

# Historical Political Economy of the Management and Development of the Nigerian Railways, 1999-2015

Tokunbo Aderemi. Ayoola  
Anchor University, Lagos, Nigeria

Shehu Tijjani Yusuf  
Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria

## Abstract

During the colonial period in Nigeria, 1900-1960, the Nigerian Railway was one of the strong pillars of the Nigerian political economy. It facilitated the massive economic exploitation and the economic development of the colony. Moreover, it was one of the important legacies of British domination of the Nigerian space up until when Nigeria got her political independence from Britain in 1960. Starting from 1960, however, and up to the 1990s, the economic, financial, and social fortunes of the Nigerian Railway industry declined at a very rapid speed. Its situation during this period was further complicated by the introduction, implementation, and the negative impact of the IMF/World Bank supported neo-liberal economics undergirded Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). By the very last year of the twentieth century, which year also marked the beginning of Nigeria's Fourth Republic, the Nigerian Railway Corporation(NRC), the statutory body that was charged with the responsibility of managing and developing the Nigerian Railway industry, had become bankrupt and was rapidly dying and was in free fall into total collapse. As a result of the foregoing negative development, and starting with the Obasanjo Administration (1999-2007), renewed efforts were made to reorganise and modernise this important transport and socio-economic infrastructure. The various reorganisation programmes that were initiated and implemented for the Nigerian Railways from 1999-2015 were critically examined. It is argued that in view of the dependent and neo-colonial nature of the Nigerian historical political economy and the rampant corruption that has come to define it, not much would be achieved by way of radical transformation and modernisation of the railway industry in the medium to long term – unless Nigeria becomes industrialised and is then able to manufacture nothing less than sixty per cent of her needs and requirements, Currently nearly of these are still imported in the face of scarce foreign exchange earnings.

**Keywords:** Nigeria, railway, management, development, transformation, modernization

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## 1. Introduction

The origin of rail transportation in Nigeria can be traced to British imperialism and colonialism in Africa in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries. The construction and development of this mode of transportation by British colonial officials in the Nigerian colony was for the primary purpose of facilitating the evacuation of agricultural and mineral resources from Nigeria; and for the distribution of consumer goods from Europe to different parts of the colony. At its apogee during colonial rule, the Nigerian Railway (NR) was part of the solid foundation of the colony's export and import economy up until 1950s, when it was fiercely challenged by road transport. This dent in the armour of rail transport in Nigeria would continue up until the 1990s, when its fortune dipped irretrievably. By 1999, which was the start year of Nigeria's Fourth Republic, the Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC), the statutory corporation charged with the responsibility of managing the Nigerian Railway industry, was in dire financial straits and dying slow death.

It was against this background that starting with the Olusegun Obasanjo's civilian Administration (1999-2007), strenuous efforts were made to radically change the Nigerian railway industry - for the better. Although many studies have been carried out on the colonial and post-colonial Nigerian Railway, however, none of these seem to have been done on its development and management in the period of civilian and democratically elected governments from 1999 to 2015. (Nzegwu, 1973; Oshosunwo, 1973; Olanrewaju, 1974 and 1976: 309-323; Mikailu, 1986; Ogwude, 1988, 179-201; Odeleye, 2000, 42-49; Jaekel, 1997; Ayoola, 2004, 2006: 148-170, 2008: 60-85; 2014: 43 – 65).

Thus, this present study will closely examine some programmes of transformation introduced in the NR meant to change its fortunes during the -same period. The thesis underpinning this essay therefore is that due to the fact that Nigeria is a dependent, corrupt, neoliberal, neo-colonial, and capitalist state and economy, little is achieved in the short to medium term in striving to change the operations, finances, and growth of the NR just by merely reforming that which should be radically transformed.

## 2. The Structural Adjustment Programme and the Nigerian Railway, 1986 - 1999

From 1964 - four years into Nigeria's independence from Britain - to 1999 and under different civilian and military governments, the financial and corporate well-being of the NR continuously declined into virtual bankruptcy. The Shehu Shagari civilian Administration (1979-1983), which came to power in October 1979 after twelve years of continuous military dictatorship in Nigeria, was overthrown by a military coup in December 1983. (Dibua, 2006: 107). The reasons given by the new military dictators included corruption on the part of the civilian politicians, mismanagement of the economy, manipulation of religion and ethnicity for the sole purpose of political survival, political prostitution, political instability and agitation, lazy and indolent public and civil services, general inefficiency in the Nigerian system, and hopelessness in the country. The new military head of state and commander-in-chief of the armed forces was Major-General Muhammad Buhari, who together with other members of his military junta ran a very autocratic administration from December 1983 to August 1985 (Dibua, 2007: 112-113). While the authoritarian regime lasted, it was completely absorbed in running battles and conflicts with members of the country's civil society. The new military dictator therefore had little or no time devoted to solving the gamut of problems facing such public institutions like the NRC. Thus, for the two years the Buhari regime was in power, there were no major changes in the NRC. The regime was subsequently overthrown by a palace coup spearheaded by the third ranking military man in the Buhari administration, Major-General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, the Chief of Army Staff. (Dibua, 2007:113). Under the new regime, the Nigerian economy, which had been experiencing serious problems since the late 1970s under the corrupt and weak Shagari Administration, was now in deep recession. To solve this economic crisis, the Babangida regime approached the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank for financial facilities and support. The negotiation for the loan was hard and was long drawn out; and lasted for two years. The Babangida government was so frustrated by what seemed a long delay that he had this to say about it

On getting to power on August 28, 1985, General Ibrahim Babangida told the nation that "the last twenty months have not witnessed any significant changes in the national economy. Contrary to expectations, we have so far been subjected to a steady deterioration in the general standard of living; and intolerable suffering by the ordinary Nigerians have risen higher, scarcity of commodities has increased, hospitals still remain mere consulting clinics, while educational institutions are on the brink of decay. Unemployment has stretched to critical dimensions. Due to the stalemate, which arose in negotiation with the International Monetary Fund, the former government embarked on a series of counter-trade agreements, Nigerians were forced to buy goods and commodities at higher prices than obtained in the international market. The government intends to review the whole issue of counter-trade. A lot has been said and heard about our position with the International Monetary Fund. Although we formally applied to the Fund in April 1983, no progress has as yet been made in the negotiation and a stalemate has existed for the last two years. We shall break the deadlock. (Eric Teniola, 2018: <https://guardian.ng/opinion/the-huge-debt-burden-and-how-we-got-there/>)

The deadlock, however, was not broken. This outcome, according to the military junta, was due to the tough requirements Nigeria was expected to meet before accessing the \$2.5 million loan.<sup>i</sup> (Eric Teniola, 2018: <https://guardian.ng/opinion/the-huge-debt-burden-and-how-we-got-there/>). Eventually, the Nigerian government rejected the loan, but in a rather queer way and against many pieces of advice not to do so, it adopted the strict and rather suffocating *conditionalities*. This implementation of those conditionalities would subsequently centre on the adoption of neo-liberal capitalist economic policies which were collectively tagged *Structural Adjustment Programme* (SAP). It was based on the interplay of market forces. It was much more for Nigeria. Thus under it Nigeria did a number of things viz: devaluation of its currency, the Naira; drastic reduction of state expenditure; elimination of subsidies on social services; achievement of balanced budget; privatization state enterprises, including the NR; sacking of many government employees; and liberalisation of the country's trade regimes. These measures greatly affected the NRC (Dibua, 2007: 115-117; Olorode, 2016: 37 - 44).

Arguably one of the greatest impact of the SAP on the Nigerian public service in general and the NRC in particular, was the massive reduction in the number of the railway industry's very skilful and specially trained staff. Even though this great reduction in the number of staff started under the Babangida government, the exercise would continue well into the 2000s. Earlier in the 1980s, the railway corporation had over 35,000 workers – equipped with the requisite deep technical knowledgeable, very skilful, and experienced - but by 1999, the number had really reduced to only 14, 649 staff. (Nigeria Bureau of Public Enterprises: Nigerian Railway Corporation Marketing Brief, 1994). In addition, as a result of further deterioration in the public corporation's finances – getting only N30 million, but paying out N=210 million per month in salaries and allowances to staff - the government further reduced the corporation's staff to 7,000 workers, and later to below 6,000 personnel (*Guardian* (Nigeria): 2005).

In the end, all these measures rather than radically changing the NRC's perilous financial and operational situation, actually compounded them up until the time when yet another military junta came to power. Even with

the new military regime the corrosive effectives of the SAP would continue from administration to administration because their key officials agreed completely with the IMF and the World Bank that the panacea for transforming Nigeria's economy, state, government and society was neoliberal economics. This was notwithstanding the condemnation by radical scholars, liberal analysts, and the majority of the people, that this economic principle both in its theory and in practice in Nigeria was making life of the people rather unbearable. Indeed around Africa the picture was not dissimilar. According to Simutanyi

The experience of neoliberal policies in sub-Saharan Africa over the past two and half decades has almost been uniform. Apart from very few exceptions, such as Angola and Mozambique, which have seen large increases in economic growth in excess of 8 percent annum, on the whole the policies have played havoc of African economies. Trade liberalisation has led to the flooding of local markets with cheap imported goods thereby ruining local producers. (Simutanyi, 2006, 5).

Similarly,

Privatisation of state-owned enterprises was in the main poorly handled with corruption and cronyism influencing the decisions. Few of the privatised industries have survived the competition of a fully-fledged economy market economy. Whereas the operation of the market has not been left to have a free reign. To cushion local business from stiff competition and shelter newly privatised companies, state elites have imposed forms of regulations and tempered with the operation of the laws of supply and demands. The other effect of privatisation has been an increase in number of the unemployed and poverty level (Simutanyi, 2006, 5).

The consequence of all these developments was that neoliberal policies in Africa did not assist it to come to terms with and eradicate poverty, lack, misery, underdevelopment, and hopelessness. The policies would appear not to have been of much value to the social existence of ordinary Africans. Neither did they serve the collective interests of Africa. Rather, to the chagrin of keen observers, these policies were yet another tool in the hands African petty bourgeoisie that was actively serving the interest of foreign masters represented by the World Bank and IMF – for their own selfish interests

It was against this backdrop that many Africans began to hack back to the halcyon days of what Mkandawire has characterised as the “Developmental States in Africa” (Mkandawire, 2001). Under the latter, governments across the continent subsidised social services and controlled some of the commanding heights of the economy – on behalf of the people. The experiment, however, started to crumble in the 1980s because of internal mismanagement within Africa and the contradictions of neo-colonialism on it. In these circumstances, what types of interjection did Nigerian state and government put up for the Nigerian Railways, one of the country's greatest assets?

### 3. Intervention by the Chinese Government

On 9 November 1995, the General Sanni Abacha junta, which succeeded the Babangida regime, negotiated and delivered a 3-year and \$528 million agreement with a Chinese government foreign firm, the China Civil Engineering and Construction Company (CCECC), to rehabilitate the deteriorating NR's assets and infrastructure.

(Guardian [Nigeria] 15 September 2005). In the contract agreement, the CCECC would supply 50 locomotives (\$100million); reduce gradients along the railway lines (\$40.5 million); eliminate curves along the railway routes(380 kilometres) (\$99.4 million); maintaining the formation (3,289kilometres) (\$64.1million); renewal of signalling equipment and installations (180 stations) (\$81.8 million); maintenance of 2,744 railway bridges (\$7.4 million); supplying 150 coaches (\$90 million); supplying 400 wagon (\$28.4million); supplying 100 guard vans (\$3 million); design and survey for rehabilitation (\$9.6 million); and experts' charges (\$4.3 million). (Guardian [Nigeria] 19 March 2001). But what keen observers – local and international - opponents of military rule in Nigeria, economists, financial experts, analysts, and critics found difficult to understand was why this uniquely unique government intervention would adopt the same failed strategy that had been adopted in the past. The strategy and implementation method were money down the drain, unprofitable, and redundant and it was merely a retouching of an old and virtually dead transport infrastructure and national inheritance.

As far as ordinary citizens and radical critics of members of the Nigerian ruling class are concerned, the strategy and indeed the policy of expending precious and scarce foreign exchange of a little over half a billion dollars in just rehabilitating instead of rebuilding from the scratch a fit-for-purpose modern and standard gauge national railway network indeed amounted to financial recklessness – pure and simple. Collectively, the critics believed that the project was the latest and newest stratagem of stealing from the country's commonwealth. The project was “a veritable avenue for the Head of State [Abacha] to siphon public funds” (Ifedi, 2005). The other partner to the railway rehabilitation project, the Chinese, did not smell nice either. They were condemned for colluding with the Nigerian state officials to fleece the country through the railway project. Second, they were

accused of supplying sub-standard locomotives and wagons. Third, was the non-provision of spare parts for the supplied locomotives and rolling stock. Four, they were not providing the necessary trainings for the NR workers (Nwoji 2005).

Between 1999 and 2007, N=124 billion was allocated to the project, but most of was allegedly pocketed by top government officials, including the late Minister of Transport, General Gumel, and even the military head of state, General Sanni Abacha. (Interviews with officials: Federal Ministry of Transport and NRC, 2000). These kinds of serious allegations of malfeasance centring of corruption by the two partners to the railway project must have annoyed the Chinese beyond measure and reason. They then sought to distance themselves from the accusation of deliberately colluding with state officials to loot the country dry. They indeed denied the accusation and stated that government officials it was that did not always meet their own obligations under the agreement. For example, Nigerian officials did not always release counterpart funding according to well worked out schedule. Furthermore, local contractors invited by the Federal government to assist in the execution of aspects of the project did not rise up to their own responsibilities It should be noted also these contractors were given advance payments to supply materials such as ballast, or to execute sub-contracts of the project actually ran away with the said money – without executing work. (Interviews with officials: Federal Ministry of Transport and NRC, 2000). Ultimately these thieving contractors never returned a penny from the advance payment they collected. In view of the financial shenanigans around the project, by 1999, when the civilian government of Olusegun Obasanjo came to power, there was not much to show for the almost \$600 million the Abacha regime claimed to have been expended between 1995 and 1998 on capital projects in the Nigerian Railway industry.

#### **4. Administration of the Nigerian Railway in the Fourth Republic, 1999-2015**

In May 1999, after 16 years of uninterrupted military dictatorship in Nigeria, civilian and democratic rule was once again restored in Nigeria. In the new political dispensation a former military head of state of Nigeria, retired army General Olusegun Obasanjo, who held rein in Nigeria from 1976 to 1979 was democratically elected as President of the country. His swearing to power in May 1999 thus inaugurated the Fourth Republic in Nigeria. In office and rearing to go and chalk up some progress, Obasanjo, who in the late 1970s engineered a programme under which the RITES of India were commissioned and came to Nigeria with some Indian railway officials, to reorganise the Nigerian Railway Corporation and rehabilitate its infrastructure, decided once again to take on the matter of the Nigerian Railway head on. Equally, the foreign consultants and contractors were very determined to turn around the declining fortunes of the railway corporation.

To begin his work of rehabilitation and reorganisation of this specific mode of transportation, railway in Nigeria, the government decided to probe the Abacha railway rehabilitation project. Second, it appointed a selected consortium of international consultants, including Team Group (Nigeria) and Natchuks and Transurb Technical of Belgium, to, among other work, develop a 25-year strategic vision for the NR (Chen, 2018: 1-9). The exercise resulted in a report, *25-year Strategic Vision for the Nigerian Railway System (2002-2027)*. This crucial report, the first of its kind in Nigeria, was first approved by the government in 2002, but later amended and ratified again in 2012. (Chen, 2018: 2). The vision and the plan derivable from it “...aimed to rehabilitate and transition existing rail routes toward higher-capacity standard-gauge tracks, and to connect all thirty-six major states and economic hubs by new railway networks” (Chen, 2018: 1-9).

In order to implement the strategic vision, a budget of \$60 billion was prepared to bring the plan to practical reality (*This Day*, 2002; British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 2002). As part of the 25-year plan, new railway lines were to be constructed from Ajaokuta - Otukpo - Port Harcourt; Makurdi – Yola-Jalingo; Gombe-Yola; Kaura Namoda – Sokoto; Katsina - Kaduna; Oshogbo-Akure-Owo-Benin City-Asaba – Onitsha; Calabar-Ohafia-Umuahia; and Baro-Abuja-Kafancha (*This Day*, 2002). But good as this vision and programme for the Nigerian Railway were, implementation under the Obasanjo government, however, did not start until the final and last year of its eight-year rule. In 2006, the government signed an \$8 billion agreement with China Civil Engineering Construction Company (CCECC), a subsidiary of China Railway Construction Company, to design, construct, and administer or manage more than 1,315 kilometres of new and standard gauge railway line from Lagos to Kano within four years. This was planned to be the first phase of the 25-year programme for the NR. Money for the construction of the railway line was envisaged to come from excess petro-dollars from Nigerian crude oil sales and account, and a \$500 million concessionary loan from the Chinese government’s Exim Bank. In 2007, the Nigerian government paid the CCECC the sum of \$250 million being mobilisation fee for the contractors, to start of the project. On paper, the project seemed to keen observers and even the generality of Nigerians as the long awaited fundamental transformation of the antiquated Nigerian Railway infrastructures (Interviews with traders, NRC’s officials, and labour leaders, 2000).

The proposed laudable railway project, however, soon ran into great political storm and political waters immediately after President Obasanjo left office in 2007. His successor, Mr. Musa Yar’Adua immediately after coming to power suspended the contract because, according to him, the time-tested procedures for awarding such

contracts were not followed and that approval was not obtained from the National Assembly; and that the initial financing the project direct from the country's excess crude oil account was not only illegal, but was manifestly unconstitutional. In view of the importance of the railway project in the overall social, political, technological and economic development of the country, the Yar'Adua government's decision would appear to be an extreme over reaction. In the circumstance, what the government should have done was to follow the normal procedures for obtaining the necessary legislative approval for the project and subsequently carrying out the construction. The government refused to do this. Instead it decided to set up a new committee to re-examine different policy options for transforming the NR (*Independent* (Nigeria), 2009). One of the strongly canvassed alternatives to the Obasanjo's solution for the NR was yet again to embark on the *rehabilitation* of the existing narrow gauge network - a strategy that had been tried repeatedly since the 1970s – with extremely limited successes.

When all is said and done, what was certainly a costly and uncalled for delay was ended. The Yar'Adua administration had to go back to the Obasanjo's vision and plan of rebuilding Nigerian Railway lines from the foundations and inserting standard-gauge lines across the country. But all these were now going to be modified. In the original plan the Western trunk line from Lagos to Kano was to be upgraded; replacing the colonial track. This line was now to be broken into sections and built in instalments; and this would be subject to the availability of capital. Paralleled to this decision was the Yar'Adua government's intention to continue to carry out the obviously the wasteful strategy of rehabilitating, maintaining, and continuing to use the existing colonial narrow gauge network.

As a result of the latter decision, contracts for the rehabilitation of the old network were awarded in 2008/2009 financial year for the Lagos - Jebba, and the Jebba-Kano lines. Furthermore, 25 new locomotives were ordered for the NRC. (*Independent* [Nigeria], 2009). But soon after work started on the rehabilitation of the lines, the contractors started to complain about many problems, including that of finance. On 7 April 2011, rehabilitation contracts for the Eastern railway line worth N=67.3billion were awarded to three companies: ESER Contracting and Industry Company Incorporated in Turkey; China Gezhouba Group Corporation Global Projects Nigeria Limited; and Lingo Nigeria. The works were to be completed before December 2012. However, as at late 2014, work was still going on the project. Other rehabilitation works under the same programme included the 463 kilometre Port Harcourt-Makurdi line; 1016 kilometre Makurdi-Kuru line; spur line to Jos and Kafanchan; 640-kilometre Kuru – Maiduguri line; and tracks, bridges, and culverts within the ambience of the 2119 kilometre track lines. (*Independent* [Nigeria], 2009).

Alongside the foregoing rehabilitation works was the government's sudden decision to resurrect and implement the abandoned 25-year railway modernisation project started by the Obasanjo administration. The first step in this direction was the construction of the \$876 million 187-kilometre (116 mile) Abuja-Kaduna single track standard gauge railway (SGR), whose construction was eventually completed by the incoming Buhari Administration in 2015/2016. It was partly financed with a \$500 million grant from the China Exim Bank, which grant had been on offer to Nigeria since 2006. But as a result of Nigerian government's inability to raise its counterpart funding, the project was suspended until the middle of decade. And in order to continue with the implementation of the Obasanjo initiative, on 18 July 2012, the Goodluck Jonathan government that succeeded the Yar'Adua administration on 6 May 2011, announced that it had signed a \$1.49 billion contract agreement with the CCECC to construct the Lagos-Ibadan *Standard Gauge Railway double track*. The line is in fact “[a]ddendum No 2(2<sup>nd</sup> Segment) to the main railway modernisation project, the Phase I Lagos – Kano rail line.” The project was scheduled to be completed either in late 2014 or in the second half of 2015 (*This Day*, 2012), but this was not to be. It was, however, flagged up in June 2021. The news of the “resurrection” of the Obasanjo initiative, starting with construction of the standard gauge railway lines, was met with great scepticism on the part of Nigerians (*This Day*, 2012). This latter attitude is understandable given the long and chequered history and notoriety of members of the Nigerian petty bourgeoisie. The class has the reputation of formulating good policies and developmental programmes for the NR - only to abandon same later, on account of their uncommon selfishness, greed, and narrow economic interests. In many instances yielding sheepishly to pressures from the “road transport interests” that were determined to sabotage all efforts to have in Nigeria an efficient, effective, and dynamic rail system. Except this, Nigeria will never develop economically, socially, politically and be in the same category of rapidly developing and advanced South countries like South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Africa, Malaysia, Brazil, and China. Thus the 25-year rail modernization programme must be completed totally.

Conscious of this very fact, the Goodluck Jonathan administration decided to adopt the modernisation and revitalisation plan of the NR as one of the cardinal points of its national development agenda. As a result, it decided to continue the two-pronged railway development agenda started by the Yar'Adua government - of which Mr Jonathan was the vice president in. Therefore the new government embarked on a series of rehabilitation programmes for some sections of the existing colonial gauge railway network. To begin with, within the first two years of the administration in power, it rehabilitated the Western Railway line - the 1124-kilometre Lagos-Kano line - which was declared re-opened to traffic in December 2012 (*Guardian Newspaper*

(Nigeria), 2014: 56). Immediately after this event, twice weekly passenger and freight services were resumed. However, for some time, not all the NR's customers were enthused by the standard of service provided on the line. Some complained bitterly about overcrowded and unsanitary condition of the second and third class coaches of the trains (*Premium Times* [Nigeria] [www.premiumtimesng.com/news](http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news), 2014).

What really irked most of the passengers and other categories of customers was the slow speed of train journeys between Lagos and Kano. For example, it took - on the average - about 33 hours to travel the distance between the two great commercial cities; whereas at 200 kilometres per hour most commercial trains in Europe and China will complete the same length of journey within six hours. Furthermore, the journey between Lagos and Kaduna, a distance of just 903 kilometres was being done in 24 hours. (*Premium Times* [Nigeria] [www.premiumtimesng.com/news](http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news), 2014). Therefore, due to these challenges many customers called for serious improvement in the NRC's service delivery. In addition to the rehabilitation of the Lagos-Kano line, there was also the development of sidings and service lines to industrial locations in the Apapa area of Lagos.

Other intercity passenger train services restored as a result of the rehabilitation of the Lagos-Kano line included the Offa-Kano Express service (once per week); Lagos-Ibadan-Ilorin-Lagos train services (thrice per week); Kaduna-Kafanchan train service (which yet to be completed); Minna-Kaduna-Minna service (thrice per week); Kano-Nguru-Kano train service (twice per week); and excursion train services, which are operated during annual festivities in Nigeria, to cater for customers interested in adventures. ([www.nrc-ng.org/about-nrc](http://www.nrc-ng.org/about-nrc), 2022). In addition, some intra-city mass transit services were also rehabilitated. They included Lagos Mass Transit service, with 18 trains per day and carrying on average about 20,000 passengers per day; and Kaduna Mass Transit service, with 10 trains per day carrying about 10,000 passengers per day. However, mass transit services could not resume in the North-eastern and Middle-Belt regions of the country because of Islamic insurgency in the two cities. Similarly the Kano-Challawa mass transit service is still awaiting rehabilitation of the railway sidings in the urban centres (NRC, <http://www.nrc.org/about-nrc&w=railway-transformation-updates>, 2022).

Second, the government entered into the N=67 billion-naira-contract with the CCECC to rehabilitate a total of 2,119 kilometres of sections of the Eastern Nigeria Railway. This is composed of the 463-kilometre Port Harcourt-Markudi line; 1016-kilometre Markudi-Kuru line, including connecting lines to Jos and Kafanchan; and the 640-kilometre line from Kuru-Maiduguri. Under the rehabilitation programme, work was expected to be completed in late 2014 or early 2015. However, due to the Boko Haram Islamic insurgency in the North-eastern part of Nigeria, which started in 2011 and has since escalated into a civil war, the work is yet to be completed (Adamu, *Vanguard Newspaper* 11 July 2014).

Third, the Jonathan regime deliberately embarked on rebuilding many old and dilapidated railway stations, to make them aesthetically beautiful and accessible to business people and to attract visitors and tourists. Some of the stations scheduled for remodelling include Iddo Terminal, Ebute Metta Junction, Ilorin, Kaduna Junction, Kano Metropolitan, Enugu, Port Harcourt, Jos Metropolitan, and Gombe (Adamu, *Vanguard Newspaper* 11 July 2014).

Additionally, within the first six years of the Jonathan government, it embarked on the refurbishment of existing rolling stock for the colonial narrow gauge network. First of all, it refitted 60 Flatbed wagons, 20 covered Pan Extra Goods wagons, 40 covered Hopper wagons, six power cars, 120 coaches, and 250 ordinary wagons. The regime also purchased new rolling stocks: 25 2500HP locomotives from the General Electric of USA; 4 1800HP locomotives from China – with additional two and two power scheduled for delivery in the country in 2015; 40 Pressurised tank wagons; two 100 ton-telescopic cranes; three wheel lathe machines; six 68-seater air conditioned coaches – with 5 more of these scheduled to be delivered to Nigeria in late 2014 or early 2015; two sets of Diesel multiple units; two 18-seater rail buses; 18 rail cars with trolleys for track maintenance, two 3500HP locomotives with built in power cars; and five air-conditioned coaches for the new standard gauge railways (Nigerian Railway Corporation, [www.nrc.org/about-nrc&w=railway-transformation-updates](http://www.nrc.org/about-nrc&w=railway-transformation-updates), 2022).

With these deliberate and determined improvements in track structures, general layout and rolling stock holdings, both freight and passenger services improved greatly. For example, the number of passengers making use of the NR rose significantly from 1,285, 080 per annum to an estimated figure of 5,000,000 per annum in 2014/2015. All this is clearly shown in the table below:

<b>PERIOD</b>	<b>PASSENGERS (ANNUALY)</b>
2009	1, 285, 080
2010	1, 514, 215
2011	3, 493, 443
2012	4, 155, 988
2013	4, 327, 397
2014	5, 000, 000 (estimated)

(Sources: Nigerian Railway Corporation, "Railway Transformation Updates," <http://www.nrc.org/about-nrc&w=railway-transformation-updates>)(Accessed 2 May 2018)

Similarly, the freight service has not lagged behind in the areas of improvements and progress. Many

companies that had abandoned the NR in the late 1990s are now returning in droves; to take advantage of relatively cheap freight rates; and security of and safe delivery of goods to their destinations - in very good conditions. As a result of these developments, the Flour Mills of Nigeria have been sending on average 3,000 tons of wheat monthly between Kano and Lagos; ICNL sends containers containing about 2,000 tons of goods between Kano and Lagos every month; Lafarge Company sends about 3000 tons of cement between Lagos and Kano; 9,000 tons of track materials were being sent around the same period on monthly basis for the Eastern Nigerian Railway rehabilitation project; movement of petroleum products throughout Nigeria; and finally, miscellaneous traffic reached about 1,000 tons monthly traffic.(Nigerian Railway Corporation, [www.nrc.org/about-nrc&w=railway-transformation-updates](http://www.nrc.org/about-nrc&w=railway-transformation-updates), 2022).

After spending considerable time and resources in the rehabilitation of the inherited and dilapidated colonial narrow gauge railway network and infrastructure, the Jonathan administration then turned to the standard gauge project. This it did by starting from the scratch the construction a new and modern railway network In order to achieve this goal, feasibility studies were carried out on possible new railroad routes. These include: Lagos-Abuja (High Speed train – 615 kilometres); Ajaokuta (Eganyi) Obajana-Jakura-Baro-Abuja with additional line from Ajaokuta-Otukpo to include the Anyigba-Ejule-Idah-Adoru-Nsukka-Adani-Omor-Anaku-Aguleri-Nsugbe-Onitsha Rail Line(821 kilometres); Zaria-Kaura-Namoda-Sokoto-Ilela-Birni Konni (Niger Republic (520 kilometres); Benin-Agbor-Onitsha-Nnewi-Aba with additional line from Onitsha-Enugu-Abakaliki (500 kilometres); and Eganyi (near Ajaokuta) Lokoja-Abaji-Abuja(280 kilometres)(Nigerian Railway Corporation,[www.nrc.org/about-nrc&w=railway-transformation-updates](http://www.nrc.org/about-nrc&w=railway-transformation-updates), 2022).

Meanwhile, feasibility studies were also planned to be carried out on Kano-Bichi- Katsina-Jibiya (354 kilometres); Sokoto Birni Kebbi-Jega-Yauri-Makere (408 kilometres) with a branch line to Kontagora; Aba-Ikot Ekpene-Ibinotu (spur Uyo) Odukpani Calabar (340kilometres); Port Harcourt-Aba-Umuahia-Enugu-Makurdi-Lafia-Kuru-Bauchi-Gombe-Biu-Maiduguri (1,552 kilometres); and Calabar-Ikom-Obudu-Ogoja-KatsinaAla-Wukari-Jalingo-Yola-Maiduguri-Gamboru Ngala (707 kilometres).

(Nigerian Railway Corporation, [www.nrc.org/about-nrc&w=railway-transformation-updates](http://www.nrc.org/about-nrc&w=railway-transformation-updates), 2022).

In order to further consolidate its programme of “redeeming the rot in infrastructure [Nigerian Railway]” (Nnadi, *Union Newspaper* <http://theunion.com.ng/redeeming-the-rot-in-infrastructure.2014>) the government decided to embark on an ambitious \$15 billion coastal railway network. According to President Goodluck Jonathan “[t]he project will cost between \$12 billion and 15 billion. It will link Lagos, the rest of the Southwest, the South-south and the Southeast to the North [Northern Nigeria]. If we achieve that it will improve communication and improve our GDP [Gross Domestic Product]”(O’Neil, *The Nation*, 2014).

In order to concretise its policy intention, on 5 May 2014 the government went into a “framework agreement” with Messrs CCECC for the construction of coastal railway line that would connect 10 states of the federation. The main arteries of the line would include the Lagos-Benin City (300kilometres); Benin-Abakaliki (500 kilometres); and the Benin-Obudu Cattle Ranch (673kilometres). In actual fact this project was not part of the original 25-year development plan for the railways in Nigeria. According to Chen the coastal railway was proposed by the CCECC as a component part of three east-west routes that would intersect the old colonial narrow gauge main lines. (Chen, 2018: 3). The most important politically, feasible, and profitable of the three coastal railway routes being the southern coastal one. The contract for it was signed by the Nigerian government and CCECC in 2016. It was to cost \$11 billion, and approval for the loan to finance the coastal by the Exim Bank of China was given by the Nigeria parliament in 2017(Vanguard News (blog), July 1, 2016, [www.vanguardngr.com/2016/07/fg-ccecc](http://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/07/fg-ccecc))

## 5. Conclusion

In this essay we have critically evaluated efforts made by many civilian administrations in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic, particularly in the period between 1999 and 2015, to rehabilitate and transform what was really an old and colonial railway system in Nigeria. We also see that after a great lack of political will and unnecessary manoeuvrings involved in setting aside the well planned and detailed Obasanjo’s 25-year and \$60 billion Standard Gauge railway transformational programme, the Yar’ Adua and Jonathan administrations decided to restart the planned construction of a new but parallel railway to the obviously ancient and colonial narrow gauge system. To be sure, the effort to maintain two totally different and parallel railway gauge systems - side by side - would appear totally insane, uncalled for duplication of work, and unthinking waste of little resources that were available at that time.

In addition, it is crystal clear from the foregoing analysis that the general strategies adopted by the various governmental administrations in Nigeria between 1999 and 2015 for developing and administering the Nigerian railway system were not totally different from those utilised by the different military administrations in the country between 1966 and 1979, and 1983 to 1999. Interestingly enough neither were they dissimilar to those adopted by British colonial officials in Nigeria between 1900 and 1963. What really are the core elements of these strategies? First, they were externally oriented; they involved the importation of virtually everything

needed in the Nigeria's railway industry – locomotives, coaches, wagons, iron rails, workshop equipment and machinery and tools, some human resources, and some skills – and lack of forward and backward integration for the railway industry. In essence, the NR symbolises a classic case of a dependent and neo-colonial institution.

Furthermore, the main source of capital flows for financing the NR's operations, including the construction and management of its properties and assets since the late 1960s has been the sale of crude petroleum oil. The sale and prices of the commodity are constantly at the mercy of the vagaries of an extremely volatile international oil market. This volatility is aptly demonstrated by the dramatic changes in oil prices from the second half of 2014 and these saw the price of petroleum falling from a peak of about \$120 per barrel to about \$40 per barrel from 2015 onwards. As a result of this development, the new Nigerian government of former army general, Muhammad Buhari, which assumed power on 29 May 2015, immediately it came to power started cutting down on public expenditures, including those earmarked for the administration and development of railways. As a result, the will power of the government to proceed with its massive capital outlay on the railway industry was immediately put in doubt. Thus, between 2015 and 2017 it would appear that the NR might once again be heading into another period of stagnation; and would not be better placed to provide efficient and effective services.

It should be remembered that with all the capital expenditures on the NR between 2010 and 2015, its services were still overall poor. This conclusion is best illustrated by the fact that the then showcase project of the railway transformation programme, the Lagos-Kano line which was rehabilitated and reopened with great festivities in December 2012 did not live up to expectation.

In the words of Adeyinka Aderibigbe of the *Nation* newspaper, who took a train journey from Lagos to Kano in January 2015 and reported that the railway route, locomotives, and trains travelling that railway line came up against many problems: unnecessary delays of trains; unsanitary conditions of the coaches - particularly the second and third class ones; overcrowding and congestion of trains; lack of toilets on some of the coaches; lack of locomotives and coaches; lack of train drivers; lack of diesel oil for the locomotives; poor railway tracks, illegal extortions on the part of the NR's staff; overcrowded railway stations, lack of water on board trains; and slow, noisy, and traumatic train journeys. (Aderibigbe, *Nation Newspaper*: 2015). All of these challenges cannot really be completely separated from the fact that Nigeria does not manufacture all it required and needed to develop and administer a modern and sophisticated railway system. In order for Nigeria, the giant of Africa to achieve this important goal, it must like those economically successful and industrialised countries in the world like US, Germany, China, Japan, South Korea, and so forth, formulate and implement a policy deliberately manufacturing of its own capital goods and machinery, including for example railway materials at home rather than continuously importing all of them from abroad. Second, the government must come up with a well-articulated railway and transport policies that should serve as the clear pathfinder for adventure into an efficient, effective, profitable, and sophisticated railway industry and network. Finally, the matter of corruption, especially as it relates to the Nigerian Railway, must be seriously combated and eradicated if the industry is to grow and make impact.

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