

PRE-COLONIAL ECONOMY AND TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM IN SOUTH-WEST NIGERIA UP TILL 1900

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ABSTRACT

The evolution of transport has always been linked to economic development. This pervasive role of transportation led to the idea that any human society is as developed as its transportation system. History is on the verge of extinction in Nigeria, In view of the above, this study has provided a detailed historical analysis of Pre Colonial transportation system and its impact on economic development in South-west Nigeria in order to preserve non-mechanical means of transportation that existed before the introduction of modern transportation in Nigeria. This study trace the history of transportation system as a lifeline of the economy in South-west Nigeria. Study showed that even though the various forms of pre-colonial transportation were vestigial and also had their challenges, they were able to help in the growth and development of the economy in the study area. The method adopted for this study is historical in approach.

Keywords: Pre-colonial, Means of transportation, Economiy, South-western Nigeria

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Transportation is crucial in the movement of people, goods and services from one place to another. The pre-colonial forms of transportation in South-west Nigeria were human portage and water transportation, ‘Kanako/Afaja, Ofè, Egbe, Afeiri/Isiju’ (fetishism belief or an inanimate object, that is revered or worshiped because it is believed to have magical powers or be animated by a spirit). These forms of transportation contributed to the growth and development of the study area economically, politically and socially. Pre-colonial Yoruba was a completely agricultural society, and farming was their main occupation. Agricultural production served as a major means of livelihood of the people. This study give the overview of pre-colonial economy and political system; discuss the pre-colonial forms of transportation in South-west Nigeria, as well as their economic importance and examine the development of Market in Pre-colonial period and market based transport system- Alabaru.

The chief productive activity of the people in South-west Nigeria was the agricultural pursuit. The connection between the agricultural production and the living standard of the people was very strong. Pre-colonial South-west Nigeria was a complete agricultural society, and farming was their main occupation. With very few and simple agricultural implements like cutlass, hoe and axe, the South-west Nigeria farmers were able to produce more than enough food they ate and also supplied home market¹.

¹ Mrs Ogundeji Deborah, 60 years, a farmer at his residence in Olorunsogo in Ibadan on 08/07/2018

Agricultural production served as a major means of livelihood of the people. It provide for all the available needs of the people, shelter, crops, foods etc. Very early in the morning, by 6 a.m., the farmers and their male children are seen trooping to the farms with cutlasses, hoes, baskets and, at times, wood torches needed to make fire in the farm for food, and in the evening, around 4 p.m., the people usually return home in groups, including women carrying heavy loads on their heads while men are seen carrying fire wood on their shoulder. Evidently, there can be no South-west Nigeria without farming.²

It is very clear from the above observation that the pre-colonial agriculture “though without all the appliances of civilization, produces fine results”.³ In addition, “with simple instrument, large trees are felled, the forest cleared, the wood cut and split and thousands of acres prepared for tillage”.⁴ Since some cash crops were not yet really introduced to South-west Nigeria, the main crops grown were tobacco, kolanut, maize, yam, cassava, cocoyam, beans, gourds, calabashes, melon, okro and a variety of vegetables, which, at times, grew up unplanted among planted crops. The common vegetables were ewe dudu, tete, rorowo, edu and egure (water leaf). A variety of pepper was also cultivated, in addition to plantain, cassava, potatoes, cotton and pawpaw. Palm oil, palm kernels and palm wine were also part of South-west Nigeria’s agricultural products. It was the duty of the men to clear the bush, till the land with hoes and plant the crops. It was the responsibility of the women to harvest farm products and bring them home and for sale in the market⁵.

South-west Nigeria farmers reared animals like goat, dogs and pigs. The animals were allowed to roam about freely after being fed in the morning. Apart from pigs which were not allowed to enter a house, dogs and goats were free to mix with people. In fact, a dog was treated like a human being and was allowed to even sleep within a house and close to people. Dogs were used for hunting and for other domestic purposes. Fowls were raised both at home and in the farm. While the men were responsible for rearing fowls in the farm, women were mostly in charge of rearing them at home⁶.

Another important aspect of the agricultural life in the pre-colonial South-west Nigeria was fishing and hunting. Nearly all the farmers were also hunters, using locally made guns, different types of traps, wires and catapults. Apart from individual hunting, there were also periodic collective hunting expeditions made up, at a time, of about 20 to 30 or more hunters hunting various animals and birds. Such games resulting from hunting were usually shared according to age and contribution either for food or for sale. Fishing is limited to riverine areas in South-west Nigeria. When the farm product of the land was not enough, they supplement it with fishing and farming⁷.

Another important of pre-colonial economy in the study area was the indigenous art and craft industry. Long before the British occupation, South-west Nigeria was creatively powerful for

² N.A.I., Ondo Prof. 2/4, File No. 82A, Administrative Report (Miscellaneous), 1920, p. 4.

³ J.A. Atanda (ed.), *Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland, 1854-1858*, by. W.H. Clarke (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1972).

⁴ ibid

⁵ Mr Ajileye Toyin, 55 years, a Trader/Farmer at his Residence in Odo-Ona in Oyo State on 07/06/2018

⁶ ibid.

⁷ Emmanuel Ajayi, 72 years, a wood carver/Farmer at his Residence in Ogun State on 15/9/2018

its strong tradition of wood carving. Nearly every district in a town had wood carvers who were revered not only for their ability to create images of the gods but also more importantly for their closeness not only to the powerful chiefs but also to the kings who were their major patrons. Culture was the life of the people, and religion was the soul of this life. All the daily activities of the people were tied to religious practices which were totally controlled by the worship of their gods⁸. Hundreds of religious activities had been sustained and associated with very many shrines that also had to be constantly equipped with art images or carved figures and other objects. All over South-west Nigeria land, the chiefs' houses and the kings' palaces or courts had thousands of religious and secular art images and objects, all of which served the spiritual and material objectives of these powerful elite in the society.

The individuals also commissioned various art images for protective, therapeutic, economic and other social reasons. Different types of musical instruments, domestic objects and other occupational objects were carved by the wood carvers. And many of the carvers were also traditional doctors or priests, and these positions brought considerable patronage to them. Wood carvers were generally very wealthy, bringing "this very popular saying that carvers never lack".⁹ In fact, what made the carvers' position more financially lucrative than those of many professionals was the belief that any commissioned religious or cultic object must be paid for once, not instalmentally¹⁰. There was also no room for credit buying. It was believed that any art image that was not fully paid for at once might not be spiritually efficacious or potent. Many wood carvers did not specialize in carving images and objects but focused on wood ornamentation or design. In fact, on the eve of the British rule, South-west Nigeria had three types of wood carvers. One was known as "agbere", the person who carved human and animal figures; "agbena", a wood carver who made wood or furniture very ornamental with patterns, motifs and other creative designs. There was also "agbegi" who produced only domestic and other non-figurative secular wood objects without any trace of design or ornamentation.¹¹

However, there were other forms of art which, in fact, formed the backbone of South-west Nigeria local industries. These were blacksmithing, weaving, dyeing, pottery, beading, cap making and mat weaving. The South-west Nigeria people were adept blacksmiths who, before colonization, produced a variety of cultic, hunting and domestic objects for the community. Like in other South-west Nigeria ethnic groups, iron ore was available and obtained from the mountains that abound in South-west Nigeria. This was smelted in furnaces before being sold to blacksmiths who used them to produce a variety of implements and instruments. Every town has its complement of blacksmith shops (workshops) that may be known by their circular tops where the sound of the hammer and anvil may from day to day be heard. The implements used are a rock for anvil, a small oblong piece of iron tapering to a handle for a hammer, one or two pairs of tongs similar to those in common use, a pair of bellows made out of raw hide in a circular shape – with handles of wood inserted so as to be raised perpendicularly – (for firing).

⁸ Emmanuel Ajayi, 72 years, a wood carver/Farmer at his Residence in Ogun State on 15/9/2018

⁹ F. Willett, "The Yoruba wood Images". A Mimeograph on African Art Course, Department of Art History, NorthSouth-west University, Evanston, Illinois, p. 17.

¹⁰ Eunice Owolabi, 57 years, wood carver, at his residence in Lagos State on 26/7/2018

¹¹ O. Oloidi, "Mediarization, Academization and Professionalism: Art Criticism in Nigeria, 1920-1996" *Art Criticism and Africa*, K. Deepwell, ed. (London: Shaffron Books, 1997), pp. 41-54.

Coal made from wood is generally used though shells of the palm nut are used in case of necessity.¹²

Blacksmithing was an important and indispensable industry before colonization, because without their products, there would be no implements for agriculture and no instruments to fight in wars, among other experiences. Weaving was another industry of South-west Nigeria before colonization. With the use of vertical and horizontal looms, South-west Nigeria women were able to produce enough cloths for people to wear. The process of weaving began by obtaining thread for weaving from cotton wool from which cotton seeds had already been removed. These seeds were removed by a thin iron rod called obibo that served as a roller. After all the cotton seeds had been removed, the cotton was beaten into a light and thin form, before being spun into threads with a spindle that had a round, heavy object at its bottom end. The heavy object could be circular in shape. The threads could be dyed in different colours, while others were used in their white colour. There were women whose occupation was to produce threads for weaving. Weaving with vertical looms was the exclusive occupation of the South-west Nigeria women¹³.

They were very dexterous on their looms and very fast in turning out yards of cloth in one day. This was why weaving of cloths was already a part of South-west Nigeria culture long before the 19th century.¹⁴

Dyeing was another industry that went hand in hand with weaving. In nearly every district were found dyeing cottage industries which were usually carried out by women only. With indigo leaves, usually obtained from the farm or bought in the market, dye was prepared. It was easy to locate the dye establishments with many big pots and heaps of ashes that had been used during processing. Dyeing produced shades of blue because of the natural indigo colour. Other common colours were purple and green. Pottery was another popular South-west Nigeria industry. Unlike other industries which were commonly found around every town, pottery industries were found only in towns where clay was available. Despite the fact that only few South-west Nigeria towns produced pottery, the few pottery industries were able to even produce surplus pottery wares with locally made instruments and traditional techniques. Again, like many other industries, pottery was an exclusively female occupation. Another home industry, monopolised by women, was cap-making and beading.¹⁵

Many South-west Nigeria towns, before 1900, were known for the production of elite caps, used mainly by the chiefs, kings and very wealthy people in the society. With strong threads or horse hair, these caps were dexterously sewn with needles produced by blacksmiths. In fact, during the pre-colonial era, the status of a man could easily be measured by the type of cap he wore. These caps produced by women definitely could not be bought or worn by ordinary people, and the people were aware of this. There were also royal caps, or crowns, which were exclusively for kings. These were expensive and prestigious. The kings' crowns were usually

¹² J. A. Atanda, *An Introduction to Yoruba History*. (Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1980)

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ A. T. Ajayi, L. O. Buhari, and O. S. Osadola, *Socio-cultural Structure and Development of Aramoko Land: A Historical Reflection*. *European Journal of Social Sciences Studies*, Vol. 3 Issue 1, 2018 pp.96-107

heavily beaded with various ornamental, pictorial or sculptural designs. This type was known as “ade”. Caps were also produced for the ordinary people in the society¹⁶.

Mat weaving, like pottery, was an industry that strongly affected the lives of the South-west Nigeria people generally. In the pre-colonial period, when there were no modern beds, these today, mats were the major materials for sleeping; followed by animal skins. Even when raised mud beds were in use by some wealthy South-west Nigeria, mats were still needed to spread on them before sleeping. During ceremonies like marriage, masquerade rituals, child naming, death rites and special thanksgiving to the gods for success in some endeavours, mats were usually spread on the ground for children and boys and girls to sit on. Grown up people or adults were given wooden or palm frond stools to sit on. On occasions, when these stools or benches were not enough, mats were also used by the adults for sitting. Like pottery, mat weaving was practised in only a few South-west Nigeria towns¹⁷. However, the volume of production by these industries was enough to meet the consumption demand of the people. What made the products of these mat industries very unique and acceptable were their attractive geometric designs and colours.¹⁸

Distribution was necessary because each individual concentrated on a particular task or on a particular crop would need to exchange his produce for that of other specialist in other fields. This then led to the growth of trade in the South-west Nigeria. Before the establishment of market system economy, the “Barter system” of exchange was used, at this time there was no standardized system of exchange since there was no currency¹⁹.

Trading by barter, does not, involved verbal bargaining but rather involved placing your goods in front of your house or by the road side and withdrawing to a hiding probably to engage in other works. When someone who needs such an items comes along, he or she would place his or her own items beside yours and go into hiding. The owner of the former items would now return and examine the goods if he or she is satisfied with the value of goods as a replacement for his own. If not he would leave the two items and go back into hiding. The other person would again return and add to his commodities or take it away until the barging is concluded. Trade by barter continued to be the medium of exchange until the introduction of commodities currency when such items like cowry shells, manilas, salt, copper etc. began to serve as currencies.

To be able to have enough money as security for social and commercial activities, the South-west Nigeria adopted the traditional banking system known as esusu which made a group of people join together to contribute a specified amount either every market day or every moon period. Such money after a period was always returned to members in full. Without doubt, in their own traditional way, the South-west Nigeria people had a well-structured trade system which made the commercial experiences of the people very productive. But despite the largely domestic nature of the South-west Nigeria pre-colonial economy, it is good to also know that there was limited contact between South-west Nigeria and some European merchants on the

¹⁶ A. T. Ajayi, L. O. Buhari, and O. S. Osadola, Socio-cultural Structure and Development of Aramoko Land: A Historical Reflection. *European Journal of Social Sciences Studies*, Vol. 3 Issue 1, 2018 pp.96-107

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

eve of colonial era. And this was why, in fact, in “the whole of South-west Nigeria, production for export was by no means a new experience that came in the wake of colonial imposition”²⁰ because the activities of the European traders before 1900 evidently showed that “export production antedated the formal imposition of British colonial rule”.²¹

1.1 Pre-Colonial Transportation

Human-porterage

Before 1900, South-west Nigeria had road infrastructures that connected the town people to their various farms that could be between five to twenty kilometers away. The roads which “branched out from each town to many geographical corners of the town were footpaths that were not only very narrow but also very curvy in many places, with side bushes that occasionally made some animals close on, on people”.²² On the roads, agricultural and hunting activities were carried out. In fact, therefore, two types of road existed in each town. These were the farm and hunting roads. The farm roads were very narrow and long while the hunting roads were narrower, rough and short.

However, “many of these hunting bush paths later developed into farm roads, particularly because of constant trailing of animals that occasionally escaped from traps or after being shot”. But, the major South-west Nigeria roads were those that connected towns to one another. Though the roads were also narrow and very tortuous, they were wider and cleaner than the farm roads²³. These roads were always maintained by the communities mainly because they were trade routes to different destinations. The roads met the needs of the people, because they were only for head porterage. Through these roads, people carried their agricultural and industrial products to distant markets. This form of transportation was the commonest and the oldest in South-west Nigeria in the pre-colonial period. Of all the means of transportation employed in South-west Nigeria, the human porterage played the most important role because there are few places that have creeks and rivers in South-west Nigeria²⁴.

Human porterage is the carrying of goods by man at the same time as he transports himself by walking. Man walks on foot, from place to place to distant lands and used his own hands or arms or his own head, shoulder or back as carriage for his load. In most parts of South-west Nigeria, human portarage was the only means of transporting goods in the pre-colonial period. This made human porterage attracted more observation than the other forms of transport in pre-colonial period.

There were short and long distant journeys undertaken for various reasons in the pre-colonial period. The short journeys were made to farm lands, markets-places, villages and nearby towns which can be covered within a day while long distance journeys could take one to four weeks for the travellers to get to their destinations. Slaves or porters were largely engaged for long

²⁰ O. Omisimi, “The Rubber Export Trade in Ibadan, 1893-1904: Colonial Innovation or Rubber Economy”, *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. 10, No. 4, December 1979.

²¹ S. O. Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, London: Lowe and Brydone printers, 1921, pp. 159-160.

²² N.A.I., Ondo Prof. 3/2, File No. 244, Administrative Report, 1922, p. 4.

²³ Mr Adamolekun Oluwafemi, 45 years, a Civil Servant at his Residence in Ikeja in Lagos State on 25/06/2018

²⁴ Mr Adekoya Oluwafemi, 55 years, Staff of Ministry of Transport, Lagos on 24/7/2018

distance journeys³³. Most of the head porters were recruited from nuclear and extended family settings. Majority of heads of families in South-west Nigeria were subsistent farmers who depended greatly on their wives, children and slaves for the movement of agricultural products such as foodstuff, pots, cotton, cocoa etc. to and from the farm within short distance. Products had to be carried to the consumers, also during harvesting; there must be immediate removal of crops from the farm to the villages or market places in order to avoid waste²⁵.

Human porters made use of local roads or bush-paths that linked neighbouring towns, villages, cities, states, kingdoms and empires. The average weight carried by a porter ranged from 50 lbs to 90 lbs depending on the carrying capacity of individuals. In the absence of measuring scales, a porter estimated what he could carry for the length of the journey by lifting it up to feel its weight. If the load is too heavy for him to lift off the ground, he knew that it will be too heavy for him to carry²⁶.

Most people or porters used their leather bags, pots, basket and calabashes on their heads or hands for the carrying of goods to their homes or farms or markets. There were intra and inter trade activities among the states in South-west Nigeria and other neighboring communities. The porters also had ready devices by which they minimized delays and increased their speed. In their journeys instead of them requiring assistance of other porters in bringing down their load, they will use forked sticks to bring them down from their heads²⁷. In order to avoid frequent pains in the head, the porters protected their heads by placing specially made pads on their heads before setting the load on it. The pads were made of folded cottons or leaves and designed to give some comfort to the head²⁸.

Human portage served in the distribution of goods like, farm produce and other goods which were generally produced for immediate consumption and for the various markets. Some of these produce were conveyed to the various markets. Human portage was the only means of transporting in some states like Ekiti, Ogun and Osun while in some places in Ondo State such as Ilaje area also Lagos and Ogun, human portage supplemented canoe transport.

Head portage mode of pre-colonial transportation was characterized by inefficiency which strongly impeded the commercial pursuits of the people in South-west Nigeria. One important defect of portage was its small carrying capacity. A porter normally carries about 65 lbs of load. This was a very low pack. As a result, many carriers were required for small amount of product. Scarcity of porters often limited production of fragile products such as pots, because it was easy for porters to slip when the ground was soft and pots to be broken in the wet season; snakes, scorpions, and ants were common on the route; streams had to be forded, flood sections of the route had to be waded through; and bridges or ferries had to be used to cross swift and deep rivers. All these could lead to scarcity of porters²⁹. In other words, the human portage

²⁵ G.O. Ogunremi, op.cit.

²⁶ *ibid.* p.102

²⁷ G.O. Ogunremi, "Counting the Camels: The Economics of Transportation in Pre-Industrial Nigeria". New York: Nok Publishers International Ltd, 1982.

²⁸ G.O. Ogunremi, op.cit, p.12

²⁹ B. J. E. Itsuehi., "Road transport in Pre-Colonial Etsako" in Njoku .O. (ed) Pre-Colonial Economic History of Nigeria, Nigeria: Ethiope Publishing Corporation, 2002, p.103

was a time-wasting transport system since its cost - effectiveness depended on seasonal changes as well as the security along the trade routes.

Another problem that characterized the human portage system of transport was the insecure nature of the bush-paths. Bush paths used as trade routes and ordinary routes were not safe. Inter-tribal wars hampered trade on goods and merchandise. Insecurity of routes owing to infestation by slave raiders, kidnappers or robbers and to civil wars might also scare off porters and raise cost of portage³⁰. Also high cost of professional carriers lured many long distances traders to encourage internal slavery. This explains the tendency of professional traders to buy and own slaves who served as carriers and as trade commodity³¹.

This form of transport has been seen also as a social evil, which encouraged child labour, because children were involved to a large extent in carrying very heavy loads over short distances. Human portage was also wasting of time, mainly because of the porters' slow speed. The speed of the porter could be affected by the weight of the load they are carrying. Some of the slaves were made to carry very heavy load that caused them not to move very fast³².

Egbe

Egbe is another means of transportation used in South-west Nigeria in the pre-colonial period. These means of transportation is mostly used by head porters, hunters, travellers, bandit etc. Egbe is a traditional herbal medicine usually prepare by native herbalist. Egbe is being refered to as air flight, without using plane, chopper or jet³³. It is use when one is confronted with fearful dangerous attack either by human being such as armed robber or dangerous creatures like fearful animals like snake, lion or large rivers across the way³⁴.

The advantage of egbe is that it will make the person to disappear immediately from the spot where he is and make him land at their desire place. It can land them at a very long distance within few seconds³⁵. The disadvantage of it is that if not properly used it prescribed or the user did not mention where egbe should take him to or if is not properly invoked e.g Egbe take me to my house, farm or market it may land him in most dangerous place such as in the river, on the tree or inside fire³⁶. Anybody can use it but it is mostly used by head porters, travellers and hunters. Person going to Lagos which supposed to take him 3 days, egbe will shorten the journey to1 day or less.

³⁰ T.N. Odeigah., op.cit

³¹ G.O. Ogunremi, op.cit.

³² A. E. Afigbo, "The Age of Innocence: The Igbo and their Neighbours in Pre-Colonial Times", Ahiajoku Lecture Series, Owerri: Ministry of Information, Youth and Sports Government Press. 1981

³³ Chief F.A Adekola, Onimoja of Ido Ekiti, a Traditionalist, at his residence in Ido Osi in Ekiti State on 29/10/2019

³⁴ Chief Bakare Arije, 82 years, a retired Constable in the colonial Ekiti administration at his residence in Iworoko in Ekiti State on 06/05/2018

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Chief Bakare Arije, 82 years, a retired Constable in the colonial Ekiti administration at his residence in Iworoko in Ekiti State on 06/05/2018

Kanako/Afaja

These two types of traditional herbal medicine are very strong and useful for travellers. According to investigation, It is a medicine that shortening long distance journey in pre-colonial period³⁷. Yoruba people's ancestors were very creative, saying they created the white man's airplane. The different between Kanako/Afaja is that, kanako is been used to travel on land while afaja is been used to travel in air. Both Afaja and Kanako are been used to shortened distance or length of a distance journey³⁸. The disadvantage of kanako/afaja is that the distance that one covered quickly in the day time or when one used it, the user are still going to cover or walk with their leg when they are asleep in their dream³⁹. Anybody can use any of the native medicine depending on what they want to use it for, either negatively or positively but is mostly used by herbalist, travellers armed robbers, kidnappers, porters etc⁴⁰.

Ofe

Ofe is also prepared by native herbalist. It is almost similar to the use of egbe but it can only land you at a very short distance when one is being confronted with attack⁴¹. It can also safe one from falling or where land is slippery. It can also be use to jump high or higher places faster as possible. Anybody can use it. For example, people dancing traditional dance can use it to prevent them from falling⁴².

Afeiri/isiju

This is another form of herbal traditional medicine which is strongly useful for travellers. It is a disappearing charm⁴³. This type of native medicine will not allow ordinary people to see the user. It will make one invisible anywhere they go either in the market, on the road etc. Hunters mostly use it to hunt for dangerous animals like lion, antelopes etc. one of the disadvantage of afeiri is that it can failed at any time and make one visible to people. This makes it not to be reliable⁴⁴.

Water Transportation

Water transportation system just like every other form of transportation served as links between internal and external trade, business transactions or between communities. Before the coming of highways, railways and airways, rivers provided the only thorough fares for the cheap transportation of large, quantities of commodities over long distances in some parts of South-west Nigeria. Coastal produce like fish, crayfish, catfish salt, periwinkle etc. were carried by canoe into the interior of the South-west region in exchange for farm produce. Water transport, entailed the use of rivers, creeks, and lakes. This form of transportation system was very important to the pre-colonial South-west region because big trees in the area were used for the

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Adekola omowumi, 56 years, Traditionalist, at his residence in Ado-Ekiti on 29/10/2019

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ A.P. Familusi, 60 years, Yoruba teacher, at his residence in Ile-Oluji in Ondo State on 27/10/2019

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Ibid

construction of canoes, and the canoes were used to convey goods or products from the riverine areas to the other communities.⁴⁵ The people built most of the canoes that were used for transporting passengers from the coastal areas to their various destinations and the canoes were sold. Canoe building was an industry in its own right. There were specialists in canoe building who were moving from one place to the other, where trees or grasses were available to build canoes. They used the canoes to operate not only in their own environment, but also in other neighboring towns that were navigable⁴⁶.

Canoes were also used for the conveying of goods such as salt, palm produce etc. Several tons of palm oil produced in the hinterland was carried to river areas. Canoes were also employed in carrying goods such as bananas, plantains yams etc. Local traders in most riverine areas in the South-west region depended on canoes for their day to day trading activities⁴⁷. Even in economic, social and political activities in their various communities, canoes were used for transportation from one town to the other

In riverine areas, rivers were actively employed for navigation activities and business activities thrived especially among fishermen. Some of the fisherman lived along water courses or lakes, using their nets or placing their wires of basket garths wherever they were likely to have a good catch of fish.

When comparing canoe transport with other forms of transportation in the pre-colonial transport system in the study area, one of the major advantages of the water transport system was that the canoe travels faster than the porters and it is comfortable when seating in it⁴⁸. In the head-porterage system, the porter could easily become sick or tired etc. A canoe could be used every day of the week by anyone who has expertise in its operation. It cannot rebel against the passengers nor become neither troublesome nor tricky like porters. Such factors like feeding or resting those often delayed porters need not delay a canoe. Its services were undisturbed as long as it remained unbroken and as long as there were paddlers to manipulate it. Canoes were suitable for long and short distance journeys and its carrying capacity was high⁴⁹. The operational cost makes it by far the cheapest mode of transportation.

Water transport system like any form of transportation had its own problems. One of the major problems of water transport had to do with the season. The season can affect water transport adversely, especially the dry season during which the water level is low for canoes to sail. Another limitation of water transport was the canoe capsizing and all the people and goods inside the canoe perishing inside the water. During economic and political dissension within a community or between one political unit and another, during wars and conflicts some water routes become inaccessible. Canoe transportation remained insecure due to the presence of river animals like crocodile. The canoeists can be ambushed by local creek pirates who intercepted river boats for the purpose of robbing market men and women⁵⁰.

⁴⁵ T. N. Odeigah., *op.cit.* p .490

⁴⁶ C. Harrison, "The Economics of Transportation in Africa", New York: Nok, p. 46-45.

⁴⁷ T.R. Batten, "Tropical Africa in World History", 3rd Edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956. p. 50

⁴⁸ M.R. Bonavia, "The Economics of Transport". Cambridge, Cambridge university press, 1954, pp.146-179

⁴⁹ G.O. Ogunremi 1982, *op.cit.* pp. 2-5.

⁵⁰ S. Clifford, *op.cit*

Most communities in the study area are situated in upland areas which made contact with coastal middle-men trader very difficult. The absence of extensive river networks like the Niger and Benue never posed serious barriers to trade and inter-group relations.

2.0 THE ROLE OF TRANSPORT IN THE PRE-COLONIAL ECONOMY

As far as transportation is concerned, it has a lot to do with the economy of any given society, for any economy to grow it requires the movement of goods and services from one place to another. Transportation involves the moving of raw materials to areas of production and for moving of finished goods to consumers⁵¹. Transportation determines the extent of market prices; because where transportation is not costly, goods tend to be cheap and affordable.

Various forms of transportation promoted trade and improved the economy of the South-west Nigeria. The surpluses generated in the economy had to be disposed of and the transport system therefore played an important role⁵².

Pre-colonial transport systems such as human portorage on land and canoe on water stimulated the growth and expansion of market centres in the study area. The presence of bush-paths paved the way for the exchange of goods and services. It also encouraged cultural borrowings, intra and inter-group relations. Many places in the study area produced agricultural commodities like dried cassava, cocoa, yam, palm oil and palm kernel which were carried by means of human portorage to neighbouring markets where they were exchanged for commodities⁵³.

Pre-colonial transport systems in South-west Nigeria aided internal slavery and the Trans-Atlantic slave trade via bush-paths, inland water-ways and creeks. In South-west Nigeria, slave dealers traveled through bush-paths from Badagry which was a popular slave market centre where slaves were finally taken for shipment to Europe or the Americas via the Atlantic Ocean⁵⁴.

Trade contacts enhanced regional specialization across spectra of occupational pursuits as farmers, traders, blacksmiths, diviners and traditional healers in South-west region who hawked their wares and services to distant markets, where they maximized profits. The presence of market centres made possible by transportation. Transportation brought the people of South-west region into closer contact with other communities in Nigeria. There were periodic and daily markets that needed movement from one market to the other⁵⁵. Market days provided suitable occasions to observe the continuing dominance of non-motorised forms of transport in the grassland areas. Women are to be found walking in groups and carrying food items on their heads⁵⁶. Individuals needed transportation to carry whatever items for sale either by road or water. European cloth, salt, sugar, and soap and so on, further destroyed the existing

⁵¹ G.O. Ogunremi, 1982, op.cit.

⁵² I. Elizabeth, "A History of Nigeria". New York: Longman Inc., 1983, p.22.

⁵³ I. Elizabeth, op.cit

⁵⁴ A.I.O. Ifediora, "Fishing in the Economy of Pre-colonial (Ale-Iwere) Itsekiri land", Ed. O.N. Njoku, Pre-Colonial Economic History of Nigeria. Nigeria: Ethiope Publishing Corporation, 2002. pp. 66-67.

⁵⁵ R.E. Westmeyer, "Economics of Transportation". New York Longman, 1952. p.3

⁵⁶ P.O. Pedersen, "Freight transport under globalisation and its impact on Africa." *Journal of Transport Geography*, Vol.9, pp. 85-99. 2001.

pre-colonial economic system. It is also important to note that pre-colonial transport modes had continued to play an important role even after the colonial conquest.

Pre-colonial bush-paths that linked neighbouring communities throughout South-west Nigeria encouraged exchange of services and the recruitment of labour force for agricultural purposes. Through these bush-paths, most migrant farmers penetrated into South-west region where they were absorbed as migrant labourers. Also, the political and social activities were also facilitated by transportation, because some of the political and social activities involved moving people from one place to another⁵⁷.

3.0 DEVELOPMENT OF MARKET IN PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD

By 1500, people as been making use of market system to obtain part of their needs and disposed their excess production. These products include yam, maize, plantain, palm oil etc. Market served as nucleus around economic activity engaged in by traders, farmers, and artisans of the region. Each town or village in South-west Nigeria had one or more markets depending on its size. Market centers were spread in pre-colonial period and there were three types of marketing system: Local, regional and long distance market⁵⁸.

The local market refers to authorized caucus of buyers and sellers within a radius of about ten miles of the area of production. This was the range, which could be covered in one day by foot, while still allowing in time to exchange product and return home.

The regional market on the other hand consisted mostly of specialized or sometimes full time craftsmen, hunters, fishermen etc. such marketing activities exceeded ten miles distance and could bring together people from various regions.

The long distance market as the name suggests also exceed the ten miles radius, there by involving the necessity of arrange for overnight stay and in some cases the stay can even be more than one night. This kind of market held the greatest potential for the development of business, capital and emergence of specialist merchant group and it was closely intertwined with the flow of population⁵⁹.

Generally, markets in the study area were well ordered institutions. The market had special areas allocated to different types of group of sellers, so that buyers and sellers knew the customary sections of the market where various articles were sold, such markets as the morning and evening markets. Markets in the study area were found directly opposite the palace of the king of the town. This was due to believe that the king and chiefs had absolute control and authority on his people as well as the economic activities of their community⁶⁰. Findings revealed that at the end of each market day, traders and farmers usually sent part of their

⁵⁷J.C. Anene, "Benin-Niger Delta, Ibo and Ibibio peoples in the nineteenth century." Ed. By J.F. Ade Ajayi and Lan Espie in Thousand years of West African History. Nigeria: Ibadan University press and Nelson, 1965. pp. 304-305.

⁵⁸ Chief A.F.Agboola, op.cit

⁵⁹ Chief A.F.Agboola, op.cit

⁶⁰ Chief A.F.Agboola, op.cit

agricultural products to their king. King appointed some officers who saw to the maintenance of law and order in the market. They were also in charge of collection of market dues⁶¹.

There were various types of markets centres such as the daily markets, periodic markets and the periodic rotational marketing centres. The periodic markets are held at fixed interval of 4 days, 8 days, 16 days or more. The dates were fixed from one region to the other. The four days were usually the nearest while the 16 days market were the farthest from the centre. And the later always involved virtually people from more than one local district. Closely related to this is the periodic rotational market. The difference between this and the normal rotational market is that the venue of transaction was usually rotated among the many districts or villages⁶².

Without doubt, slave trade was the greatest humiliating and destructive experiences on the lives and economic activities of the South-west Nigeria. Slave had its most tragic effect on South-west Nigeria from the beginning of the 19th century. But during this period when hundreds of South-west Nigeria men and women had been captured and taken as slaves, people were able to fashion their own methods of avoiding being captured, Part of the means of escaping the slave raiders was shifting some settlements temporarily too far away into the interior forest where the raiders could not easily locate. Women, young boys and girls were made to reside in these settlements, while the men, armed with charms and weapons and who could resist capture would come to the town⁶³. However, on the eve of colonial rule, slave trade had diminished considerably.

From the above, it is clear that the evolution of pre-colonial transportation followed the evolution of settlement in South-west Nigeria. When there were fewer settlements in Nigeria, there were fewer linkages as well. Also, an important development is the upgrading of footpaths into untarred roads; which can be used by automobiles much of the time. Head portage moves substantial part of the country's rural agricultural commodities. Bicycle, hand drawn/push carts, pick-up van etc are the dominant modes of public transport in the rural areas, while canoes and boats are used in riverine and navigable inland waterways throughout the country. Also, the various forms of pre-colonial transport system namely, the human portage and canoe, Kanako/Afaja, Ofe, Egbe, Afeiri/Isiju contributed to the growth and development of the South-west Nigeria economy. It also helped in the linking up of various communities in the area and outside the area, especially in the movement of people to perform economic, social and political obligations like visitation, going to farmers, markets, marriage ceremonies, funerals and religious functions. Transportation as an economic function also contributed to internal and external trade in the area. Despite its numerous problems and limitations, pre-colonial transport in the study area helped in the economic development.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The various forms of pre-colonial transport system contributed to the growth and development of Southwest Nigeria economy till 1900. It also help in linking up various communities in he area and outside the area, especially in the movement of people to perform economic, social

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ Chief Bakare Arije, 82 years, a retired Constable in the colonial Ekiti administration at his residence in Iworoko in Ekiti State on 06/05/2018

and political obligations like visitation, going to farmers, markets. Despite pre-colonial transportation' challenges and limitations, Transportation as an economic function also contributed to internal and external trade in the area. It also help in the economic growth and development of the area.

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