



Igbo Traders in Mararaba Market in Nassarawa State, Nigeria since the 1960s

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Abstract

Although the literature on the history of the Igbo people has highlighted the role of Igbo traders, the analysis appears to have underemphasized the role of Igbo traders in specific markets. This article, therefore, examines the activities of Igbo traders in the Mararaba market, Nassarawa state. To achieve its objectives, the study adopts the distinctive historical method. It has utilized primary sources such as oral interviews, newspaper reports and secondary sources like books, journal articles and internet sources. It highlights the emergence of the Igbo traders in Mararaba and the various activities they are engaged. The article has shown that since the end of the Nigerian Civil War, the Igbo informal enterprise had continued unhindered. The study also found that the activities of Igbo traders in Mararaba market went beyond the formal trading activities to include other informal social activities. It also demonstrates that the Igbo traders through their activities have promoted inter-group relations and infrastructural development.

Keywords: Igbo Traders, Mararaba Market, Nassarawa, Civil War, Economy

Introduction

It is no gainsaying that in contemporary Nigerian society the Igbo are synonymous with migration. The Igbo has also been described as a migrant race, a phenomenon that is economically driven. The Igbo



people of Nigeria have a long and rich history of trading, dating back to pre-colonial times. Silverstein demonstrates that the rapid expansion of the Igbo diaspora was a product, not only of population pressure at home, but of the prior development of social blueprints for migration in pre-colonial Igbo social organization.¹The activities of Igbo traders at the macro level have been widely analysed by scholars. Yet case studies documenting their role in specific markets remain limited. Mararaba market is an example of such market and therefore serves as a case study.

A marked feature of Igbo economic arrangement since the pre-colonial period was long distance trade, which was interwoven with manufacturing and agriculture. According to A. E. Afigbo, the known pre-colonial Igbo long-distance professional traders who were away from home for long periods came mainly from Aro, Awka, Nri, Nkwerre, and Abiriba among others.²Similarly, Meagher argues that the organization of craftsmen and traders into itinerant groups with specialized territories created a framework for migration that did not rupture linkages between migrants and their home areas.³During the pre-colonial era, the Igbo traded a variety of goods including palm oil, yams, and other agricultural products. They also traded in salt, iron, and cloth. They established trade networks with other African communities and even with European traders.

Trade was also a significant economic activity in the colonial economy of Igboland. The Igbo continued their trading activities, adapting to new markets and opportunities. While the Igbo have historically had a significant presence among coastal peoples of south-eastern Nigeria, their expansion into western and northern Nigeria took place largely in the context of colonialism. The Igbo took advantage of the new economic opportunities available across Nigeria, moving to locations across the country. Igbo groups including traders migrated widely within Igbo areas, but the bulk of migration was outside the Igbo hinterland to western and northern Nigeria.⁴They were involved in the export of palm oil and other agricultural products

¹S. Silverstein, *Sociocultural Organisation and Locational Strategies of Transportation Entrepreneurs: An Ethnoeconomic History of the Nnewi Igbo of Nigeria* (Boston: Boston University Press, 1983); 130.

² A. E. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1981)

³ Kate Meagher, "The Informalisation of Belonging: Igbo Informal Enterprise and National Cohesion from Below" *Africa Development*, vol. XXXIV, no1, (2009): 31-46.

⁴ Mathias Mgbeafulu, *Migration and the Economy: Igbo Migrants and the Nigerian Economy 1900 to 1975* (Indiana: iUniverse, 2003)



to Europe, as well as the import of European goods such as textiles and guns. At the early stage of colonial rule, some of the first set of rural-urban migrants engaged in petty trading. Initially, the trading sector was dominated by big European firms. The activities of these firms affected the fortunes of a few indigenous traders. However, the economic boom experienced after the Second World War facilitated the activities of migrant traders and their coming into prominence. Although Igbo informal enterprise was tolerated by the British colonial administration, it was given little encouragement and no real support.

After independence, the Igbo continued their trading activities, with a focus on imports and export. They were involved in the import of goods such as electronics, textiles, and machinery, and the export of agricultural products such as palm oil, rubber, and cocoa. Despite, the ugly experience of violent expulsion and defeat in a long Civil War, the Igbo resumed their out-migration at the end of the war due to three main factors namely pressures from land scarcity, limited employment opportunities at home and intense economic advancement.⁵It is important to state that after independence in 1960, the Igbo informal traders and producers became even more marginalized in the face of state efforts to promote the development of the formal economy.

In essence, the lack of state assistance in the process of reconstruction coupled with disadvantageous policies governing the economic integration of Biafra crippled Igbo participation within the formal economy intensifying their focus on informal systems of economic organization.⁶Today the Igbo have been involved in a variety of other business activities, including real estate, construction, and finance. They have also been involved in the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, which have helped to drive economic growth in Nigeria.

Importantly, the Nigerian Civil War had precipitated further migration of the Igbo to other areas in search of better living. Since then, the Igbo traders have traversed various parts of Nigeria. One such area is Mararaba in Nasarrawa state where they have distinguished themselves as successful traders. They have also contributed to the development of the area through their commercial activities. Despite the increasing activities of Igbo traders in specific markets, their contributions in the Mararaba market have been under-researched.

⁵D. Anthony, *Poison and Medicine: Ethnicity, Power and Violence in a Nigerian City, 1966-1986* (Oxford: James Curry, 2002); 228.

⁶Kate Meagher, "The Informalisation of Belonging: Igbo Informal Enterprise and National Cohesion from Below" *Africa Development*, vol. XXXIV, no1, (2009): 31-46.

It is with this rather neglected aspect that this article is chiefly concerned with an analysis of the activities of Igbo traders in the Mararaba market. To achieve its objective, the study adopts the historical approach. It relies heavily on primary sources such as oral interviews and secondary sources such as journal articles, books, newspapers, and internet sources. Relevant information gathered for this study has been interpreted using the historical methodology.

Emergence of Igbo Traders in Mararaba Market

The origin of Mararaba could be traced back to the 1840s. The founding fathers of this territory are known to have migrated from Niger, as hunters and farmers seeking arable lands for cultivation. The first settler and founder of Mararaba was *Jejiwi Zadatolo*, settling in Paptase (geography within Mararaba). The second settler came to Gwagbaya, his name was *Gwagba*. Both founding settlers in an attempt to demarcate their territory named the midpoint that separates their territorial boundaries Mararaba. Mararaba remained a small community until the 1970s. Its proximity to the federal capital territory Abuja accounted for, to a large extent, the massive influx of immigrants including the Igbos.

The incursion of Igbos into Mararaba for trade began in the 1960s. Several factors may have contributed to the emergence of the Igbo traders in the Mararaba market. It is true that the Nigerian Civil War devastated Igbo trading activities across Nigeria and precipitated a mass return of Igbo migrants to their home area. However, it also laid the foundation for the consolidation and rapid development of Igbo informal enterprise.⁷ Consequently, the Igbo turned to rebuild their livelihoods through migration immediately after the Civil War. This included a rapid return to northern Nigeria. Aside from the Nigerian Civil War, the movement of Nigeria's capital from Lagos to Abuja led to massive migration of people including the Igbos to the new capital. Afterwards, the capital city of Abuja began to experience a mass influx of immigrants. However, not all immigrants could financially sustain the high cost of living in Abuja. Consequently, people began to work within Abuja and reside in neighbouring towns like Mararaba where the cost of living is low. Mararaba also witnessed the influx of migrants including Igbo traders from the far North due to the religious crisis in places like Kaduna, Kano and Maiduguri. Mararaba has witnessed an upsurge of immigrants including Igbo traders due to the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast. It was also reported that the demolition of buildings by the Federal Capital Territory authorities in Nyanya District contributed to a massive movement of Abuja residents including Igbo traders to Mararaba in Nasarawa state.

⁷ Ibid



Activities of Igbo Traders in Mararaba Market

The activities of Igbo migrant traders in the Mararaba market cut across diverse spheres ranging from social, political, and economic to judicial activities.

Economic Activities

Over 60 percent of the total boutiques and stalls in Mararaba are owned by Igbo clothes dealers. In these boutiques, the Igbos sell imported clothing they brought from America and China. They further specialize in the sales of clothing bearing the names of popular brands. Fendi, Louis Vuitton, Hermes, Gucci, Chanel, House of Versace, and many more, are the kind of clothing brands they sell. The Igbos also specialise in the sale of branded shoes and clothing. These branded goods follow the patterns of Western popular clothing brands, providing those who cannot afford the original clothing products with the sub-standard version of such products. These substandard products are usually referred to as *Aba* products (usually spotted by their fake logos or fake names), thus describing the fabrication of an original product.⁸

Second-hand clothing trade is another economic activity the Igbo traders are deeply involved. It is on record that the Igbo pioneered the trade in used clothing in West Africa. The business expanded through cooperation between Igbo and Hausa networks. Forrest, for instance, maintains that Igbo second-hand clothing importers based in the Republic of Benin and Togo extended the trade northward into Sahelian countries through contacts with Hausa traders. Thus, in a relationship of cooperation rather than competition, the vast Hausa trading systems of Sahelian West Africa became integrated into the second-hand clothing business as distributive networks for Igbo importers and traders. The second-hand clothing trade in the Mararaba market is highly organized as they have a universal laundry system that washes, starch, and iron such clothes. The demand for second-hand clothing in the Mararaba market is high. The sale of used clothes is a thriving business in the Mararaba market. This is largely due to the harsh economic situation in the country that has forced many people to buy and wear used clothes and underwear. As stated earlier, the traders travel as far as Missebo Market in the Benin Republic to purchase bales of second-hand clothes, which are subsequently smuggled into Nigeria before being sold in many

⁸Oral Interview with Mr Chinonso



Nigerian towns.⁹One major advantage of the trade in second-hand clothing is that it does not require huge capital.

One of the profitable activities the Igbo traders are engaged include spare parts business. The spare part traders at Mararaba, import motor parts from America, Europe, and Asia. Some of the articles of the trade include motor spare parts, machine or motorbike components, car and machine/motorcycle lubricants, car and machine tires, batteries, wheels and engines, windscreens, car nuts, and motorbike parts.¹⁰ They handle the major spare part deals because of their ability to sway customers, convincing them to patronize them. In addition, in cases where an Igbo trader has exhausted a requested spare part, the flexibility of trade and brotherhood has made it easy for them to access such spare parts and in fact, market such a product as if they are the actual owners.

The sale of electronics, phones as well as phone repairs forms another significant business activity of Igbo traders in Mararaba market. The hub of electronic activities in Mararaba is located at Heart Plaza, where they specialize in the sales of phones, phone repairs, laptops, and other technical activities. In the Mararaba market, the merchandise for electronics and the sales of phones and other components are mostly dominated by Igbo traders. However, the sales of phone accessories are dominated by the Hausa indigenes.¹¹ The Igbo traders, concerning electronics, unite, working together to repair phones, laptops, and other gadgets. They also used the apprenticeship system, where interested Igbo youths are taught how to repair such gadgets. They are also allowed to practice their trade at the Plaza. The Igbo youth after acquiring small capital and with the help of their Oga, (master) who they had served for several years, were able to set up businesses. Additionally, the trade unions assist in the form of small loans to these youths after a period of tutelage. Phones and other components (phone spare parts) are usually imported from places like China, the United Kingdom, and the United States.¹²

The Igbo traders are also engaged in pharmaceuticals. The prominent pharmacies in the market include Odera Pharmacy Limited, Ethvan Pharmacy, Quali Health Pharmacy, and Tejjas Pharmacy. These pharmacies are owned by the Igbo. However, they are confronted with several challenges such as a lack of funds to effectively stock the pharmacy with required drugs and low patronage.

⁹Oral interview with Mr Chukwuma

¹⁰Oral Interview with Mr Chinedu

¹¹Oral Interview with Coach Kenechukwu

¹²Oral Interview with Mr Tony



The Igbo traders engage in the shoe business in the Mararaba market. The Igbo traders acquire readymade shoes from Aba, down to Mararaba to sell within the market. Aba and Nnewi towns emerged as the epicentres of the Igbo manufacturing industry, which has earned them the title "Japan of Africa". In addition, the term Aba made has become associated with cheap local manufacturers. Scholars are divided on the origin of Igbo industrial dynamism.¹³ These range from shoes for corporate wear and also make palms for casual or traditional wear. The Igbo shoemakers employ the services of an apprentice to reduce the workload. More so, the sale of *Okirika* shoes, that is, second-hand shoes, is another trading activity of the Igbo. They import such shoes in bulk from other countries. They also purchase *Okirika* shoes locally from Lagos (Katangua and other areas).¹⁴

Over time, the Igbo traders in Mararaba began to purchase land in Nassarawa for farming. However, they are not engaged in large-scale farming. They are involved in subsistence farming to cater for their personal needs at home and the surplus is sold at the Mararaba market. The Igbo traders in the Mararaba market also deal with all forms of building materials including cement products (Dangote cement, Eagle cement, Lafarge and Elephant cement), they import and sell various forms of metals (steel, zinc, aluminium, and Iron reinforcement rods), plaster of Paris, paints (oil paints, Aluminium paints, emulsion and many others), plumbing materials such as concrete pipes, iron pipes, PVC pipes, asbestos, and cement pipes among others. Igbo traders enjoy the monopoly of trade in building materials over other ethnic groups in the Mararaba market.¹⁵ It is important to state that the activities of Igbo migrant traders have been sustained through the apprenticeship system.

Political and Judicial Procedures

The general administration of the market rests on the Central Executive Council Mararaba (CECM). The Central Executive Council Mararaba serves as the frontier body concerning negotiations and putting forward the demands of traders, especially at meetings with government officials. They also act on issues regarding the security of goods, lives, and properties of fellow traders. They help solve the problem of sanitation by providing cleaners whose responsibility is to

¹³ Some scholars link the Igbo industrial dynamism to the economic incentives created by structural adjustment. Others have demonstrated that the conditions for local industrial development were laid over a decade earlier in the context of the Civil War.

¹⁴ Oral Interview with Mr Joseph Ikon

¹⁵ Oral Interview with Mr Ebube

ensure the environment is clean. They take charge of issues or cases that are beyond the executives of units.¹⁶

The second stage of the political organogram in Mararaba is the Units. Units in Mararaba commonly refer to a chain of stalls along each line. They combine to form associations. Irrespective of such a person's profession, once they are within that Unit, they are subject to rules guiding such Units. It is from the unit level that the grievances of the traders are forwarded to the Central Executive Council for consideration. They serve as the voice of the traders and also the spokesmen of the Central Executive for the effective dissemination of information. They also perform adjudicative functions where they settle issues on theft, robbery, and refusal to pay debts or loans among others. Upon adjudication, the Secretary is expected to prepare a report with a copy sent to the Central Executive Council to keep them informed.¹⁷

In cases where the issue is beyond the Unit level, the Central Executive Council takes up the case and administers justice accordingly. The judicial procedures in the market have prevented further escalation of problems. Adjudication follows the process of listening to both sides. Both parties are usually satisfied with the judgment.

The traders are also organized based on their line of business. Those within the electronic and technical sector, pharmaceutical line, spare-part trade, and transport, join groups within their line of business. This provides them with numerous opportunities, financial assistance, and many more benefits. In Mararaba, it is not compulsory to join such groups; however, such business groups confer benefits for starting businesses.¹⁸

Informal Igbo Migrant Traders Network

Since the late 20th century, the Igbo have established unions in Mararaba to cater for their wellbeing and foster social relations. Trade unions like the *Aka Onye Wetelu*, *Nwannedinangba Social Club*, and the *Secondhand Cloth Dealers Association* are examples of Igbo associations in Mararaba. Historically, the formation of Igbo associations began in the 1920s. The movement of Igbos to the economic capital, Lagos, set the pace for Igbo ethnic unions. As migration became a necessity in the post Civil-War era, Igbo unions began to spread to several parts of the country. Hence, associations

¹⁶Oral Interview with Chief Julius Maduka

¹⁷Ibid

¹⁸Ibid.

served as a means for dealing with a change in the environment.¹⁹ Additionally, these unions provided care and support to members in times of need. They also render financial assistance by providing loans for members. Occasionally, they provide support for members during social gatherings like funeral and marriage ceremonies and also organize cultural events to ensure fellow Igbo migrants do not lose their cultural identity.²⁰

In the spirit of *onyeaghalanwanneya*, which translates as do not abandon your brother/sister, the Igbos join Town Union Associations (TUAs) at their destinations to care for one another. Igbo town union takes two major forms. First, is the community association. Every Igbo man or daughter is required to participate in the activities of the community by aligning themselves with community associations.²¹ This further helps members to be constantly informed about the welfare, growth, and development of their community and hometown in the South East. The second category of association entails the formation of Igbo unions within the Local Government Area an Igbo person currently occupies, thereby housing such unions under the umbrella of *ohanaezendigbo*.²²

Prominent amongst the Igbo associations in Mararaba is the Unique Traders Association. The Unique Traders Association is a union organized by a train of shop owners within Mararaba²³. Its formation dates back to 2008 after a fire outbreak destroyed the goods and properties of traders. The association was formed to help protect the goods and properties of traders. The Unique Traders Association houses traders who sell clothes, phones, and electronics. Admission into the union requires that such a trader owns a store along the chain of stores in Mararaba. ²⁴

The association is saddled with the responsibility of providing store owners with security services to help protect their goods. Also, in rare cases of fire outbreaks or damages to properties owned by a member of the association, the association provides insurance plans for

¹⁹Ezebunwa Nwokocha. "Igbos in Ibadan, Nigeria: migration, integration and challenges"

<<https://uaps2015.princeton.edu/abstracts/151597>>

²⁰Eghosa Osaghae, *Trends of Political Migrants in Kano: The Igbo in Kano*. (Ibadan, IFRA Nigeria, 1994.)

²¹Ezebunwa Nwokocha. "Igbos in Ibadan, Nigeria: migration, integration and challenges"

<<https://uaps2015.princeton.edu/abstracts/151597>>

²² Oral interview with Chief Julius

²³ Oral interview with Mr. Robinson

²⁴ Ibid

members experiencing such troubles. ²⁵The efforts of the Unique Traders Association have contributed to the eradication of hoodlums in the market, allowing customers and traders to move freely without fear of being molested.²⁶The services rendered by the association are financed by the monthly contributions of members, usually 5,000 naira from over 40 members.

One trade union largely dominated by the Igbo in Mararaba Market is the Second Hand Clothe Dealers Association. The rate at which customers purchase second-hand clothing despite the ban from the Nigerian government remains high. Some have attributed the motive behind the purchase of second-hand clothing to its affordability.²⁷Others believe that consumers' purchasing power dwindles by the day. Thus, second-hand clothing has become appealing to the low-income group who believe that such clothes are of higher quality than new sewn fabrics often imported from China.²⁸

The Association of Secondhand dealers established a general trust fund for its members. This was set up to assist traders who might have lost their goods and wares in transit or to a fire outbreak to enable traders to get back on their feet. Hence, they serve as a support system for members. They further provide the required financial assistance to help newly recruited traders with start-up capital. Start-up capital given to recruits come in the form of loans, with little or no interest incurred and payable within a period.²⁹To ensure the sustenance of the Second Hand Clothe Dealers Association, the union established a system for successful revenue collection and payment from its members. Traders collect assessment forms at the start of the year. The forms are completed and returned to the organization. When a member pays the monthly dues, he is given a ticket or a pass confirming that he has paid for the month.³⁰

Mararaba Christian Association (MCA) is an association of Christian men and women in the Mararaba market. It was founded in 2011 by a group of Igbo traders who moved from Nyanya to Mararaba partly because of the bomb blast at Nyanya. This association seeks to help members grow in their spiritual lives. They take part in services which the association organizes every Wednesday. More so, they render

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Rasheed Sobowale. "Nigeria: Why We Prefer Second-Hand Clothes - FCT Residents" <<https://allafrica.com/stories/202101110116.html>>

²⁸ Femi Adekoya, Gracious Akunna. "Used clothing as unlikely competition for Nigerian textile manufacturers" <<https://guardian.ng/business-services/used-clothing-as-unlikely-competition-for-nigerian-textile-manufacturers/>>

²⁹ Oral interview with Mr. Chukwudi

³⁰ Ibid

members the necessary assistance during ceremonies like burial rights, weddings, and naming ceremonies.³¹

The *Aka Onye Wetelu* is an association for Igbo electrical dealers in Mararaba. The Association began as a contribution between a group of Igbo friends, twelve in number, with the motive of sourcing out capital for members. Members of this association contribute the sum of ten thousand every week. The money is then given to a member of the group. Fines are also attached to defaults or delays in payments. The sum of two thousand naira is added as a fine for such delays. The members hold their monthly meetings every last Sunday of the month. During this session, games are played and pertinent issues concerning the growth of the business are discussed. The association has a governing structure that includes the president, vice president, and financial secretary. These officials are also referred to as the organizing committee. They set the venues for meetings and provide the necessary refreshments and games for each meeting. The financial secretary, on the other hand, oversees the collection of dues every Saturday of the week. The contribution is then handed over to the members to collect the money for the week. During important festivals like Christmas and New Year, the organizing committee kills one cow, which is subsequently shared among the members.³²

Nwannedinanba Social Club (NSC) is a club in Mararaba that focuses on the well-being of fellow Igbo men in the Mararaba community. It focuses on social gatherings, activities, and sports. Their meetings are usually once every month where they gather to discuss pressing issues and proffer solutions to them.³³ Their contributions are also monthly. During the meeting, all contributions of members are collected (the sum of ten thousand naira) by the financial secretary and then given to a member. The club provides members with start-up capital for businesses. Defaulters in *Nwannedinangba Social club* are not spared by the constitution of the club as they are made to pay double the amount they owe. The club provides loan packages worth up to a million for their members in Mararaba, of which payment is spread for five years.³⁴

Social Activities

The social activities of Igbo traders in Mararaba include naming ceremonies, deaths, weddings, festivals and celebrations, and lastly, the activities of the vigilante groups. In Igbo culture, *Igu aha* (naming

³¹ Oral interview with Mr. Chinonso

³² Oral interview with Mr. Tony

³³ Oral interview with Mr. Odinakachukwu

³⁴ Ibid

ceremony) is held days after the birth of the child. It is often performed between 7 and 12 days after the child's delivery. When a child is born in the Igbo trading community in Mararaba, he or she is greeted with joyful Igbo music. The roles played by the Igbo traders precede the naming ceremony. Igbo men come together to contribute and if necessary source the funding required for the safe delivery of the child. From these contributions, they provide such members with tokens required to help cater for refreshments as well as gifts at the naming ceremony. The Igbo women gather to contribute their quota by assisting in taking care of the baby and singing songs in Igbo, they are also responsible for taking care of the mother, and providing her with necessary meals pending the time she can effectively handle home activities. They also use this opportunity to bring gifts for the baby.³⁵

Burials are more distinctive. For the Igbo community, *Ikwoozu* (burial rites as it is called) is dependent on how long such an individual lived. The death of an Igboman or woman is honoured differently depending on the person's history, title, gender, relationship with family, and circumstances surrounding the death. For instance, if a person died premature death or died at a young age, such burials are not celebrated. Still, the Igbo traders, in their little way, take up the responsibility of catering for the children and contribute money to cater for the family. If such a trader has children, the Igbo trading community will help further their education by providing them with scholarships which usually last till they finish their secondary school education. Additionally, if it is evident that the child of the deceased has entrepreneurial potential, he or she is taken as an apprentice by one of the Igbo men who will later set such a child up with his own business in due time.

In addition, *Ikwoozu* is best celebrated when an individual die of old age and most importantly, has lived a well-fulfilled life. Such burial is handled by families, friends, groups, and members of the Igbo trading community. In a situation where a member or the relation of a member dies, the Igbo traders play active roles in the burial rites of the deceased. This takes the form of buying joint attires to show support and to also serve as an insignia that such a person was one of them. They mobilize themselves by providing transportation for the movement of fellow traders to the location of the burial, usually in the hometown of the deceased. They play the important role of moving the corpse of the dead to his or her final resting place. For the deceased Igbo man, he is transported to his ancestral village, and for the Igbo woman, it is the village of her husband. They also bring along some of the requirements for burials. Some of them are cows, goats,

³⁵ Interview with Mr Chinonso

alcohol, and drinks, amongst other things. This is a way of showing their support to the family of the deceased.

The marriage procedures of the Igbo traders in Mararaba follow the Igbo custom. The groom pays a visit to the bride's family, informing them of his plan to marry their daughter and his desire to bring his family to see them. Both families meet for the first time at the bride's home on the agreed-upon day. The groom's parents, elders, a few family members, and friends are close to him. Igbo traders in Mararaba provide financial support for members preparing for marriage and accompanying them to the bride's home as friends.³⁶

The Igbo traders provide medical assistance to other members. The use of traditional medicine is applied in the treatment of fellow Igbo traders in Mararaba. This approach is usually resorted to when such a trader is highly incapable of meeting the necessary financing required for proper medical check-ups. However, some rely on the pharmaceutical stores of fellow Igbos where primary check-ups are conducted. They are given the necessary medical treatment, which sometimes is free or are permitted to pay for such medical treatments later. Also, in cases where surgeries, issues of accidents, inability to pay for medical bills, and more, contributions and donations serve as a means of helping out their fellow Igbo man or woman. Soft loans are also given to traders who find themselves in such dire situations with little interest incurred.

The engagement of vigilantes in Mararaba is solely based on protecting and preserving the trader's goods and properties within the market. The protection of goods owned by the Igbos in Mararaba remains the sole duty of, firstly, individual Igbo men within the market. It is one reason why the goods of one Igbo man can be sold by another Igbo man in his absence, without any fear of theft. This largely displays their commitment to each other. In more recent times, the military has served as a form of protection. The government employed the services of armed female soldiers in Mararaba, to help stabilize the area and to prevent cases of violence and more. Thirdly, the Igbo employ the services of vigilantes. Although their activities begin at dawn till the next morning, there are periods where they begin their duties much earlier. The purpose of these vigilante services is to protect the goods and to act effectively during a robbery or even fire incident. The impact of vigilante services is that it has reduced cases of theft and has served as a form of security, thus reducing crime and possible terrorist activity.

³⁶ Oral interview with Mr Odinakachukwu Obinna



The devoted Christians amongst the Igbo traders in the Mararaba market observe the daily noon prayers. Their prayers focus on the protection of their families, the growth of their businesses, financial stability, untimely death, and prayers against spiritual forces. After prayers, they discuss their businesses, their progress, and sometimes areas of assistance. They also have fellowships every Wednesday evening to discuss the word of God and help each other grow spiritually. These fellowship groups provide free clothing, yam, oil, rice, and other necessities of life (especially during Christmas). Unlike other unions, they do not provide loans of any form, but they render financial assistance to the less privileged. They further help to resolve the conflict between members and, most importantly, between husbands and wives. More so, they embark on evangelism. This is primarily a norm with the Pentecostal churches around the area.³⁷

Two examples of such churches are The Redeemed Christian Church of God and The Lord's Chosen. RCCG, as it is popularly referred to, does conduct evangelism around the market. They adopt one-to-one conviction to prevent your attention from being divided. On the other hand, Chosen is an outreach for souls, where fliers about Jesus Christ are shared; However, Igbo traders are usually a part of this evangelism and outreach as they better understand the market structure than other members of the church.³⁸

Impact of Igbo Traders in Mararaba

The active involvement of the Igbos in trading activities within the Mararaba market has improved economic activities in the market. The participation of the Igbo in trade and sales of various products has bolstered economic activities within the market. The fact that they have created a wide range of monopolies on specific articles of trade indicates that a certain aspect of the market economy would have been lacking without the presence of the Igbo. Although assertions can be made as to the rise of other ethnic groupings to fill up the economic role of the Igbo within Mararaba provided they were never present. However, certain trades and ways of life have become ethnic-specific. Hence, the Hausa traders will not go into spare parts sales simply because it is not their forte.

Furthermore, the Igbo apprenticeship system is now modelled by a large majority of traders in Mararaba. Other ethnic groups within the market have now inculcated the habit of mentoring family members who will, in turn, be settled after serving for several years. Although it

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Oral Interview with Mr Stanley Okoro



remains domicile with the Igbo, other ethnic groupings have learned and adopted the Igbo apprenticeship system.

The Igbo, in collaboration with other ethnic groups, have continued to provide security and safety of goods, lives, and properties. To extirpate all forms of theft and robbery, the Igbo adopted the vigilante system in Mararaba to effectively cater to and protect traders' goods. Also, to prevent cases of insurgencies, which ultimately require that people begin to look over their shoulders, the inability to focus on trade, or the eventual need to migrate due to insecurity, the Igbos became highly focused on curbing all forms of insecurity. Hence, the Igbo provide a stable environment for trade and other forms of relations. Through the Igbos, the Mararaba community has also experienced large-scale infrastructural development. Within Mararaba, and even within the market, numerous buildings in the area are owned by the Igbo. This is a factor for hiring vigilantes to protect their properties.

The Igbo have also fostered healthy competition in the Mararaba market. The Igbos and the Hausas handle the sales of phones and phone repairs in Mararaba. Despite the supposed competition for dominance in the electronics trade, it has not resulted in an unhealthy one as both ethnic groups understand themselves mutually. Additionally, the cost of goods and services provided by the Igbo is considerably cheap. With cheaper goods, customers troop in from different states to trade and buy Igbo products at lower prices. Intergroup relations are also fostered through marriage between the Igbo traders in Mararaba and other ethnic groups, especially between the Igbo traders and the Hausa people. With inter-group marriage, both groups have been able to promote unity and peace between various ethnic groups in the market.

Conclusion

We have shown in this article that the growth of an economically dynamic Igbo diaspora continued after the Nigerian Civil War. The Igbo traders have also demonstrated contrary to widely held opinion that the Igbo are self-centered. The activities of Igbo traders in Mararaba confirm the view that the Igbos are bridge builders. Aside from the informal Igbo enterprise, they have contributed immensely to the promotion of intergroup relations in Mararaba market in particular and the community at large. By and large, the Igbo are known for their entrepreneurial spirit and are considered one of the most successful traders in the country. Overall, the Igbo have a long and rich history of trading and entrepreneurship and continue to play a significant role in the Nigerian economy. Their entrepreneurial spirit and adaptability have helped them to succeed in a variety of



markets and business activities, and they remain a major force in the Nigerian business community.