BOOK REVIEW

Uwakwe Esse. *Road Transport in Nigeria: The Development of Private Enterprise among the Igbo, 1920-1999*. Glassboro: Goldline and Jacobs Publishing, 2017. Pp. 231.

The centrality of Igbo entrepreneurs in the development of indige- nous private enterprise in Nigeria without doubt is a subject that has gained scholarly interest and generated debates in the last two decades. Although some scholars have seen the proponents of "Igbo factor" in development of Nigerian economy as "self-serving", "bi- ased" and "ethnocentric", undoubtedly, evidence shows that entre- preneurs from this ethnic nationality contributed and are still contrib- uting significantly to the development of distributive trade and in oth- er sectors of the Nigeria's economy. It was their involvement in and ingenuity in road transportation industry that transformed it into a thriving commercial venture in late colonial and post-colonial Nigeria. Most crucial was the fascinating roles Igbo entrepreneurs played in the transition from expatriate capital controlled colonial economy to in- digenous private enterprise economy of contemporary Nigeria. This is what Uwakwe Esse explores in this thrilling book, which is well cap- tured on the title *Road Transport in Nigeria: Development of Private Enter- prise among the Igbo, 1920-1999*. He uses the example of road transport industry to illustrate the contributions of Igbo entrepreneurs to the transformation of the Nigerian economy. It is the argument of the book that the emergence of road transport as a private enterprise among the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria demonstrates the much-contested entrepreneurial capabilities of the ethnic nations.

The book began by examining the historical development of transportation in Nigeria, from head portage, waterways, railways to roads, and how they stimulated the growth of trade and services across the country. Esse sees the shortcomings of the older modes of transportation and the subsequent construction of railways and roads that crisscrossed Nigeria in the early colonial period as a catalyst to road motor transport industry. While the emergence of vehicular transportation was traced to the early colonial period, the author maintains that it was purely an

expatriate-controlled and dominated industry. However, indigenous transporters began to emerge on the scene by 1920s, but it was between 1928 and 1939 that Igbo presence was felt in the industry. Consequently, road transport industry sud- denly became a big commercial venture with the emergence of the in- digenous Igbo transporters.

In chapter three, Esse undertakes a huge task of investigating post Second World War economic challenges and how they influenced co- lonial administration's decision to relinquish public owned and con- trolled transport industry to private enterprises. According to the au- thor, it was this near-absence of government's direct control and inter- ference in this sector that explains the emergence of indigenous enterprise, of which Igbo entrepreneurs were prominent and demon- strated some sense of dominance. On the other hand, the inability of the foreign owned transport companies and the colonial government to meet the transport needs of Nigeria's growing population created a very strong demand for an efficient and sufficient transport service. Igbo transporters leveraged on this and grasped the opportunity to launch themselves on this emergent "big business". Stressing further the place of war to the development of motor transportation in Nige- ria, the author posits that the Nigeria-Biafra war was a turning point in the transformation of the industry.

The wartime and post war political and economic challenges cre- ated a high degree of displacements in Igboland and the accompany- ing emigration out of Igbo nation. The frustrations of abandoned property saga and the monetary policy created a great mobility need among the Igbo coupled to the fact that the hitherto transport outfits owned by the Igbo suffered setbacks because of the war. This gave rise to the emergence of luxury bus service first in southeast to convey people to various cities in Igbo homeland, but later it spread to other cities across Nigeria. It was however, the rise of inter-city luxury bus service that marked the hallmark of Igbo prominence in road transport industry in Nigeria. This was discussed and problematized in chapter four of the book. It asserts that the pioneer Igbo transporters mostly came from Nnewi-Onitsha axis notable among whom are Peter Aroh, J. C. Ulasi, and Louis Philip Odumeguw Ojukwu. Later names include Augustine Ilodibe of the famous

Ekenedilichukwu and sons Motors, P. Ezenwata, C. N. Okoli, to mention but a few. From their bases in urban centers in Igboland such as Aba, Port Harcourt, Onitsha, Enugu, Owerri and Umuahia they transverse other cities like Lagos, Kano, Sokoto and Kaduna.

The book's rich sources show the depth of the author's research. The archival materials used in this book are overwhelming and fascinating. Interestingly, Esse was an archivist of long standing at Nation- al Archives Enugu, thus had access to a retinue of colonial reports on transport matters across Nigeria. Without doubt, his position gave his opportunity to further access the Public Records Office depository in London from where other important documents were gotten for this study. The depth of his analysis of these documents also lays credence to the postulations of the book. To further strengthen the work, the author heavily drew oral information gotten from personal interviews conducted with various actors in the industry - transporters, drivers and road users which synergized the archival materials.

Esse appreciates and interrogates well established concepts in transport industry such as financing, managements and road trans- ports workers in the context of Igbo enterprise pointing out crucial matters relating to the establishment of private parks, maintenance workshops and job creation. As a capital-intensive venture, the author paid considerable attention in interrogating the question of sources of fund in operating such enterprise. Availability of capital derived from personal savings, family supports, and community cooperatives were adduced in explaining the rise and success of Igbo entrepreneurs in this industry. Other factor identified includes the absence of a legal entry barrier which encouraged anybody with requisite capital to in- vest in the industry.

By stressing the importance of modern transportation as a critical prerequisite for economic development and growth, the work con- tributes to the understanding of the nexus of technological innovations and intermingling of peoples of different culture, traditions and ideas especially in African societies where regional ethnicity thrives. The book provides a new thinking of the relationship between trans- culture/regional migration, and cross city transportation in Nigeria by questioning the sharp ethnic and

social boundaries that characterize the Nigerian ethnic space.

The study adds to the narrative of the recent resurgence of the "Igbo factor" in Nigeria's socio-economic space. Considerable attention has been given to the significant role of Igbo people in economic de- velopment of Nigeria in such enterprises as trade, real estate invest- ments and manufacturing industries. Hence, a study of Igbo enterprise in transport sector development in Nigeria is not only a welcomed de- velopment but a long-waited accomplishment. This will also fill the gap in transportation development scholarship in Igboland and Nige- ria in general.

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