



## The Igbo Entrepreneurs and Kano Economy in the Twenty-First Century

Ojimba Chinyeremaka Christian<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Ph.D History

Email: [ojimbajab@gmail.com](mailto:ojimbajab@gmail.com)

### Abstract

This paper focuses on some selected Igbo entrepreneurs in the Kano metropolis during the period 1970-2015. It examines the role that the Igbo have played in the development of the Kano metropolis. There seems to be no universally accepted definition of entrepreneurship as different scholars have defined the concept differently. However, some authors have conceptualized entrepreneurship as the purposeful activity (including an integrated sequence of decisions) of an individual or group of associated individuals undertaken to initiate, maintain, or aggrandize a profit-oriented business to produce or distribute economic goods and services. Igbo entrepreneurship could be said to have genesis from the conditions or state of affairs the Igbo found themselves in after the Civil War. Before the Nigerian Civil War, the Igbo passion for quick acquisition of wealth was not as in recent times. This was so because essential capital formation and a pre-condition for any business ventures were not as easy as in the early 1900s of Igbo settlements in Northern Nigeria, including Kano. Thus, the Igbo youth of the pre-war period found it difficult to embark on any business that required substantial capital. After the Civil War in 1970, 49 percent of the Igbo ventured into different enterprises basically to earn a living. At the end of the Nigerian Civil War in the early 1970s, Sabon-Gari Kano, an area meant for non-indigenes, began drastic changes due to developments undertaken by the returnee Igbo. As they returned, some of them resumed their businesses, but some were unable to do so due to a lack of initial capital to take off the business. By the end of the civil war, Kano had developed as an increasingly working-class city with some major areas of settlements like Tudun-Wada, SabonGari, and the new residential areas of Zaria Road, Zoo Road and Gwammaja.

**Keywords:** Igbo, Entrepreneurship, Kano, Hausawa, Development.

### Introduction

According to Schumpeter<sup>1</sup>, entrepreneurship is either a creative or innovative activity. By implication, entrepreneurship is a continuous activity. The entrepreneur is either always creating things or ideas or improving on those already created. Whichever may be the case, the important thing is that such activity must be geared towards meeting the discovered needs of the people. Entrepreneurs are, therefore, agents of change, growth and development since they involve themselves in accelerating the generations, dissemination and application of innovative ideas. They ensure the different use of resources and expand the scope of economic activities. Entrepreneurship has rightly been identified with the individual, as the success of an enterprise depends upon

<sup>1</sup> Schumpeter A., *The Theory of Economic Development*, Cambridge, Harvard Press, 1934, As Cited in Stefanivic,

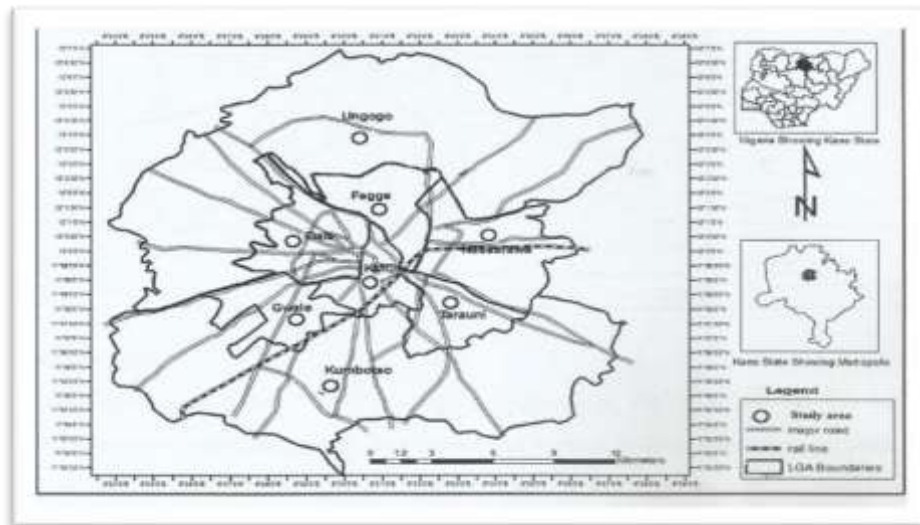
“Entrepreneurs Motivational Factors: Empirical Evidence From Serbia” *Serbian Journal of Management* 6,1, (2011) 74

imaginations, visions, innovativeness, and risks taking. Entrepreneurship is a risks taking factor which is responsible for the end result in the form of profit or loss. In other words, an entrepreneur develops and owns his own enterprise. He is also a moderate risk-taker and works under uncertainty to achieve the goal. He is innovative and persistently tries to create or improve on the things already created. He tends to persist in the face of adversity and strife to convert an adverse situation into an opportunity.

The Igbo were attracted to Kano due to the availability of jobs in manufacturing enterprises such as textile, hides and skin, etc. A large number of the Igbo people, therefore, moved to Kano to engage in gainful economic activities, and many of them migrated to northern Nigeria, especially Kano. Bako was of the opinion that the Igbo migrated to Kano because of the improved security and economic significance of Kano as the most commercially advanced city and wealthiest native authority in the Northern states. The Igbo took advantage of the existing network of markets in metropolitan Kano, particularly the famous Sabon-Gari market. Kano was also attractive to the Igbo because the class structure in Kano was not rigid. Kano society offered unlimited opportunities for ambitious and industrious men with optimism to grow rich.

The analysis focuses on the role of the Igbo in the economic and social development of Kano metropolis. The real issue here concerned areas of economic undertaking in which the Igbo were engaged. Possible identification of each of the various sectors in which the Igbo were involved in Kano dominated the white collar jobs and semiskilled works in the light industries, railway, post office, colonial administration, Kano water works and the expatriate firms. Above all, between 1970 and 2015, they dominated the Sabon-gari market. Therefore, Paden believed that the manpower in these sectors in Kano and even in Zaria were drawn from the southern emigrants who settled in Sabon-Gari, Kano, with the Igbo having a near monopoly.

**Figure 1: Kano Metropolis Showing Major Areas of Igbo Business Activity**



**Source:** Cartographic Unit, Department of Geography, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Cited in Emmanuel Eyeh (2015), History of Igbo Enterprises in Kano, 1960-2007



The entrepreneurship of the Igbo in the Kano metropolis is in the areas of pharmaceuticals, automobile spare parts, educational sectors, transportation and stationeries, among many others. This aspect of Igbo socio-economic activities reflected in varying degrees the changing nature of Kano's economy, from the imposition of colonial rule in 1903 to 2004, the terminal date for the study. These social and economic activities also promoted relations amongst the Igbo, Kanawa and other migrant communities in Kano, like the Yoruba, Edo, Ebira, Ibibio and Efik from the Cross-River Basin. The choice of these economic activities is predicated on the fact that they were the most prominent trades that attracted a significant number of Igbo entrepreneurs in the Kano metropolis in the period covered in this study.

The Igbo were also substantial in the teaching profession. In a sense, therefore, they organized the provision of diverse services for their community or ethnic group. For example, as they considered the quest for western education a matter of life and death. The Igbo built a primary school and a secondary grammar school to take care of their children's educational needs. Before the civil war, therefore, the Igbo in Kano, consisting of educators, journalists, and professional business people, had risen to prominent economic positions.

### **Igbo Entrepreneurs in Kano**

#### ***1. Patent Medicine Entrepreneurs in Sabon-Gari Market, Kano***

It is not clear who the pioneer Igbo patent medicine dealers were. All my informants agreed that the people who pioneered the patent medicine business were among the (Kano 1) "a term popularly used by the Igbo in Kano to refer to the earliest Igbo migrants in Kano." Most of the earliest Igbo patent medicine dealers in Kano have since relocated back to their towns, and others have died.<sup>2</sup>

Fabian Nwaugo<sup>3</sup> opined that the Igbo entrepreneurs in patent medicine started in Kano in the 1940s. According to him, the pioneers ventured into the business after World War II, and they included prominent entrepreneurs like Chief John Ejesi, Jude Nwanyaka and Dee Godwin Ukonu. These were Igbo traders who set up the medicine shops in Kano. Contrary to the popular assumption of the current trend of events, the majority of the patent medicine dealers in Sabon-Gari entered the business in the 1970s. Most of them related that they learnt the trade under another person. For example, the study carried out by F. N. Nwaugo on the Igbo in Kano indicated that all of them went through one form of apprenticeship or the other. Jude Nwanyaka underwent apprenticeship training under the tutelage of John Ejesi, while Ambrose Nwadike was trained by Cyrcus Nwanyaka<sup>4</sup>. What is of interest is that the majority of the Igbo patent medicine dealers in Sabon-Gari market Kano, are from Orlu district in Imo state. F. N. Nwaugo outlined the following basic common features of the Igbo patent medicine entrepreneurs in Kano:

- i. Majority of them come from Orlu in Imo state
- ii. All of them are products of one form of apprenticeship or the other.
- iii. Many of them went beyond primary school education; some have secondary education with O'level results and some also with university degrees.

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Chief Godfrey Ukaonu, UcheOgudo, Lucky Okoro, All Igbo Patent Medicine Dealers in SabonGari Market Kano, 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2013. However the term Kano 1 was used to refer to the earliest Igbo settlers who came to Kano after the construction of the railways in 1912/13

<sup>3</sup>Nwaugo F. N., *Igbo Community in Kano 1913 – 2004*. "A study of the Inter-Group Relation, Ph. D Thesis, History", Nigeria Defense Academy 2013. P. 138

<sup>4</sup> Ibid 138



- iv. The initial capital for their business came from their personal savings, contributions from relatives and proceeds from dowry or sale of valuable property.
- v. Each of them attracted dozens of relations as an apprentice. These characteristics were responsible to a large extent for the preponderance of Orlu indigenes of Igbo extraction in patent medicine enterprises<sup>5</sup>.

Some of the Hausa entrepreneurs in the patent medicine business in the Sabon-Gari market also served as apprentices under the Igbo. These entrepreneurs are Alhaji Nuhu Ibrahim, the Managing Director, Ndabor Pharmacy; Alhaji Umoru Dankwura and Alhaji Bala Ali. The study also revealed that some presence of the Hausa in the trade was due to their close association with the Igbo in Kano for a long time. The link became stronger immediately after the civil war, especially with the entrants of more Igbo in the business.<sup>6</sup>

The relationship between the Igbo migrants and their Hausa host community provided the leverage for inter-group cooperation and national cohesion, especially after the Nigerian civil war when passion arising from the war was still inflamed. The main sources of the Igbo trading stock were Starline Group of Industries, Rufus Obi.

Industries West African Limited, Meyer and Baker, Patterson Zochonis (PZ), Hoechst and Kraka. Apart from Rufus Obi and Starline which are indigenous manufacturers, the others were multi-national cooperation from Germany, England, China, India and Yugoslavia.<sup>7</sup> Some of the Igbo patent medicine enterprises had grown in size and complexity due to good management and accounting procedure.<sup>8</sup> Some of these entrepreneurs had collaborated with foreign technical experts to establish their own local pharmaceutical companies, while others with the requisite professional qualification had established their indigenous pharmaceutical companies. A typical examples of Igbo indigenous pharmaceutical companies are the PAL Pharmaceutical West Africa Limited and Marleyshree pharmaceutical Company Nigeria Limited.

The chairman of Marleyshree, Dr. Chidi Odikanwa<sup>9</sup> operates under the copyright law of the United Arab Republic. His company engaged the services of five Indian pharmacists and a dozen Nigerian trained Pharmacists to produce highly potent and efficacious drugs. The drugs produced by the indigenous pharmaceutical companies include Paracetamol, chloroquine, syrups like oral liquids, multi-vitamins, external preparations like lotions, and dry powder granules such as Ampicillin and Ampiclox.<sup>10</sup> In order to encourage indigenous pharmaceutical companies to increase production capacity and raise public confidence in drugs produced locally, the Federal Government inaugurated a steering committee to help build the capacity of local pharmaceutical companies in line with the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) officially established at the millennium summit in 2000 represented by 189 member nations of the United Nations.

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<sup>5</sup>Nwaugo F. N., "Igbo Community in Kano 1913 – 2004: A study of the Inter-Group Relation", (Ph. D Thesis, History, Nigeria Defense Academy 2013). P. 138

<sup>6</sup> Mathias C. M., 'Migration and Economy: Igbo Migration and The Nigerian Economy 1900 -1975'. Universe Inc. New York USA 2003. Pp45 – 49

<sup>7</sup>Basden G.T., 'Niger Ibos' (Frankcass Ltd. 1966) p.121

See also Nwaugo F. N., "Igbo Community in Kano 1913 – 2004: A study of the Inter-Group Relation" P. 140

<sup>8</sup> David N., 'Trade without Rulers: Pre-Colonial Economic Development of Eastern Nigeria'. (Oxford Clarendon 1978)

<sup>9</sup>Dr.ChidiOdikanwa is an Igbo industrialist in the Pharmaceutical sector. He is an Orlu man by birth and from Imo state. He is also a graduate of Business Administration from the Bayero University Kano and the Chairman of Marleyshree Pharmaceutical Company in Kano.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with ChidiOdikanwa Managing Director Marleyshree Pharmaceutical Company, Kano 24<sup>th</sup> August 2015.



The goals include: reducing by three quarters, between 1990–2015, the under-five mortality rate, improving maternal health and achieve by 2015 universal access to reproduction health, combat HIV/AIDs, Malaria and other diseases.<sup>11</sup> The committee was also to identify the funding of the indigenous companies, which would in turn ensure global competitiveness, identify all the funding options available to the industry and identify challenges including conditions for accessing funding and other support for the industries.<sup>12</sup>

These terms of reference have demonstrated governments concern with ensuring safe and efficacy of drugs in realizing the MDGs. But in practice, it has raised a fundamental question. Did the government have the political will to translate this action plan into fruition? It is doubtful, considering the level of official corruption and mismanagement of public funds often associated with the political office holders in Nigeria. Apart from this skepticism, the production and circulation of drugs in Nigeria have been confronted with two major challenges. First, there was the high production cost due to the epileptic supply of power by the then Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), now known in Kano as Kano Electricity Distribution Company (KEDCO). Second, the industry has been challenged by the issue of fake drugs. Fake drugs are mostly produced by pharmaceutical companies in India and China in collaboration with some indigenous entrepreneurs and dumped in Nigeria. The fake drugs gain entry into Kano through the porous Nigeria border at Maradi in the Niger Republic.<sup>13</sup> The citizens prefer to buy fake drugs because they are cheaper and affordable, despite their potency being low and less efficacious. The preference of fake drugs to the locally manufactured drugs was probably because of Nigeria's prevailing economic situation, which had pauperized the citizenry.

Thus, the indigenous pharmaceutical companies found it difficult to operate in a competitive market because the production costs in Europe, America and Asia were comparatively cheaper than in Nigeria due to power outages, official corruption and double taxation, which affected production and raised the overhead costs. Though the administration of the former civilian Governor of Kano State, Engr. Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso (2011 – 2015) staged a serious war against fake drugs, counterfeit and sub-standard drugs in Kano<sup>15</sup>

Finally, the Pharmacist's Council of Nigeria, in collaboration with the National Association of Patent and Proprietary Medicine Dealers (NAPPMED), regularly organized seminars and workshops to educate and enlighten members of NAPPMED on the dangers posed by the marketing and consumption of fake drugs.

## **2. Motor Spare Parts Entrepreneurs 1970 - 2015**

Spare parts trading in Nigeria dates back to 1945. Although available evidence on this aspect of Igbo commerce did not show when they started trading on motor spare parts, the trade developed during the Second World War when few motor parts were imported into the country. During the Second World War, second-hand vehicles and army motors were acquired and used as spare parts. After the war in 1945, some Igbo spare parts entrepreneurs traveled to the Gold Coast (Ghana), where supplies were less restricted. The trade's major post world war centers were Lagos, Kano, Aba and Onitsha.

However, the Igbo spare parts entrepreneurs initially imported spare parts from Japan and China, especially in the early 1950s. However, after the civil war, the trend began to change in

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<sup>11</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millennium\\_Development\\_Goals](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millennium_Development_Goals). Retrieved 25<sup>th</sup> August 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Daily Trust, August 17, 2010 p.41

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Chairman, National Association of Patent and Proprietary Medicine Dealers in Sabon-Gari Market, Salisu Kano on the 12<sup>th</sup> March 2015.



favour of Taiwan spare parts. Several factors are adduced for this change. First, Taiwan's trading practices are very flexible. When trade and credit conditions deteriorated after 1983, India and Hong Kong Companies took over the business. Taiwanese exporters were prepared to follow their goods to Nigeria in order to monitor market conditions, check margins and press for cash payments outside the bank system so that they could pay for their supplies. Second, Taiwan gained from a flexible and rapid response in terms of product specification and quality for markets in Nigeria and West Africa. Other countries like India and Mainland China may be able to produce cheaper products, but their labour precludes the large order and flexibility in terms of timing, quality and packaging.<sup>14</sup> Different grades of products were produced that distinguishes between Taiwan and Original. Taiwan parts were looked down as inferior but highly preferred in Nigerian market because it was cheap. Igbo spare parts entrepreneurs were very willing to produce Taiwan parts because property laws including copyright were not always strictly adhered to in Taiwan.<sup>17</sup>

By the last decade of the 1970s a significant number of Igbo migrants started new businesses in Kano. More so, the road and transport sector which received a boost after the civil war as demonstrated in the National Development Plan stimulated the development of spare parts business. This was further accentuated by the promulgation of the Nigerian Enterprises and promulgation of Decree 1972 as amended in 1977. Schedule 11 of the Act brought the distribution and servicing of motor vehicles, tractors and spare parts under the sole control of Nigeria. Foreigners and non-Nigerians were barred from the ownership and management of all enterprises under schedule 11 of the promulgation act.<sup>15</sup> The Igbo took advantage of this opportunity and opened shops in Kano metropolis and the business soon expanded to other parts of Kano, such as Gezawa, Ringim, Dambatta and Kura, Tudun Wada and Dankadai, Gwarzo and Wudil.<sup>16</sup>

In Kano metropolis, most of the entrepreneurs sell both old parts (second-hand or fairly used spare parts or popularly called Belgium, by the traders) the new spare parts. They are mainly located in SabonGari in New Road, Yoruba Road, Ibadan Road and Niger Road, and in KofarRuwa, Kabuga and Fagge areas. Table 1 below shows the number of Igbo spare parts entrepreneurs in the area surveyed in Kano.

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<sup>14</sup> Forrest., 'The Advancement of African Capital: The Growth of Nigerian Private Enterprises', Edinburgh: University Press, 1994 p. 238 <sup>17</sup> Ibid p. 233

<sup>15</sup> Mgbeafulu M.C, 'Migration and the Economy: Universe', Inc, New York, USA 2003 pp. 45 – 49. See also F. N Nwaugo. The Igbo Community in Kano 1913 – 2004. P. 121.

<sup>16</sup> Nwaugo F. N., 'The Igbo Community in Kano 1913 – 2004'. P. 121.

**Table 1: Igbo Spare Parts Entrepreneurs in Kano Metropolis as at August 2004**

S/N	Surveyed Areas	No. of Igbo entrepreneurs	Percentage
1	KofarRuwa	1,562	49
2	Yoruba Road	347	11
4	New Road	924	16
4	Niger Road	430	10
5	Kabuga	38	4
6	Fagge	107	8
7	Gwammaja	15	2
	Total	3,423	100

**Source:** Fieldwork, February 2014 – August 2014 in Kano Metropolis

From the above table of the Igbo spare parts in the Kano metropolis, the total figures in the box of Igbo entrepreneurs were from the membership register of members from the surveyed areas. Each figure was computed into percentages and all the figures were summed up to 100%.

The number of Igbo motor spare parts in the table above is not the exact number of the entrepreneurs; the reason is that many of them had not registered officially with the Igbo Motor Spare Parts Association. The table also shows that KofarRuwa had the highest concentration of Igbo entrepreneurs, with 49 percent, while Gwammaja had the least number of entrepreneurs. Apart from the Igbo, others involved in the spare parts trade include the Yoruba, Hausa, and Edo, who together constitute about 51 percent compared to Igbo entrepreneurs.<sup>17</sup>

The pre-eminence of the Igbo in the motor spare parts business was attributed to a number of factors. First, was the lack of awareness of the trade by other ethnic groups and the belief that the business was exclusively for the Igbo. According to Umar Shehu, spare parts trade was an Igbo man's business due to established trade connections in and outside Nigeria.<sup>18</sup> Second, was the huge capital outlay required in setting up the business, which the enterprising Igbo can easily provide. Thirdly, as the unwillingness of wealthy entrepreneurs from other ethnic groups to give loans and credit facilities to their people. Fourthly, the financial assistance and the supply of goods on credit by wealthy Igbo entrepreneurs to Igbo traders. These factors combined to ensure Igbo dominance and near monopoly of the spare parts business in Kano. On delivery, the spare parts were supplied

<sup>17</sup>Fieldwork compiled by the researcher between February 28 to August 20<sup>th</sup> 2014. This was before I was attached by the Boko-Haram insurgents at the Federal College of Education, on the September 17<sup>th</sup> 2014 and had been on sickbed for nearly one year, consequently draw back the progress of work

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Umar Shehu aged 48, 21 Niger Road, Sabon-Gari Kano, Trader Umar Shehu believes that Igbo spare parts entrepreneurs have relations abroad that enable them to import spare parts from United Kingdom, Taiwan, Japan and Germany.



to retailers including Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba and Edo entrepreneurs. Those that paid promptly enjoyed some discounts ranging from 5 to 10 percent. However, the entrepreneurs preferred immediate payment of goods supplied to their customers for two main reasons. First, it enabled them to recover the capital they had invested in the business quickly and thereby allaying the fears of the possibility of bad debt. Second, they could invest the money in other businesses before the next importation.

Through the apprenticeship/mentoring system of members of their family, continuity in spare parts business is often ensured by allowing one or two of the children of the entrepreneurs to learn the business, while the other children continue their education in the tertiary institutions in the country. Those that learnt the trade were given responsibilities and authority by their father. Children trained in this way not only have experience in the trade but also develop sufficient authority to keep the trade going on the death of the founder, which reduces family pressure to divide assets.

Apart from the need to involve the children of the founder of the enterprise in business, the prospect for business longevity and sustained growth of the enterprise also rested on other factors. First, the type of business, for example, trading ventures tended to liquidate during the life time of the founder due to a lack of record keeping and accountability. Secondly, the degree of bureaucratic organization and delegated responsibility and authority achieved during the owner's lifetime. Thirdly, the existence of polygamy tended to accentuate pressure to divide responsibilities and share the assets on the death of the founder of the enterprise.<sup>19</sup> However, most entrepreneurs did not allow their children to engage in the business for obvious reasons. First, was their inability to trust their heirs and pass on the detailed understanding and confidence of the business life to them (their sons). And also to teach them the intricacy of the trade, the idea of allowing children to have access to wealth at a tender age would be unproductive because of its tendency to undermine motivation and discipline among children.<sup>20</sup>

The earliest generation of Igbo spare parts entrepreneurs (1945 – 1966) only had primary school education. They did not also allow their children to go beyond that level. Their main concern was to make much profit as possible without looking into the future. The second generation 1970 – 2015, however appear to have shown considerable interest in their children's education, for a number of reasons. First, the business orientation they acquired from their parents undermined their interest in western education. Second, their parents did not encourage them to seek higher education because they needed their assistance in the family business. Third, education was not strongly considered as a means of acquiring wealth. As a result, most of the new entrants into the business did not possess qualifications above the West African School Certificate. However, as a result of the increasing rate of unemployment in Nigeria within the period covered in this study, Igbo youths with higher qualification had joined the spare parts business. One of the graduates interviewed said that he decided to learn the business from Alex Mmerigwo because of his inability to secure employment after his National Youth Service Corp scheme in Ondo State. Part of his working capital was obtained through *Igba Oso Ahia* (prospective traders without working capital to buy stock and to rent a shop) or journey man or running market. He also satisfied his customers' needs by collecting

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<sup>19</sup> Forrest, *The Advancement of African Capital: The Growth of Nigerian Private Enterprises*, (Edinburgh University Press) 1994 p. 238 – 237.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Umar Shehu aged 48, 21 Niger Road, Sabon-Gari Kano, Trader Umar Shehu believes that Igbo spare parts entrepreneurs have relations abroad that enable them to import spare parts from United Kingdom, Taiwan, Japan and Germany.





the spare parts from the entrepreneurs that had rented the shop and sold to his customers above the market price and the excess became his gain.<sup>21</sup>

Another way entrepreneurs with higher academic qualifications enter the business was by sending their wives to obtain degrees in higher institutions. After their wives had graduated with better skills to invest in entrepreneurship, the life of the business changed due to better professionalism. Entrepreneurs from Anambra and Enugu states were mostly associated with this practice. Two major reasons have been advanced for this orientation. First, is the belief among the entrepreneurs from Anambra and Enugu states that one cannot acquire wealth quickly by spending many years in school. Second and perhaps, the more important was the recognition and respect they give to title holders.

Important titles such as Ogbuefi (strong and wealthy man or an eminent person who has achieved his or her tittle killing or presenting cow to one's kinsmen, friends and well wishers), Oputa Obie (Philanthropist or Benefactor) and Eze – ego (wealthy person or king of money) were usually given to persons who achieve greatness in business. Thus, to become rich and gain recognition, Anambra and Enugu entrepreneurs more than other Igbo groups went into entrepreneurship at a very tender age because business is perceived as the shortest and surest means of getting rich. In this vein, the entrepreneurs resorted to sending their wives to school to assist them in the organization of their business, using proper accounting procedures.<sup>22</sup>

### 3. *Entrepreneurs in Stationery Business*

After the Nigerian civil war in 1970, the Federal Government under General Yakubu Gowon was committed to constructive reconstruction and rehabilitation of the Nigerian economy. In pursuance of this goal, it introduced the indigenization policy; the aim was to achieve and retain for Nigerians the ownership, control and management of the Nigerian economy. The objectives of the Nigerian indigenization policy were: The transfer of ownership and control of Nigerians in enterprises formerly or mainly owned and controlled by foreigners; fostering widespread ownership of enterprises among Nigerian citizens, fostering the development of the Nigerian capital market, to create opportunities for Nigerian indigenous business and to raise the level of intermediate capital goods production in the domestic economy. It also included the encouragement of foreign businesses and investors to move from unsophisticated areas of the economy to large investments in terms of intermediate and capital goods production.<sup>23</sup> As a result of these objectives, the Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree (now Act) was promulgated in 1977, and the 1972 Act (then Decree) together with the amendments were repealed and replaced by the Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Act 1977. The 1977 act created three schedules of enterprises to be acquired, controlled and managed by Nigerians. Newspaper publishing, printing and office stationery<sup>24</sup> fell under schedule I of the indigenization scheme.

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Charles Onuoha, aged 48. No. 10 Yoruba Road, Sabon-gari Kano, a native of Mbaise in Imo state. On 18<sup>th</sup> March 2014. Charles is a graduate of Business Education from Federal Polytechnic Nekede Owerri.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Chief Fabian Ewuzie, aged 55, 21<sup>st</sup> June, 2014. His wife Blessing is a graduate of Business Administration from Imo State University.

<sup>23</sup> Anyanwu J. C and Oyefusi .A., 'The Structure of the Nigerian Economy 1960 – 1997' (Joanee Educational Publishers Ltd Onitsha, 1997), Pp. 334 – 336.

<sup>24</sup> National Transport Policy Options prepared by the Transport Sector Reform Implementation Committee (TSRC) June, 2002 p. 83



### 3.1 Igbo Stationery Enterprises, 1977 – 2015

The indigenization policy led to the closure of many large foreign enterprises such as the United Trading Companies (UTC) and Leventis. Prior to the Nigerian civil war, UTC, Leventis, Kingsway and Zamani Bookshops were the leading giants in the stationery business in Kano. The exit of these firms from Nigeria created a vacuum that the shrewd Igbo businessmen filled. According to Alpha Nliam, Igbo traders entered the stationeries business as a result of the closure of the expatriate firms such as UTC, Leventis, the creation of new states and local governments and the expansion of school enrolment.<sup>25</sup> To consolidate their hold in the trade in stationeries, the Igbo employed some marketing strategies to distribute and sell stationeries. The first was the mobile or canvass strategy. The entrepreneurs devised this system to capture greater market for their products. It entailed conveying products to government offices and establishing institutions, private establishments and corporate bodies. The strength of this strategy was that most consumers who were not aware of the existence and the use of stationery until they were introduced to them came to appreciate the products. Second, the stationery products are often supplied on wholesale to the buyers on credit to encourage bulk purchase and guarantee the availability of the products regularly. Some credit facilities are allowed for a long time as long as the interest exists uninterruptedly.

According to Aloysius Akaekpuchionwa<sup>26</sup> there were 360 registered members of the Stationeries Sellers Association, of which the Igbo had 287 members (representing 80 percent). Other entrepreneurs had their operational base at Church Road, Yoruba Road, Emir Road and Niger Road, including Sabon-Gari market.

**Table 2: The Operational Base of Igbo Stationeries Traders in SabonGari as at July 2004**

S/N	Surveyed Areas	No. of Igbo entrepreneurs	Percentage
1	Church Road	32	11.14
2	Yoruba Road	24	8.36
3	Emir Road	18	6.27
4	Niger Road	120	41.81
5	Sabon-gari Market	93	32.40
	Total	287	100

**Source:** Researcher's Fieldwork as obtained from the secretariat at No.70 Church Road, Sabon-Gari in July 2014.

From the frequency distribution of Igbo entrepreneurs in the area surveyed in 2014, it is evident that during the period under study, Emir Road had the least number, with 18 members representing 6.27 percent, while Niger Road recorded the largest number, with 120 representing

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Alpha Nliam aged 58 "E" Line, Sabon – Gari Market, Kano, trader July, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Aloysius Aka ekpuchionwa, aged 55. An Igbo stationery trader from Orlu, Imo state, at Church Road by Igbo Road, Kano 4<sup>th</sup> July 2014.



41.81 percent. The predominance of Igbo entrepreneurs in Niger Road was because when Sabon-Gari market gutted by inferno in 2002 with a large scale looting which accompanied the inferno, a significant number of the stationeries businessmen relocated to Niger Road. Thus, most of the prominent stationery entrepreneurs such as Awaco, Great Matador, Champion, etc, were conspicuously located along Niger Road, which was easily accessible to customers and very close to Abubakar Rimi Market, otherwise called SabonGari market, the nexus of northern Nigeria. Apart from the Igbo entrepreneurs, other ethnic groups in the stationery business include; Hausa, Yoruba and Edo entrepreneurs. However, their numbers were quite insignificant. A number of reasons have been adduced on why other ethnic groups may not be able to break Igbo monopoly in the trade.

First, was the argument that the trade requires apprenticeship training that last between 5 to 6 years. This period was considered too long by most non-Igbo for apprenticeship and a waste of time. Second the huge capital outlay required in setting up the business. This was usually between ₦500, 000 to ₦1million for a successful take-off of the trade. Third, the prevailing stereotype among members of other ethnic groups that stationery business was the preserve of the Igbo social group and fear of traveling long distance to procure stationery materials. The procurement centers for stationary materials in Nigeria are located in Lagos, Owerri, Aba and Onitsha.

According to Maikudi Ali Umar, Hausa traders were generally averse to traveling long distances, especially to the Eastern States, but preferred buying from their Igbo counterparts.<sup>27</sup> However, some of the stationery products that could not be manufactured in Nigeria were imported by the Igbo directly from China, Malaysia and Indonesia.

The Igbo entrepreneurs sourced for the scarce foreign exchange in the open market. In order to protect their members irrespective of ethnic or religious leaning, the stationeries entrepreneurs formed an Association in October 1996 known as Books, Stationery and Sports Dealers Association. The association was inaugurated in August 1998 with a certificate No. Y and C mins. BYC/1582/90/076. The association dialogue with the Kano State Government on important policies that affect interest of their members such as tax increment, signboard registration and location of business premises.<sup>28</sup>

#### **4. The Igbo Motor Transport Entrepreneurs in Kano**

A number of studies on migrants in Kano have tended to concentrate on the dynamics of Igbo entrepreneurship in various undertakings. The works of Bako (2001 and 2006), Albert (1993), Meagher (2009) and Douglas (1996) have studied the Igbo entrepreneurship in Kano before and after the Nigerian Civil War.<sup>29</sup> These works paid attention to other economic sectors that the Igbo are well represented. While paying marginal attention to Igbo transport enterprises in

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Maikudi Umar Ali, 50 "E" Line, Sabon – Gari Market, Kano, trader. 5 July, 2014.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with the former chairman of the Association of Books, Stationery and Sport Dealers, Great Matador, OgbuefiIbe, Niger Road by Igbo Road Kano, 6<sup>th</sup> July, 2014.

<sup>29</sup>Bako A., " Opportunities or Business Perspectives on Igbo Commercial Dynamism in post Civil War Years" I, Vol 3. No. 1. A Bako (2006), *Historic Immigrants and Intergroup Relations in the Century*. Sokoto, (Usman Danfodio University Press, Sokoto). Albert I., 'Inter-ethnic Relations in Nigerian City A Historical Perspective of Hausa – Igbo Conflicts in Kano 1953 – 1991', (Ibadan: IFRA, University of Ibadan. A Douglas (1996), 1999, "I Need to Get to Kano: The Unmaking and Remaking of An Igbo Migrant Community in Northern Nigeria", 1966 – 1986" Ph.d Thesis North-Western University cited in Daniel O. I., "The Opportunities and Challenges of Igbo Transport Enterprises in Kano" 1970 – 2014.pp.48, 2001



Kano.<sup>30</sup> According to Daniel Olisa Iweze, the exodus of the Igbo from Kano during the civil war greatly affected the operation of vital sectors of the Kano economy, such as transport. For instance, Lorry transport services fell by seventy percent.<sup>31</sup> The mass exodus of the Igbo from Kano during the civil war undoubtedly created a crisis in the transport industry. There is no data to show the number of Igbo that left Kano, but available records show that between 1965 and 1966, the population of Sabon-gari residents was 41,956. During the war, between 1967 and 1968 the population fell to 2,129, showing that 94.9% of Sabon-Gari residents, mostly of whom were Igbo, left the town.<sup>32</sup> The mass exodus of the Igbo led to the emergence of some indigenes in the sector, and controlled the long-distance travels from Kano to other parts of the country during the civil war and the immediate post-civil war years.

The first major indigenous transport entrepreneur in Kano was Alhaji Muhammad Na Goda. The other transport entrepreneurs were Alhaji Ibrahim Umar Madugu (Na Bako Wayya), Alhaji Abdullahi Turaki, Alhaji Garba Nakama, Alhaji Inuwa Wada, Alhaji Nawake, Alhaji Sanusi Dantata, Alhaji Jafaru Dan Mallam and Alhaji Sani Marshal, Alhaji Haruna Kassim, Alhaji Baba Danbappa – the researcher in-law who married my sister former Miss Josephine Ohazulike from Uli Ihiala L.G.A Anambra state and Alhaji Nababa Badamasi.<sup>33</sup> Indigenous Kanawa transporters' participation was necessary to fill the vacuum created by the Igbo transporters and restore normalcy to the transport sector. The Northern Nigeria Regional Marketing Boards encouraged them to expand their operations by providing incentives of increased transportation of 200% to facilitate the conveyance of produce to the coast.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Daniel O. I., "The Opportunities and Challenges of Igbo Transport Enterprises in Kano 1970 – 2014". Kano Journal of History, vol.1 No.1 June 2014 pp.48

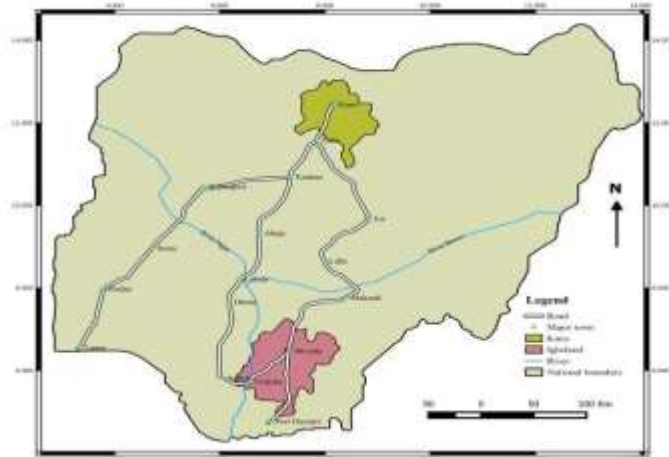
<sup>31</sup> Dan Asabe, "Kano Labours, Kano Poor, 1930 – 1990" (Ph.d Thesis Bayero University, Kano) p. 223 in Daniel O. I., "The Opportunities and Challenges of Igbo Transport Enterprises in Kano 1970 – 2014.pp.53

<sup>32</sup> Bako A., A Social and Economic History of Sabon-Gari, Kano 1913 – 1989" Ph.d History Thesis Bayero University, Kano pp. 122

<sup>33</sup> Bako A., "Igbo Immigrants, Indigenous Merchants class and the Nigerian Civil War in Kano Northern Nigeria: Challenges and Opportunities Revisited. A Paper presented in a Festschrift Conference in Honour of Prof. Dahiru Yahaya, 19 – 21 October, 2014. P.10 cited in Daniel Lisa Iweze "The Opportunities and Challenges of Igbo Transport Enterprises in Kano 1970 – 2014.pp.53- 54

<sup>34</sup> Daniel O. I., "The Opportunities and Challenges of Igbo Transport Enterprises in Kano 1970 – 2014. Journal of History, vol.1 No.1 June 2014.

**Figure 2: Map showing Luxurious Bus Route from Kano to Onitsha, Owerri, Abia and Port Harcourt**



**Source:** Cartographic Unit, Department of Geography, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Adapted from Emmanuel Eyeh (2015), *History of Igbo Enterprises in Kano, 1960-2007*

At the end of the Nigerian civil war in 1970, when Igbo and Yoruba transporters returned to Kano, they discovered that the indigenes had taken over their place and dominated the commercial transport business. The only alternative for the Igbo was to engage in motor vehicle repairs, vehicle parts sales and other related trades. This was because the Igbo were very good in the auto spare parts trade. Their success in various enterprises in Kano was the role played by the Igbo Union and Associations, which enhanced community solidarity and helped them operate as an exclusive community. They formed mutual benefit associations and credit societies and improvement organization.<sup>35</sup> The Kanawa entry and dominance of the transport industry in Kano was short-lived. Despite the opportunities provided by the civil war and assistance they received from the Regional and State Governments, the indigenous transporters could not compete favourably with the emergent Igbo transport entrepreneurs who shook off the civil war setbacks and re-entered the motor road transport sub-sector with avid aggressiveness and vigour. They gradually displaced the indigenous transporters and dominated the long-distance road transport sub-sector with the advent of the luxury bus. They directed their operations from Kano to the eastern cities of Onitsha, Enugu, Nnewi, Aba, Port-Harcourt and other parts of the country.<sup>36</sup>

The advent of the luxury bus transport service in Nigeria took place in 1960s when the defunct Mid-Western State established the Midwest State Transport Service. This was followed by other transport services such as the Oriental Line from the then East Central State.<sup>40</sup> The pioneers of luxury bus transport enterprises in Igbo land were the transport magnates such as Chief Augustine Ilodibe, Patrick Nwobi Emerah, popularly known as P.N Emerah Transport Company Nigeria

<sup>35</sup>Bako A., "A Social and Economic History of Sabon-Gari, Kano 1913 – 1989" Ph.d History Thesis Bayero University, Kano pp. 43 – 44, see also F. N. Nwaugo (2000) "The Igbo spare parts Entrepreneurs in Kano Metropolis. A case study of Automobile Spare parts. M. A History Dissertation, Bayero University, Kano p. 67

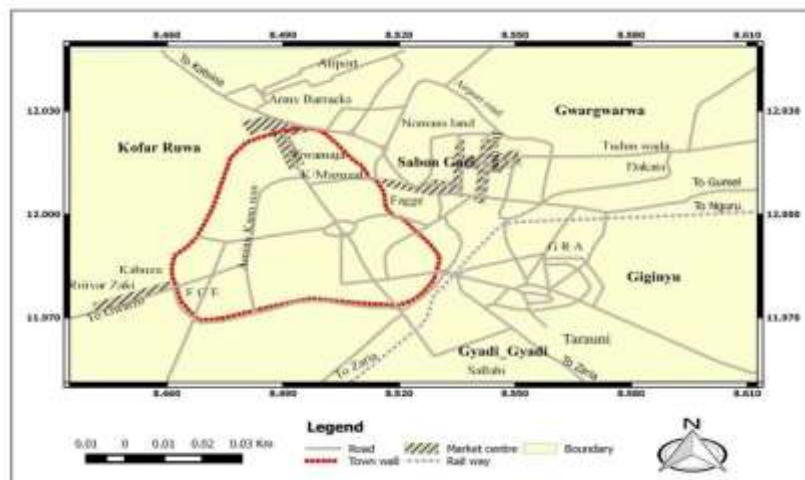
<sup>36</sup>Daniel O. I., "The Opportunities and Challenges of Igbo Transport Enterprises in Kano 1970 – 2014. *Journal of History*, vol.1 No.1 June 2014. <sup>40</sup> Ibid p. 5

Limited, Ben Ubajiaka, etc. New entrants, according to Daniel Iweze included Chief G.U.O Okeke, F. G Onyenwe, Izuchukwu, Geoffrey Obi and Frank Nneji, amongst others who are more vigorous by traversing all parts of the country, even beyond the Nigerian shore. The emergence of luxury bus transport services marked a significant landmark that revolutionalized road transport sub-sector in Nigeria.

### 5. The Igbo and the Introduction of Luxurious<sup>37</sup> Bus Transport Business in Kano

The introduction of luxurious buses during the closing decades of the 1970s by Igbo transport entrepreneurs was a major landmark in the evolution of the motor transport subsector in Kano. The establishment of luxury bus transport enterprises in Kano began in 1980 and was pioneered by Chief Augustine Ilodibe, the Chairman of EkeneDilichukwu Transport Company, Patrick NwobiEmerah and Chief Okunwa of new Tarzan Motors.<sup>38</sup> It should be pointed out here that the increase in the national road network, improvement in the quality of the roads, the mass importation of vehicles, particularly in the 1970s, and the rise in the stock of vehicles, created enabling environment for Igbo investment in the motor transport sector.

**Map 3: Location of Luxurious Bus Motor Park in Kano**



**Source:** Cartographic Unit, Department of Geography, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Adapted from Emmanuel Eyeh (2015), *History of Igbo Enterprises in Kano, 1960-2007*

For Igbo road transporters in Kano, the period was very significant. First, there was a speedy recovery from the effects of the civil war. Most pre-war Igbo transporters had gradually given way to a new generation of Igbo transporters. Among the Igbo who started motor transport business immediately after the war were entrepreneurs like Chief Augustine Ilodibe, the group chairman and managing director of EkeneDilichukwu Motors, Chief F. E. Okonkwo, Chief C. N.

<sup>37</sup> Luxurious bus is a term commonly used by passengers and transport owners to describe the long distance bus from Kano to the southern part of the country. It is more comfortable, equipped with air condition, television and musical sets on board which enhance passenger's relaxation. They are safer, reliable and regular. Speed is their greatest advantage as journeys that they usually takes days by the use of other vehicular means of transport are covered within hours.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid p. 55



Nebe and Chief Okunwa.<sup>39</sup> The successes of the pioneer inspired new entrants to direct their fleets to Kano for the same business of transportation. There are over sixty luxurious buses transporting enterprises in Kano that move between Kano and other parts of the country<sup>40,41</sup>, which may take three to four days and, in some cases one week. Second, most of the buses had in-built electronics or those installed by bus owners, such as television set and video machines with air conditioning to ensure maximum relaxation and comfort of the passengers. According to Ifeanyi Chukwu, John Ifediora, Chairman of Task Force Luxurious Bus Park Sabon-Gari Kano, traders are ready and happy to pay additional fares to enjoy these facilities.<sup>42</sup> Fares that the luxury bus charged depended to a considerable extent on the type of the bus, condition of the road and the period of the year. Usually, festive periods like Christmas, Easter, and Sallah holidays attract more fare. The fares ranged between ₦3, 500 (three thousand, five hundred naira) to ₦4, 500 (four thousand, five hundred naira) and as much as ₦5,000 (five thousand naira) during festive periods. In 2004, various models of luxurious buses like Buscar cost as much as ₦30 million; the Mercedes RS 500 cost ₦36 million, Comil Mercedes Brand ₦38 million, Iriza also from Brazil 40 million<sup>43</sup>.

These technologies are a combination of Brazil and Germany.<sup>44</sup> Luxurious buses have helped stimulate internal activities in Kano, by providing easy means for the transportation of commuters and non-bulky trading goods. The buses have equally assisted substantially in transporting trade items such as stationeries, spare parts and pharmaceuticals for the traders who frequently travel to major commercial cities in the Eastern Nigeria such as Onitsha, Port Harcourt, Aba, Nnewi, Umuahia, Warri and Lagos. In this way, they have linked the economy of Kano with other areas which previously had only rare contact with each other. Igbo transporters had contributed in making Kano the greatest and unrivalled emporium of commerce and industry in Northern Nigeria. The Igbo motor transport entrepreneurs were dominant in the luxury long distance passenger traffic. This dominance was directly related to the depth and wide spread in nature of Igbo traders in diaspora.

The Igbo transport entrepreneurs, indeed, have made a major contribution to the growth of Kano's economy. Apart from their major role in distributing goods and services, they also paid development levies which swelled the government's coffers by 20%. The Association of Luxury Bus Owners of Nigeria (ALBON) paid ₦250,000 to Fagge Local Government every month. Thus, in this vein, therefore, between January 2002 and May 2004 a total of 10 million was paid into the

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<sup>39</sup>Nwaugo F. N., "The Igbo Community in Kano 1913 – 2004: A study of Intergroup Relations", Ph.d Thesis, History, Nigerian Defense Academy 2013. p 115

<sup>40</sup> The names of selected luxury bus transport services and the date of their establishment in Kano are as follows: Ekene Dili Chukwu (1974), P.N Emerah (1974), Izuchukwu motors (1978), Micmerah International Agency (1991), G.U.O Okeke Transport Services (1991), F.G. Onyenwe Nigeria Ltd. (1995), New Tarzan Motors

<sup>41</sup>, now split into (services Tarzan and First Tarzan. Gobison Transport Ltd. 1990. For further reading consult Dr.Iweze (2000) A History of Igbo transport Business in Kano. A case of study of Luxury buses from 1970 – 2000. B. A Dissertation, Bayero University cited in D. Iweze "The Opportunities and Challenges of Igbo Transport Enterprises in Kano 1970 – 2014 in Kano. Journal of History Vol. 1 No.1 June 2014.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Ifeanyichukwu John Ifediora. He is the current chairman Task Force of the Luxury Bus Motor Park, New Road, Sabon-Gari, Kano age 43, 15 August 2014

<sup>43</sup>Nwaugo F. N., "The Igbo Community in Kano 1913 – 2004: A study of Intergroup Relations", Ph.d Thesis, History, Nigerian Defense Academy 2013. p 115

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Sunday Odogwu, aged 46 vice-chairman, Taskforce Luxury Bus Park Sabon-Gari; Kano and Transport Manager Chukwuje Transport Motor Ltd, 15 August 2014, see also T. Forrest 2005, p. 156



coffers of Fagge Local Government.<sup>45</sup> Also some of the youths were employed by these transport firms in Kano, which reduced unemployment and ultimately youth restiveness; employment that cut across diverse groups like the Nupe, Yoruba, Igala, Ebira and Niger, respectively. Also investment in the motor transport industry about the development of motor spare parts business in Kano as vehicle owners required spare parts to fix the vehicles when it developed faults that needed replacement of old spares parts<sup>46</sup>.

Many of the transporters used the profit accrued from the trade to diversify into other lucrative ventures like estate, hotel and tourism. Transporters contributed in improving the lives of members of their various communities in Kano through financial assistance and cash remittances. They assist their community members in setting up different types of businesses by giving financial support to those who had business setbacks to enable them to start new ones.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, the Luxurious bus transport enterprise played prominent role in enhancing harmonious inter-group relations between the various ethnic groups in Kano. This socio-economic intercourse among the different ethnic groups fostered peaceful co-existence, and national integration despite the incessant ethno-religious conflicts in Kano. The intermingling of people from different ethnic groups through commercial and socio-cultural contacts has enhanced tolerance, mutual understanding and unity of the country.

### Conclusion

This paper examined Igbo commercial activities in Kano. It has shown that through hard work and perseverance, the Igbo created a niche for themselves in various commercial activities in Kano, which they later dominated. The commercial activities include motor spare parts, patent medicine, stationeries, transportation, and many others. In fact, the names and professions of some of these trades almost became synonymous with the Igbo, not only in Kano but the entire nation. It was also observed that this commercial intercourse between the Hausa of Kano (Kanawa) and Igbo on the one hand and Igbo and other migrant communities on the other and over time became the premise for inter-group cooperation and national cohesion. The paper examined some of the enterprises that the Igbo engaged in Kano. Emphases were laid on five of them: the patent medicine entrepreneurs in the Sabon-Gari market in Kano, motor spare parts entrepreneurs, Igbo entrepreneurs in stationery business, motor transport entrepreneurs, and the introduction of luxurious bur transport in Kano. In each of these economic activities, the Igbo had shown clear dominance. In all of them, the yearnings and the needs of the people were identified and every action necessary was deployed to satisfy these needs.

It was not as if everything went smoothly for all the Igbo entrepreneurs in Kano. For each of the enterprises, there were numerous challenges. However, one remarkable future was the doggedness of the people in the face of the challenges. Despite all these, they continue to live and do business in Kano.

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with Augustine Nwokeoma, Secretary General, Association of Luxury Bus Owners of Nigeria (ALBON) Kano Branch age 45, Luxury Bus Motor Park Sabon-Gari Kano.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Augustine Nwokeoma,

<sup>47</sup> D. Iweze, "A History of Igbo Transportation Business in Kano" cited in Daniel Iweze "The Opportunities and Challenges of Igbo Transport in Kano" Kano Journal of History, vol.1 No.1 BUK, Kano