

ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE IGBO ETHIC AND THE SPIRIT OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Chris Sam Biriowu

Department of Management, Faculty of Management Sciences, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Received: 03 Nov 2019

Accepted: 07 Nov 2019

Published: 20 Nov 2019

ABSTRACT

The entrepreneurial feat ascribed to the Igbo ethnic group of Nigeria instigated this study, which aimed at finding a possible relationship between people's ethic and their economic activity, as reflected in the works of Weber (1930). This study deployed the use of the narrative-textual case study (NTCS) method to study the development of entrepreneurship in Nigeria, including an attempt at isolating the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria so as to document what propelled them to dominate the Nigerian informal sector entrepreneurship. An analysis of the special characteristics that are associated with this group, using the model of analysis similar to the works of Weber (1930), in his essay, "the Protestant ethic and the spirit of Capitalism" was carried out. The paper supported the association between the popular myths surrounding the origin of the Igbo ethnic group of Nigeria and the spirit of entrepreneurship. This study inferred that there is an "Igbo ethic" (Igbo rationalistic orientation) which stimulated their approach to economic activity of accumulation, investment, re-investment, expansion and rational calculative choice.

KEYWORDS: *Igbo Ethic; Protestant Ethic; Spirit of Capitalism; Spirit of Entrepreneurship; Narrative - Textual Case Study Method*

INTRODUCTION

No think tank here or elsewhere has opposed the position that the most powerful nations in the world became economically great not only on the basis of mineral resources and good governance but mostly on the doggedness and enterprise of people who had the courage to take a risk in a business with increasing interest, innovativeness and creativity. The development of an economy is premised on entrepreneurship, which could be likened to an engine that facilitates the growth and development of nations. Entrepreneurship went on to become a transformational tool of the traditional industry that creates employment opportunities and generates incomes (locally and internationally) and in effect, contributed to regional activity and co-operation.

Entrepreneurship was said to have begun and developed first in Nigeria, when people in the villages and farming communities produced more crops than they needed. These farmers then had to make a transactional exchange of those surpluses with those who needed them within their immediate and neighboring communities for other tangible items that they seemed to have been lacking. At first, the exchange of goods or services for other goods and services was based on trade by barter until the era of economy monetization. Entrepreneurship further developed when exchange encouraged specialization, that is, communities concentrated on the production of goods and services in which they were best or most fitted for. This is said to have led to the development of the culture of entrepreneurship in Nigeria (Nicks, 2008; Raimi and

Towobola, 2011). Onyemenam (2013) gives a consenting account on the development of entrepreneurship in Nigeria, which he described was championed by those who were said to have had initiatives and the ability to lead, take the risks and manage the consequences. This account also describes entrepreneurs as goal-getters, risk takers, missionaries, creative and highly respectable individuals, who have the ability to effectively combine the functions of management to achieve set goals.

As the words of Vasant (2011) import, the concept of entrepreneurship is complex in its content, influenced not only by economic but also sociological, political, psychological, ethical, cultural and religious dimensions or values. It has also been the argument of Schumpeter (1951) that only certain extraordinary people have the ability to be entrepreneurs and they bring about extraordinary events. These “extraordinary” people in Nigeria are said to be the Igbo ethnic group.

This paper therefore seeks to analyze the special characteristics that are associated with this ethnic group using the model of analysis similar to the works of Weber (1930), in his essay, “the Protestant ethic and the spirit of Capitalism”.

OBJECTIVE OF THE PAPER

This study seeks to contextualize and identify the special characteristics that are associated with the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria, using the model of analysis that is similar to the works of Weber (1930), in his essay, “the Protestant ethic and the spirit of Capitalism”, and then isolate this group with the aim of documenting what propelled the spirit of entrepreneurship in them and how that has led to entrepreneurial development amongst the Igbo-speaking people of Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Entrepreneurial Development and Entrepreneurship

The word entrepreneurship is derived from the French word “*entreprendre*” meaning to “*undertake*” Olutunla (2001). This implies that an entrepreneur is someone who creates or *undertakes* a business. However, and as noted by Zimmerer and Scarborough (2006), although the creation of business is certainly an important facet of entrepreneurship, it is not the complete picture. To be enterprising, as posited by Nwafor (2007), is to keep your eyes open and your mind active. It is to be skilled enough, confident enough, creative enough and disciplined enough to seize opportunities that present themselves regardless of economic conditions. In addition, Meredith (1987); Kubr (1986) and Jaja (2009), assert that the biggest asset to sustain entrepreneurial ability is positive attitude displayed through personal determination, persistence and hard work. According to Drucker (1970) and Knight (1967), entrepreneurship is about taking a risk; it is the process of creating new values that did not previously exist; it is the practice of starting a new organization, especially new business; it involves creation of new wealth through implementation of new concepts and commitment to innovation. For innovation to become hatched, the entrepreneur must have not only talent, ingenuity and knowledge, but he must also be hardworking, focused and purposeful.

McGrath and Macmillan (2000) identified five characteristics of habitual entrepreneurs:

- They are focus-driven, who wholeheartedly and watchfully seek out new opportunities, and always on the lookout for any kind of change – regardless of how minute – to profit from and prepare for any disruptions in the way business is done.
- They are on a constant chase of opportunities, while taking care to apply economic discipline; are not only alert to spot opportunities but make sure they are readily available to act on them.

- They diagnose situations and opportunities, such that they ensure that they pursue only the very best opportunities and avoid chasing every option, are brutally disciplined about limiting the number of projects they pursue and take sensibility and reality into considerations, as they go after cases of opportunities at different stages of development.
- They are realistic and open-minded, so that their focus becomes specifically on adaptive execution, rather than baseless analysis of new ideas to their death. Entrepreneurs are mostly interested in executing opportunities as they are readily adaptive to change with the tides should better opportunities and better ways to exploit it present themselves.
- They are team builders and people friendly who engage the energies of everyone in their domain; find the potential in as many people as they can, and take cognizance of the prospective abilities and advantages of individuals, of both inside and outside the organization in the pursuit of an opportunity.

Soyibo (2006) added that entrepreneurs understand the profitability of creating and sustaining networks of relationships rather than latching on to individualities, which is obviously limiting and making the most of the collective intellectual and the other resources people have to offer while helping those people achieve their goals too.

The importance of entrepreneurial development in any given economy cannot be exhausted. As Metu and Nwokoye (2015) put it, economists have long recognized that entrepreneurial development equals economic development. This means that the creation of businesses (small or large) and the maintenance of existing ones are considered to be the fastest way to achieve economic growth.

Entrepreneurship in Nigeria is basically organized within, yet not limited to the context of micro (small and medium scale businesses) (Ewurum and Ekpunobi, 2008; Nwokoye 2013). Being a venture that predominantly attracts the youth, Bennell (2000) argues that entrepreneurship in Nigeria could thrive because the dynamism of young people is essential for the sprout and success an enterprise could record. Leveraging on their strong spirit of resilience, resourcefulness, drive, energy, ambition and courage, Anyadike (2012) proclaims that the qualities that the Nigerian youths possess are all valuable traits for entrepreneurial development. There are a number of small and middle scale businesses that have been known to have started from scratch with individuals who possess entrepreneurial qualities and according to Nwokoye *et al.* (2013), these businesses having been well-managed, have grown and expanded their arms and outlets to other locales within Nigeria and have made millionaires and billionaires out of their innovators.

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

Weber (1930) put forward his thesis of increasing rationalization, as the determination of the differences between Western capitalist society and other societies, which are forcefully put to test in his essay, “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism”. Weber’s essay, which was an exercise in the idealist concept of social change, was not only an attack on Marxist economic determinism eradication, but also the explanation of the development of Western Capitalist Society. For Weber, therefore, the spread of increasing rationalization based on Weber’s conception of instrumentally rational action constituted the most important single factor that led to the emergence of Western Capitalist Society.

In its application to the growth of the spirit of Capitalism, nearly everything about Weber’s works sought to empirically account for the differences and imbalances in the development of different parts of Germany in terms of value

systems, which possess the element. For Weber then, the spirit of Capitalism was closely related to the ascetic and frugal, ‘this worldly as against other worldly’, industrious, individualistic in terms of salvation, calculative and rational value system of the protestant. The spirit of Capitalism and the Protestant ethic eventually stimulated the approach to economic activity of accumulation, investment, reinvestment, expansion and rational calculative choice.

The main accomplishment of Weber’s work is that it shows the moral instrumentality of the spirit of capitalism in an unintended offshoot (unintended consequence) of the religious ethic of Calvinism and more generally of the conception of the worldly calling, whereby Protestantism broke with the monadic ideas of Catholicism (non-innovative, almost communal in orientation). Ethic as used by Weber refers to the role of an idea or value system, which influenced an entrepreneurial spirit in people with value commonality and orientation. In other words, the spirit of entrepreneurship is premised on the fact that the people in question have something in common on which they can form a bond and grow a relationship on. This could be a value as simple as language or religion.

Similar to the Weberian value of the Protestants, is the ethic of the Igbos of Nigeria, whose idea or value system, is claimed to have influenced an entrepreneurial spirit in their people with value commonality and orientation.

The Igbos of Nigeria and Entrepreneurship

The Igbo people of Nigeria, popularly known as the people of the south-eastern part of Nigeria (sometimes referred to as “ibo”) is one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. As core natives of five major states in Nigeria, the Igbos make up 25% of Nigeria’s population (Oriji, 1994). The Igbos are known for their knack for migration and expansion. This explains why the Igbos can be found in nearly every country in the world (Slattery 2010). Entrepreneurship for the Igbos simply denotes establishing, directing and controlling other factors of production and manufacturing processes in Igbo learning culture. The Igbos are especially known for their ability to seize the slightest opportunity and make economic profit out of a situation. The culture of a typical Igbo man involves the attitude of having an “eye” for business. The Igbo entrepreneur regularly finds innovation, creativity and business opportunities in spite of and through scarce resources. “The Igbo entrepreneurs are visionary, enthusiastic and result-driven. These are not far from the rationale behind their undertakings in high business risk” (Nafiu, 2014). The rate at which the Igbos are known for their entrepreneurial skills and success has been acknowledged beyond the Nigerian borders. In countries such as Ghana, Liberia, Cameroon, Mali, The Gambia, China, to list a few, the Igbos have been recognized as industrious and highly entrepreneurial. “The economic activities of Igbos all over the country accounted for the excellent interpretation of their skills. In Nigeria, Igbos took over South West economy from the British not from other tribes and never by force or with arms but by economic skills and strategies built through progressive business mind” (Nafiu, 2014).

The spirit of entrepreneurship and the Igbos go hand in hand. Entrepreneurship is a way of life for the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria. This is supported in the works of Clelland and Winter (1969) and Sue and Dan (2000) that state that entrepreneurship is innate and instinctive, can be affected by family background, genealogy and the local environment in which an individual is raised. The pattern of trade or apprenticeship amongst the Igbos is unstructured, informal and non-contractual. Ironically, the Igbo trade apprenticeship program is straightforward and solidly binding, whereby a person undergoes the process of understudying an entrepreneur (“serving a master”) in order to acquire the skills and nitty-gritties of a particular type of business for an agreed period of time. This agreement is usually done between the entrepreneur and the parents/guardians of the potential apprentice with some clearly stated (sometimes non-stated) verbal terms and

conditions and which when broken by the apprentice could terminate the apprenticeship program. Upon successful completion of the apprenticeship program, the “master” rewards the apprentice by setting up a business outfit for the apprentice and provides the wherewithal needed for the launch of a new business. As a way of giving back to the community, the new master upon set up, returns to his local community and recruits an apprentice for himself with the same terms and conditions that he had been subjected to. This automation continues and revolves around all Igbo entrepreneurs regardless of the amount of years in business or the number of apprentices an entrepreneur has raised. The Igbos pride themselves in the number of youths that an individual has been able to successfully bring up as an entrepreneur. “The Igbo trade apprenticeship system is a vibrant part of the Igbo business attribute that has long been shaping their mental and intelligent quotient about business success” (Nafiu, 2014: 159).

The Igbo Ethic and the Spirit of Entrepreneurship

Like Weber (1930), we have found amongst the Igbos of Nigeria, an increasing rationalization orientation as the determinant of the differences between them and the other ethnic groups in Nigeria. The spread of this increasing rationalization, which could be connected to Weber’s conception of instrumentally rational action constituted the most single factor that led to the emergence of the Igbo ethnic group as the center of excellence in the informal business sector of Nigeria. This has led to the emergence of Nnewi Market and Ariaria (Aba) as the largest single informal industrial sector of Nigeria. This goes with the saying that “even though the Igbo man is scared of travelling by sea, if he hears the sound of coin in the river, he will dare the risk”. The marketplaces that the Igbos have created for themselves are not limited to their homelands. In nearly all cities in Nigeria and across the globe, the Igbos have set down roots of trade. It has become the pride of the Igbos to boast of having businesses all over the world and expand on their basic and specialized source of income.

A Narrative – Textual Case Study of the Connection between Weber’s Work and Texts on the Igbo Ethic and Entrepreneurial Spirit

The methodology applied in this study is the narrative-textual case study (NTCS) method, which is preferred because of its utilizability semiotically, using secondary data to assert an association between people’s economic ethic (the Igbos of Nigeria) and entrepreneurial development. This position aligns with the works of Weber (1930), which asserted a causal connection between the economic ethic of the protestant population of Germany and the development of capitalism. NTCS is a social science research method that employs intensively the information, data and academic materials made available and easily accessible by information and communication technology facilities, such as intranet, world wide web, on-line data bases, e-libraries, etc. (Abouzeedan and Leijon, 2007).

The Igbo apprenticeship system popularly known amongst the Igbos as Imu-Ahia, which translates to ‘learning a trade’, is perhaps one of the biggest contributors to the Nigerian entrepreneurial system. This method of incubation/training and learning has given the Igbo traders and apprentices an edge over all business-owner/apprenticeship systems in Nigeria. The Igbo apprenticeship system is a functional program that happened and thrived in Nigeria at a time when the Igbos felt hopeless and desolate. Having just fought the Nigerian civil war and dealing with the consequences of losing, the Igbos had no real productive source of livelihood. Petty trading on and with the remains of the spoils of war was the only available option. Forrest (1994) points out that “the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970 precipitated a sudden shift toward the repatriation of capital to Igbo areas for investment at home”. With so many hungry mouths to feed, little resources, home

bound and a ruined geographical area, few Igbos with little means – yet more than most – started up small businesses in the locales and “allowed” the youths (mostly young boys and men) who had basic family responsibilities to attend to, to hang around their places of business and run errands for them. These youths did whatever their “masters” wanted of them with no payment plan, no formal employment contract and no financial expectations from the traders. As the major source of income, coupled with the fact that the targeted clientele population were beyond the geographical area of the Igbo lands, these traders gradually began to expand and exceed the boundaries of the their hometowns with a clear vision, hardwork, resilience, the ability to seize an opportunity and take risks, but more importantly, the availability, loyalty, resourcefulness and capability of the apprentices, gave rise to the system that greatly impacted and transformed the lives of the Igbos after the Nigerian Civil War. This system of entrepreneurial development that was forged in the 1970s as a means of survival has since metamorphosed into a grand recognized scheme that has fostered growth and economic advancement in the Eastern parts of Nigeria and beyond. Although these apprentices are not paid, their masters provide them with accommodation, feeding, clothing, transportation costs and some basic amenities. Years of service range between 10 and 15 years, at which point the apprentices have become full-grown men with vast knowledge of how to run a business. The apprenticeship agreement is informal, but certain issues such as morality, theft, delinquency, gross disrespect, etc., could result in immediate termination of the program, and the masters reserve the right to dissolve the apprenticeship. The Igbo apprenticeship system is about taking chances on the poor and helpless Igbo rural dwellers with the intention of giving them a future. Upon ingratiating, the master “frees” the apprentices by establishing similar businesses for them. In turn, the apprentices return to their hometowns and recruit teenage boys who would serve under them as apprentices under the same conditions that they had served. This cycle of entrepreneurial development system is the reason the Igbos are the most successful entrepreneurs in Nigeria (Nafiu, 2014). This Igbo rationalistic orientation has stimulated their approach to economic activity of accumulation, investment, reinvestment, expansion and rational calculative choice. The indicators of the Igbo ethic are found in the following that characterizes their way of economic enterprise in fig. 1:

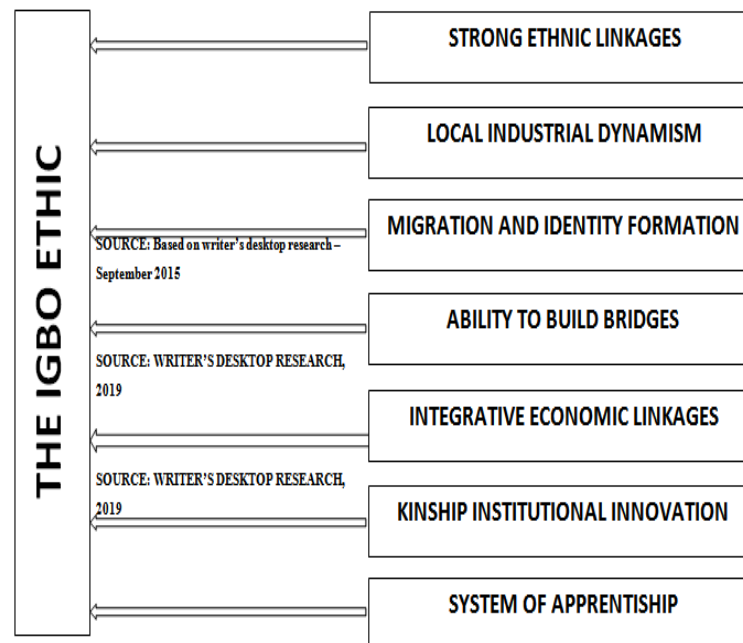


Figure 1: The Igbo Ethic and the Spirit of Entrepreneurship.

A textual analysis of the indicators of the Igbo ethic are carried out in the following that characterizes their way of economic enterprise and indeed, as embedded in their life and approach to economic activity of accumulation, investment, reinvestment, expansion and rational calculative choice.

Strong Ethnic Connections and Co-Operative Relations with other Nigerian Ethnic Groups

The Igbo-speaking traders, artisans and business people have accomplished amiable and enviable success in the informal economy, which spreads across Nigeria and beyond. Strong indigenous commercial institutions and a relentless competitive ethos have spurred high levels of outmigration and the development of wide-ranging informal trading networks, not to mention one of the most dynamic informal manufacturing sectors in Africa (Northrup, 1978; Brautigan, 1997). Even though the entrepreneurial feat may have begun as a means of survival and economic expansion in the post-war community, ethnic group did not leave it at that. The Igbos have far advanced and are still advancing within the informal economy without losing sight of the need to involve the development of strong inter-ethnic connections and cooperative relations with other Nigerian ethnic groups. This means that the entrepreneurial development has not been achieved in isolation, without somehow recognizing incorporating, where necessary, the outside community within which the Igbos reside. It is worthy of note, however, that the orientation for inter-ethnic connection internalized by the average Igbo entrepreneur, which is handed down from generation to generation, is one of the key entrepreneurial ethic or idea system that distinguishes the Igbos from others in the Nigerian informal industrial sector.

The above orientation goes to support the position of Weber (1930) that capitalism is a vast system that forces the individual to play by its rules, in a kind of economic survival of the fittest. However, Weber argues that in order for a manner of life so conducive to capitalism to become dominant, it had to originate somewhere, as a way of life common to a large number of people.

Local Industrial Dynamism

Studies by Forrest (1994) and Brautigan (1997), as well as Meagher (2006), demonstrate that local industrial dynamism in south-eastern Nigeria did not represent a withdrawal into parochial forms of economic organization, but involved the development of complex trading and productive connections with other Nigerian ethnic groups as well as with traders from other parts of Africa and from as far away as East Asia, all without the assistance of the State. The legendary success of Igbo trading and manufacturing networks since the Civil War has been a product of cooperative relations across ethnic cleavages rather than of ethnic exclusivity. As one Igbo informant observed, 'historically, we migrated and saw that it was good to have foreigners' (Forrest 1994:169). While communal solidarity has played a central role in Igbo economic advancement, symbiotic forms of institutionalized collaboration with other ethnic groups have been just as critical for widening markets and gaining access to new sources of labor, technology and skills.

As Weber (1930) rightly observed, the biggest opponent that the capitalist ethic has had in gaining dominance has been traditionalism. Weber says that he will try to make a provisional definition of "traditionalism" by looking at a few cases. First, there is the laborer. One way in which the modern employer encourages work is through piece-rates, for example, paying an agricultural worker by the amount harvested. In order to increase productivity, the employer raises the rate of pay. However, a frequent problem is that rather than work harder, the workers actually work less when pay increases. They do this because they can reduce their workload and still make the same amount of money. The question is not 'how much can I earn in a day if I do as much work as possible?' Rather, 'how much must I work in order to earn the

wage which I earned before, and which takes care of my traditional needs?' This reflects traditionalism and shows that 'by nature' man simply wants to live as he is used to living and earn as much as is necessary to do this. This is the leading trait of pre-capitalistic labor and we still encounter this among more developing nations. Weber (1930) then addresses the opposite policy, of reducing wages to increase productivity. He says that the effectiveness of this has its limits, as wages can become insufficient for life. To be effective for capitalism, labor must be performed as an end in itself.

Weber (1930) then considers the entrepreneur in terms of the meaning of traditionalism. He reckons that capitalistic enterprises can still be linked to traditionalistic character. The spirit of modern capitalism of hardly an amateur or standalone affair implies an attitude of rational and systematic pursuit of profit. Such an attitude finds its most suitable expression through capitalism and this has most effectively motivated capitalistic activities. However, the spirit of capitalism and capitalistic activities can occur separately. For example, consider the "putting-out system." This represented a rational capitalistic organization, but it was still traditional in spirit. It reflected a traditional way of life, a traditional relationship with labor and traditional interactions with customers. At some point, this traditionalism was shattered, but not by changes in organization, rather some young men went into the country, carefully chose weavers whom he closely supervised and made them into laborers. He also changed his relationship with his customers by making it more personal and eliminating the middleman, and he introduced the idea of low prices and large turnover. Those who could not compete went out of business.

For the Igbo entrepreneur, therefore, a leisurely attitude towards life was replaced by frugality. Most importantly, it was usually not new money that brought about this change; it was a new spirit.

Igbo Migration and Ethnic Identity Formation

'The long history of Igbo migration and ethnic identity formation before 1966 always included productive interaction with other groups, and continued after 1970 in the everyday life of the re-established Igbo diaspora'. While Igbo's economic success is at the popular level as well as their monopolization of profitable activities such as the trade in auto parts has been a source of resentment and sometimes of conflict, particularly in northern Nigeria, Anthony (2009) points out that such ethnic divisions were mitigated by widespread integrative strategies of Igbos living in northern Nigeria.

To come up with a formulation, as it relates to the formulation of peoples' entrepreneurial identity formation like the Jews, Weber presents a long excerpt from the writings of Benjamin Franklin. He states that Franklin's attitudes illustrate capitalism's ethos. According to Weber (1930), Franklin writes that time is money, that credit is money and that money can beget money. He encourages people to pay all of their debts on time because it encourages the confidence of others. He also encourages people to present themselves as industrious and trustworthy at all times. Weber states that this "philosophy of avarice" sees increasing capital as an end in itself. It is an ethic and the individual is seen as having a duty to prosper. This is the spirit of modern capitalism. While capitalism existed in places like China and India and in the middle Ages, it did not have this spirit. This illustration with Franklin supports the ethos of the Igbos of Nigeria. The identity of the Igbos, therefore, has the spirit of entrepreneurship.

Ability to Build Bridges

As Tom Forrest argues, this ability to 'build bridges' with other ethnic communities were not peculiar to the Igbos of the diaspora. It also played a vital role in the rapid development of local industrialization within the Igbo states following the Civil War.

This idea of one's duty in a calling is the basis of the capitalist ethic. It is an obligation that the individual should and does feel toward his professional activity. The entrepreneur should possess the ability to build bridges as a survival strategy. Now, this does not mean that this idea has only appeared under capitalistic conditions or that this ethic must continue in order for capitalism to continue. Capitalism is a vast system that forces the individual to play by its rules, in a kind of economic survival of the fittest. However, Weber (1930) argues that in order for a manner of life so conducive to capitalism to become dominant, it had to originate somewhere, as a way of life, common to a large number of people. For the Igbos of Nigeria, their entrepreneurial spirit is akin to that kind of economic survival of the fittest.

Integrative Economic Connections

Integrative economic linkages have brought about Igbo economic fluidity both in the diaspora and at home, while concurrently promoting mutually beneficial relations with other ethnic groups. Examples will be drawn from economic relations between Igbo and Hausa groups in rural as well as urban northern Nigeria, and also from inter-ethnic relations underpinning the much-celebrated development of informal manufacturing in the Igbo home states of South East geo-political zone of Nigeria. While these are not tales of unremitting optimism, they highlight some of the ways in which popular and often ethnic forms of organizations provide social resources for national integration amid the opposing forces unleashed by ethnic competition over oil rents.

Capacity for Institutional Innovation Across Kingship and Community Lines

What is most striking about the Igbos is their remarkable capacity for institutional innovation across kinship and community lines? The answer still lays in Weber (1930) in his postulation that religious, associative and inter-community relations as well as the ties of kinship and community coalesced into economic networks are the contributory factors to the widening of social identities. The fact that neither the Igbos nor the powerful Aro sub-group constituted primordial ethnic identities testifies to this reality. The Aro emerged from a fusion of three ethnic groups, involving the Akpa, the Igbo and the Ibibio melded into a single identity group through institutionalized political and economic organization (Dike and Ekejiuba, 1990).

System of Apprenticeship

Silverstein (1983) shows in her study of Nnewi entrepreneurs that systems of apprenticeship also followed a diasporic pattern in which masters settled and relocated apprentices to other parts of Nigeria, so as to widen their networks and avoid problems of oversupply in a given area. These developments took advantage of opportunities provided by new colonial arrangements but depended essentially on indigenous organizational efforts. While Igbo informal enterprise was tolerated by the colonial government, it was given little encouragement and no real support. After Nigerian Independence in 1960, the Igbo traders and producers became even more marginalized and made to feel cheated in the face of State efforts to promote the development of the formal economy. The Kilby Report on small-scale industry in Eastern Nigeria based on fieldwork conducted in 1961, identified an active small-scale manufacturing sector that had essentially been left to 'shift for itself' (Kilby 1963). The Nigerian Civil War, from 1967 to 1970 intensified the role of self-reliance in the development of Igbo enterprise. Brautigam (1997) and Forrest (1994) suggest that the Civil War encouraged a trend towards increased local industrialization in the context of the three-year siege of the Igbo State of 'Biafra', and the subsequent marginalization of the Igbo after their defeat. Even after the war, the local self-help institutions and a capacity for economic and social accommodation with other ethnic groups played a central role in the recovery of Igbo enterprise, at

home and in the diaspora. Despite the traumatic experience of violent expulsion and defeat in a long civil war, high levels of Igbo out-migration resumed soon after the end of hostilities, owing to the ongoing pressures of land scarcity, poverty, limited employment opportunities at home and intense competition for economic advancement (Anthony 2002). While the government policy of ‘no victor, no vanquished’ facilitated relations of ethnic accommodation for returning Igbo migrants, the lack of State assistance in the process of reconstruction combined with disadvantageous policies governing the economic reintegration of Biafra crippled Igbo participation within the formal economy, intensifying their focus on informal systems of economic organization.

CONCLUSIONS

The outcome of our NTCS indicates that the beginning of the Igbo business learning culture is the Igbo Trade Apprenticeship System (ITAS). The ITAS is a vibrant part of the Igbo business attributes that has for long been shaping their mental and intelligent quotient about business success. One major and unique trait of the Igbo entrepreneur is the courage, perseverance and determination with which they carry on in spite of the bad experiences and losses during the Nigerian Civil War from 1967 to 1970. This, Forrest (1995) seems to suggest, is at the heart of the apprentice system on which the entrepreneurial spirit is anchored and which has brought an episode of denial, hardship and forced discipline gathered through unfortunate circumstances, the trading experience which is in itself risk-prone. With little or no government assistance, the Igbo have moved from trade to industry since the end of the Civil War.

There is a popular myth regarding the origin of the Igbo ethnic group of Nigeria. This myth is supported by a theory relating to the popular claim of Igbo-Jewish origins (Okonkwo, 2007). It posits that the Igbos might have originated from the Jewish nation, given the remarkable similarities between certain elements of Jewish culture and those of the Igbos. McClelland (1961) narrated that the Jewish child is shown from the beginning that he has to maintain and remain on top in order to counteract the attitude of the society around him. McClelland concludes that because of this method of rearing, which the Jews operate, they are always on top and strive for excellence anywhere they live. Jaja (2009) equally indicated that certain groups are believed to possess beliefs, values and traditions that predispose them to succeed in business, regardless of where they find themselves. Admittedly, with the chronology of events that the Igbos have been forced to endure, they fit the description.

This paper therefore concludes that the Igbo rationalistic orientation (an ethic professed in the works of Weber (1930)) has stimulated their approach to economic activity of accumulation, investment, re-investment expansion and rational calculative choice. These special attributes have led to their nickname “the Japanese of Africa”.

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