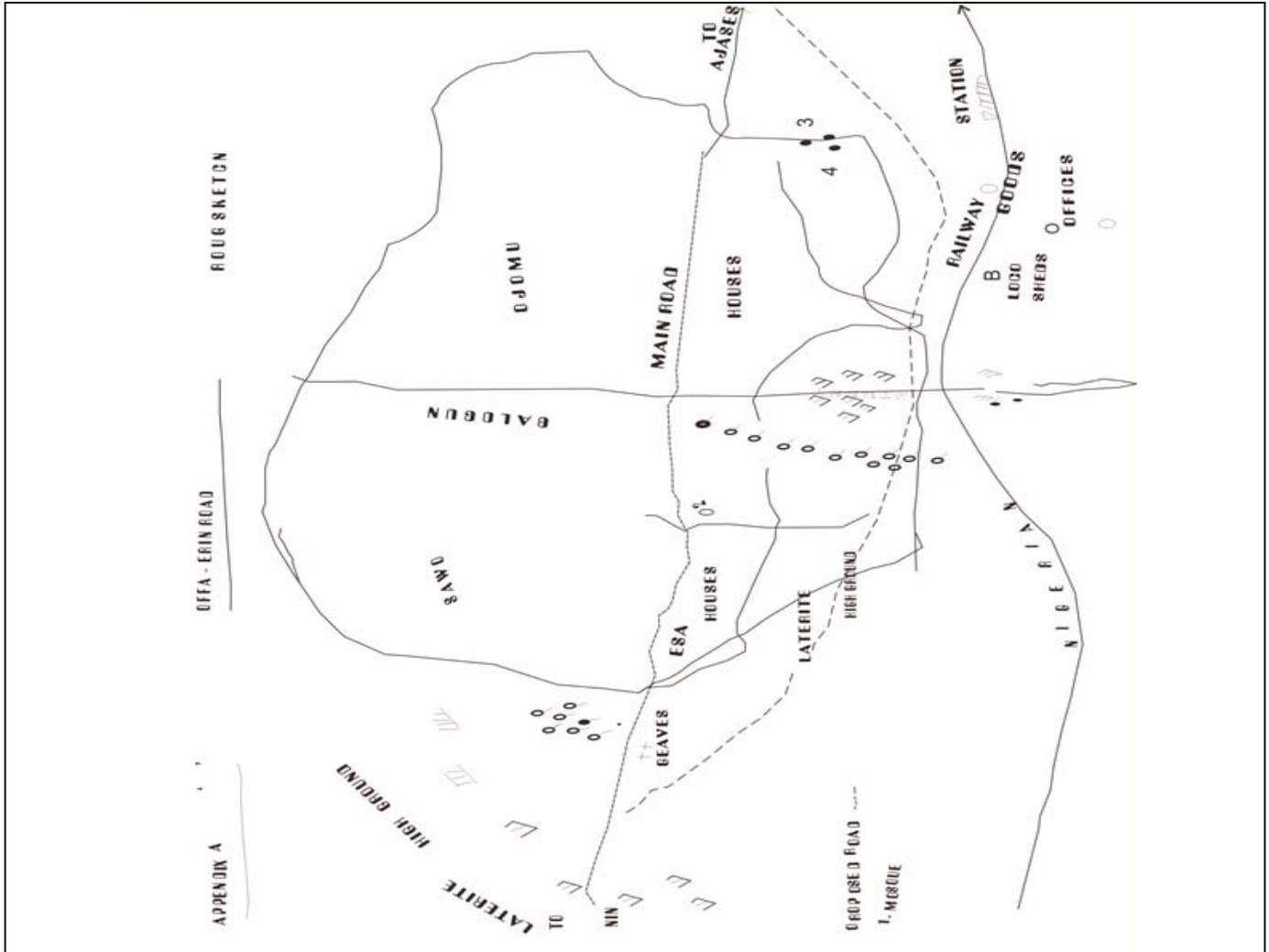
In 1907, another approval given by the British authority brought the construction of rail line passing through Offa to lime light. Thus development and extension of railway line continued unabatedly from Offa to other places like Jebba, during the construction²⁰. Then, five months later a covering letter was written to British authority informing them about a tentative approval given to the General Manager because of the urgency of the work²¹.

After the construction official commissioning of railway between Offa and Jebba took place in 1923. It is important to state here that administrative offices were commissioned in 1944 as terminus and it is known as Sub-district Headquarters, Ibadan is a District headquarters²². However, the mini station within Offa areas are Inisha, Okuku, Erin-Ile and Ijagbo all the stations are known as wayside station till today. Interestingly, Ilorin is also regarded as wayside station. The capacity of the office in Offa accommodated both civil operational and mechanical officials.

The change of locomotive driver effected at Ibadan when railway is coming from Lagos. Then from Ibadan the next locomotive driver takes over from Offa to Mokwa in Niger State. The benefit derived by wayside stations under Offa Sub-district station is that any locomotive popularly called *worowor* by inhabitants must stop over to pick and off load passengers in these

stations. Also, the stations usually have their own staff ranging from four (4) to five (5) persons as administrative officials²³.

The diagram below shows the location of railway terminus in Offa including offices sited around the terminus for administrative and mechanical work.



Source: *Offa Assessment Report by P.A. Province Office Ilorin*²⁴

V. THE IMPACT OF RAILWAY TRANSPORT IN OFFA FROM 1912-1955

The main focus of this part is to examine the impact of railway transport system in Offa.

It has been argued that widely separated communities like Nigeria were linked by trading activities which could be carried out through the following ways; water, air and land. But the activities did not just run through north and south to connect forest and savanna; they also connected the communities in the east to those in the west²⁵. This suggests both a variety of economic activities and adequate transport facilities which rail transport system has done since inception.

Initially, there were few practicable alternatives to the railway. Lines were therefore built as an aid to general economic development and in the interest of political administration²⁶.

The development of railway had significant effect on the economy of Nigeria as a nation. Economic activities were stimulated and existing modes of transport were displaced in large measure especially in long distance transactions²⁷. Indeed, up to the outbreak of First World War, the lagoon traffic supplied a considerable proportion of Lagos export but this was not the case, in communities like Offa, where there is no availability of water transport. The coming of rail transport was a blessing for the colonial master to

penetrate without any competition from other mode of transport.

However, it is generally accepted that long distance trade had been in existence in Nigeria before the coming of European and different means of transport like road had been adopted for the movement of goods and services in Offa and other areas in Nigeria, but it was not in large quantities. The establishment and development of railway transport system in Nigeria was a revolution in movement of goods and services in Nigeria which Offa tapped immensely from it. Also railway system across Nigeria gave opportunity to international trade to thrive. The palm-oil produced in south, cocoa and kola nut in the west, and groundnut in the northern part could easily be taken to the coast for onward transfer to Europe. It is important to analyze the economic and social impacts of railway transport in Offa. This would enable us to know the benefits derived by all stake holders in the sector especially Offa people who are the main focus of this discourse.

VI. ECONOMIC IMPACT

a) *Low-Cost of Transport*

The rail transport system in Offa had made the movement of internal and long-distance trade easy. Haulage is the basic transport mode at Offa, but in certain circumstances, when traffic flows are exceptionally heavy and where distance are long, rail transport offers the lowest-cost of transport. This is an immense contribution to the colonial economy as well as traders who supplied farm produces to the European²⁸. Attention of many traders was shifted to Offa with aim of easy transfer of their goods to choice location at cheaper rate.

b) *Evacuation of Cash Crops*

Railway system largely met the needs of people. Agricultural products in this area (Offa) required movement only over short distance to and from market places, between adjoining villages and between villages and nearby towns were taken to railway station for onward transfer to Urban centres (i.e. Lagos for export). One of the key objectives in the establishment of the railway system by the colonial master was to aid the evacuation of cash crops and export it to other county. Land transport owners and porters benefited from the system. Conveyance of goods from far and nearby villages created huge opportunity for transporters then, while porters are waiting at station to convey these goods into the station for waybill. This served as means of income for many people.

c) *Supply of Manufacturing Goods*

The manufactured products were being carried back to the hinterland through the rail. As a result of this Offa had many stores belonging to multinational company like United Africa Company (UAC), Paterson

Zochonis (PZ) and JOHN HOLT till today in Offa and these companies employed large number of people²⁹. While these companies gave employment to the indigenes and settlers at Offa, it provided great opportunity for wholesaler to buy in large quantities and distributed to retailers within the area at cheaper rate. A modern market in Offa became beehive for the people from towns and villages surrounding Offa.

d) *Job Opportunities*

It is on record that railway in Nigeria was the major employer of labour in Nigeria during the colonial economy. This shows that host communities like Offa had great opportunity in terms of job opportunities with the railway. Between 1912 -1955 the estimate figure of employee with the Railway Corporation hovered around 42,000 in Nigeria, then Offa terminus had 1317 employee with seven departments namely;

1. Signal and Communication,
2. Operation & Cooperation
3. Civil Engineering
4. Mechanical,
5. Welfare
6. Mechanical Diesel,
7. Ticketing.³⁰

Apart from this, indirect job was created by this sector with large numbers of private lock-up shops built along railway terminus servicing the workers and passengers³¹. Also the workshop built by Railway Corporation had impacted knowledge of modern technology then into the people.

The advent of rail transport also consolidated the position of existing commercial centres, caused the decline of others- unless such had road links with the railways and led to the emergence of new towns and markets at railway junctions. Typical example of this could be found in Inisha, Okuku and Erin-Ile where the wayside stations beat far from the main town commercial activities were moved to those stations to serve the needs of travellers. There is no doubt that rail transport reduced cost of fare significantly, facilitated the access of European merchants and officials to new markets in the hinterland and enabled them to exploit the colonies more effectively.

Offa became an entry-port for the traders in neighbouring towns and villages which increased internal generated revenue. This additional income led to the advent of local tax collector in Offa then. This caused rivalry between Offa and Ilorin Emirate then but later resolved that all labourer living in Offa must remit their taxes with the Local District Officer.³² Thus, autonomy was given to local administrator on tax and this helped authority in Offa to develop infrastructure for the benefit of the inhabitants. The Native Revenue Ordinance and Gazzete gave an estimate of €1517.12 as revenue generated then³³. The railway employees living in Offa town were compelled to remit their tax to

Oloffo, District Head of Offa, and not through the ward-heads. The management of railway suggested €8.0.0 per man. But final rule came from Lieutenant Governor stated in his telegram **S.6 dated 7/3/18** to the employee residing at Ilorin and Offa that the minimum tax on each employee should be €6/per annum. It was accepted by Oloffo³⁴. Internal Generated Revenue from Offa then soared.

VII. SOCIAL IMPACT

a) *Spread of External Religions and Western Education*

The exchange of cultural background through movement of goods and services by people aided the spread of Christianity and Islam in Offa at that time. It is important to know that part of the people who worked assiduously for the construction of rail road are the evangelists because they had conviction about changes that would greet missionary work, if railway had access to the hinterland³⁵. When railway started operations in Nigeria, it contributed immensely to the movement of missionaries and they had access to the people. The evangelical work was easier for the missionaries to carry out. Also, Roman Catholic Church was built with cottage hospital in Offa, then, the hospital was serving Offa people and other neighboring towns like Ijagbo, Ipee, Igosun and Ira. Also, the Muslim scholars moved into Offa from Northern part of Nigeria to preach Islam and many traditional worshipers were converted into Islam³⁶. The first oldest community secondary school known as Offa Grammar School (OGS) emanated from communal effort in what used to be the northern Nigeria gateway was established at Offa in 1943 to promote western education³⁵. The establishment of this school (Offa Grammar School) devoid of any religion affliction, hence, it emanated from communal effort to promote western education.

b) *Inter-Group Relations*

One of important aspects of social development that railway transport brought into Offa was emergence of towns and villages that attracted a population that was made of other ethnic like Hausa, Igbo including Yorubas from other towns and villages. Today, in Offa there is Hausa community around Popo area of Offa with their leader recognized by the King (Oba) of Offa. Igbo established some of their shops along rail line till today, the existence of these ethnics dating back to 19th century when the construction of rail line started in Offa. Inter-ethnic marriages became rampant among people, before the establishment of railway in Offa; marriages were mostly organized among indigenes. Influx of different ethnic groups promoted inter-ethnic marriages which was part of joke among people then that if you accept railway to go through your back yard your wife would be married to white man.³⁷

VIII. CONCLUSION

The use of transportation in any human society cannot be over emphasized because; it is regarded as the only means of movement from one place to the other. Before the advent of rail transport in Offa other modes of transportation like use of animals and road transport portage were the methods used in carrying their goods and services from one location to the other. Establishment of railway in 1912 at Offa was a game changer in the way and manner people engaged in transportation system because railway is the greatest carrier of merchandise.

The development of railway transport at Offa led to establishment of wayside stations in its environs as earlier mentioned and this impacted positively to the socio-economic activities of those areas. Thus, impacts of railway transport/terminus could not be waived aside at Offa in terms of job opportunities, businesses and other socio benefits attracted to Offa.

The full utilization of railway as modern means of transport led to development of trade, agriculture and industry. It is noteworthy that the establishment and development of rail transport from 1912 -1955 was remarkable period which greeted rapid development in the transport sector because the rail traffic at this time was dominated by agriculture. The cost of rail freight depends on the type of goods which are classified as each class had its own rates. Cost was directly related to the volume of goods transported by train.

More people preferred to move their goods by train as freight by train because it was cheaper than by road. A larger proportion of goods transported by train were agricultural produce like groundnut, hides, cocoa, cotton, and palm kernel. The railway became centripetal which connected all major towns and introduced the resources of each region to each other. And Offa as a major player in the railway transport benefited from this colossal opportunity.

Finally, if government focuses on resuscitating railway in line with the vision of colonial masters in Nigeria, the economy of Offa would be resuscitated and this will provide job opportunity for teeming youth that are jobless in the community today. The activities of shop owners within the premises would certainly wear a new look for economic prosperity. More importantly, high powered technological equipment erected for training and production of furniture and welding tools would serve the interest of inhabitants as it were in those days when the white men were controlling the terminus.

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