PERCEPTIONS OF MARRIAGE, FAMILY AND WORK IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF LAGOS MARKET WOMEN

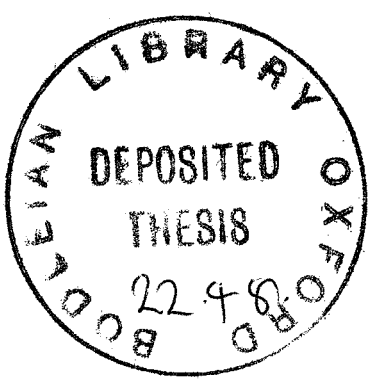
By

Wambui M. Karanja - Diejomaoh

Lady Margaret Hall,
Oxford

Michaelmas 1980

Thesis submitted to the University of Oxford for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The fieldwork upon which this thesis is based was generously supported by the University of Lagos, the Ford Foundation and the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. In addition, the University of Lagos supported me throughout my stay in Oxford, while the Ford Foundation also gave me financial help during the writing stage. To these organisations I make grateful acknowledgements.

In the field, Dr. Veronica Jantjie, formerly of the Department of Medicine, University of Lagos, and now of the Federal Ministry of Health, Lagos, acted as a doctor to some of the Koso market women traders and their families without financial reward, while Dr. Tola Pearce of the University of Ife, Nigeria, helped to transcribe some of the field material, also without a fee.

Most of the field material and the personal histories were conscientiously and meticulously transcribed and translated by Miss Yemisi Awowale, formerly of the Department of Geography, University of Lagos, and Miss Ṣade Williams, also formerly of the University of Lagos, Department of Philosophy.

At one point or another during my stay in Oxford I received encouragement and moral support from a number of people. Among these I would like to say a special thank you to the following: Professor J.Y.D. Peel, Mrs. J. Ikomi-Kumm, Dr. B. Harrell-Bond, Dr. Godfrey Lienhardt, Dr. Peter Lienhardt, Mrs. Elizabeth Bullock and Sr. M. Joseph Thérèse Agbasiere.

In the academic sphere, I wish especially to express my gratitude to the following: Mrs. E.M. Chilver, the former principal of my college, Lady Margaret Hall, who kindly read most of the draft chapters with an eye on the style, Mrs. Helen Callaway and Mr. Martin Uhomoibhi, who at very short notice kindly read the final chapters and made many helpful suggestions, while Mrs. S. Ardener offered helpful suggestions on the format.

However, my greatest academic obligation is to my supervisor, Mr. E.W. Ardener, who at all times kindly and freely gave of his time.

This thesis is dedicated to the following: the women of Koso, without whom it would not have been written but who must, for obvious reasons, remain anonymous; to my parents for sending me to school when it was not fashionable; and to Vremudia and Odafe, for insisting that I should prove that my parents had been right.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ii

List of Tables, Map and Figure viii

List of Illustrations ix

PART ONE:

Chapter One: Introduction 1

Rationale for the Study 1

Methodology and Fieldwork 6

Plan of the Study 14

Chapter Two: The City of Lagos: An Historical Overview 19

The Early History of Lagos 19

Trade and Politics in Lagos 23

Economic Expansion and Growth in Lagos 32

Lagos City Today 36

Chapter Three: Markets of Lagos and Market Women: The Wider Setting 41

Definitional and Conceptual Problems 42

Markets in theory: the 'formal' definition 42

Markets in practice: the market women's 'informal' definition 47

Lagos Markets 51

Origins of Lagos Markets 51

Periodic Markets 54

Lagos Periodic Markets 55

Lagos Daily Markets 59

Street Trading 62

Lagos City Local Government Administration 63

Traditional Leadership Structure at Lagos Markets 68

Market Women: An Occupational Group? 74

Who Are Lagos Market Women? 78

Women's Dominance in Market Places 78

Market Women and Modern Politics 82

Will the Lagos Markets Survive? 85

Chapter Four: Koso Market: The Immediate Setting 88

History of Koso 88

The Physical Layout of Koso Market 91

Public Facilities 93

Commencement of Trading Facilities at Koso Market 96

Effects of Christian and Muslim Festivals on Trade Activities at Koso 99

Allocation of Stalls 100

Range of Commodities Sold at Koso Market 102

Major Sources of Supply of Commodities 112

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of some of the Women Traders at Koso Market 120

Leadership Hierarchy at Koso Market 123

Social Dimensions of Market Places 129

Relations between Women Traders and their Customers 130

PART TWO:

Chapter Five: The Koso Market Women's Perception of Marriage and Family 134

The Women's Definition of Marriage 135

The Function of Owo Ori ('bridewealth' or 'bride-price') 137

On Becoming Married and the Women's Attitudes towards the Changing Definitions of Marriage 141

The Importance of Virginity (iwa wundia) before Marriage 143

The Relationship between Husbands (oko) and Wives (aya) 148

Rights and Obligations between Husband and Wife 151

The Role of Sex in Marriage 152

Koso Market Women's Perception of Barrenness and Male Infertility 153

Relationship between Sexual Intercourse, Pregnancy, Menstruation, Semen and the Menopause 157

Women's Views on Iwa pa-n-saga, Iwa agbere or Ise (Adultery) 160

Ilobirin pupo or Ikobirinjo (Polygyny): A Necessary Evil? 163

The Relationship between a Wife and her Husband's Relatives 167

The Relationship between a Married Woman and her own Relatives 169

Role of Children in Marriage 171

Women's Perceptions of Omo ale (Bastards) 173

Attitudes towards Divorce 175

Chapter Six: Koso Market Women at Work 178

Women's Views on Involvement in Work Outside the Home 178

What Attracts Women to Market Trading? 182

Supportive Structures for Women in Market Trading 182

Trade Activities and Family Responsibilities 186

The Role of Children in Market Trade 187

Are Koso Market Women Petty Traders or Wealthy Traders? 195

How Women Raise Capital to Finance their Trading Activities 202

Aid from Relatives 203

Credit Given by Suppliers 210

The Role of Modern Banks 211

The Most Effective Method of Expanding Trade: the Centrality of Esusu 213

Mama Chingwa describes a type of mutual aid association 218

How Women Spend their Money 222

Women's Views of Textile Traders and Long-distance Traders 224

PART THREE:

Chapter Seven: We Struggle to Survive: An Autobiographical Account of One Market Woman in Lagos 227

My mother, my brother and my trade 227

The death of my children 234

Market women traders and officials are not friends 240

Market women's struggle against the government: the case of Mama Pelewura 244

The market women in Lagos ask me to be their leader 248

Lagos Market Women's Associations: what do they mean to us? 252

Lagos has changed 255

What it means to be married 258

Chapter Eight: Iya Kareem: The Times of My Life 265

My childless marriages 265

The marriage that gave me a son 267

My second childless marriage 271

The man who fathered my first daughter 273

What I know about my family 276

The battle to save my eldest daughter 279

Market women traders in Abeokuta refuse to pay tax 287

Lagos has changed 291

What I think of witchcraft 295

Chapter Nine: Mama Nkechi: From the Village to the Market 298

The Stories told to me when I was young 301

My encounter with a European nurse 303

How I helped Mrs. Ado to deliver her child 304

Doctor and Madam Omotayo give me a job 306

Doctor and Madam Omotayo take me to England 307

Doctor Omotayo refuses to allow me to acquire any training in England 310

The return to my country and my marriage to Papa Imo 313

Why I decided to become a trader and the struggle to get a market near our home 314

Training my children and building a house 320

Childbirth in my country 322

How people are buried in my area 325

Aba women did not like being taxed like men 330

Mai mama send mi to skul 333

Chapter Ten: Summaries and Conclusions 335

Data on African women in urban communities 336

Koso market women's models or views of their lives 339

What have we learned? 346

Appendix 354

Bibliography 366

LIST OF TABLES, MAP AND FIGURE

TABLES:

1. Markets Recognized by Market Women's Associations in the 1960s and Gazetted or Legally Established Markets in the 1960s 45

2. List of all Markets in the Metropolis of Lagos (Government Approved) at the time of Field-work 46

3. Major Facilities in the Markets 67

4. Distribution of Average Arrival and Departure Times at Koso Market 97

5. Average Daily Attendance at Koso Market by the Traders 98

6. Major Commodities Sold at Koso Market 102-3

7. A Select List of Food Commodities at Koso Market and their Approximate Prices 106-7

8. Summary of Major Commodities Sold and the Number of Stalls Selling Them 111-2

9. Markets Most Frequently used by Koso Women Traders 119

10. Socio-Demographic Data on 85 Koso Market Women 122

11. Commodities Sold by 15 Women Traders at Koso Market 200

12. Sources of Capital for Trade 204

13. Sources of Original Capital for Trade 206

MAP:

1. The City of Lagos showing Ward Boundaries 18

FIGURE:

1. The Leadership Hierarchy in Modern Market Administration in Lagos City 66

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Plate 1: Market impression in Lagos 58

Plate 2: Plan of a Market in Lagos 61

Plate 3: Layout of a Market in Lagos 92

Plate 4: A Market in Lagos 94

PHOTOGRAPHS:

1. Traders take their turn to pay their stall dues 64

2. Head of United Market Women's Association 69

3. The Alaga of Tejuoso Market 71

4. A male 'stranger' in Koso market 76

5. A section selling rice, gari and beans 101

6. Male children assisting their fathers 103

7. Women shown selling eseron (cow skin), saki (tripe) and pomo (cow foot) 104

8. Women selling fish 108

9. A section of the market where plantains, yams, and snails are sold 110

10. A broader view of the market 113

11. Women traders arrange tomatoes as they talk to each other 114

12. Some temporary stalls 116

13. A Koso migrant trader 121

14. Alaga of Koso market 124

15. A good example of children's participation in the market 185

16 A vegetable section at the market 187

17. Again, the evidence of children is apparent 189

18. Still further evidence of children in market trade 192

19. The main meat section at Koso market 194

20. Two meat sellers and an apprentice 208

21. One of the Koso market women leaders 219

ABSTRACT

Perceptions of Marriage, Family and Work:
A Study of Lagos Market Women

This study investigates Nigerian women's views and perceptions of marriage, family and work as represented by Lagos market women traders. The analysis centres primarily on a small market which I have called Koso, even though data collected from other market women traders in Lagos are also incorporated into the analysis.

Women's views are compared with that of men in order to discern the extent to which these differ or are in congruence with those of men, on such issues as: changing definitions of marriage, function of bride-wealth (termed by the Yoruba owó ōrí), relationships between co-wives, between a wife and her husband's mother and sisters, between a married woman and her uterine kinsmen, the rights and obligations between husbands and wives, role of sex in marriage, attitudes towards divorce, and the like.

The study concludes that Koso women's models of their lives are heavily influenced by the dominant models of male Yoruba (Nigerian) society. However, certain differences emerge. For instance, the study indicates, among other things, that women's perceptions of the institution of polygyny are at variance with the male dominant models. Thus, while women agree with men that this institution has certain values that are good, this belief is based on conceptions of polygyny that differ markedly from their male counterparts. In the women's view, polygyny is seen as defending their interests

in that it reduces the woman's obligations towards her husband and his kinsmen, as well as lessening the senior wives' burdens, thereby allowing them more time in which to concentrate on their trading ventures as well as their children.

These are in turn weighed against the disadvantages of this institution, in particular the constant tensions it generates consequent to the inherent competion between the co-wives. The disadvantages are said to outweigh the advantages accruing from polygyny. This contrasts with male dominant views that polygyny is good because, among other things, it provides a man with many wives and children who help to enhance his status in the community.

This study also reports on how women view their trading activities and how this affects their lives. For example, how does market-work — which takes women away from home all day — affect their relationship with their husbands? What is the women's view of the contributions they make towards the maintenance of their domestic families? Is trading compatible with family responsibilities? How do they compare their own work with other occupations such as farming, working for the government, domestic service, working in the factories, shopkeeping, and so on?

Since the women's preoccupation with the financial aspect of trading was particularly evident, special attention is given to this problem in chapters four and six. In particular, the centrality of esusu or Rotating Credit Associations are brought to the fore. These include the specific ways in which the credit associations operate in

Koso market and other markets in Lagos. The major differences between, for example, daily and monthly esusu contributions as well as their pros and cons are investigated. The women are shown to be afraid of being duped by unscrupulous collectors of daily contributions.

Koso market women traders also discuss the changes that are brought about by industrialisation-cum-modernisation and how these affect their market work. Specifically, they discuss the reduction in the help their children can now give them since the introduction of universal primary education.

This thesis also presents detailed case histories of three market women traders. Two of these women are from Koso market, while the other is one of the most prominent market women leaders in Lagos City today. Her case history appears in chapter seven. Besides discussing her family life, her marital relations with her husband and co-wives, the institution of polygyny, her children, and similar matters, this woman gives an interesting account of the market women's struggles against government officials during the last forty years. She discusses, for example, how the struggle against government control of food prices and food rationing in the 1940s led to some market women — including herself — being arrested. The women's protest, she tells us, included among other things, refusal to sell their goods in any of the Lagos markets. This 'general strike' by Lagos market women led the government to concede to the women's demands, including halting plans to tax market women.

This woman leader also talks about the struggle for leadership in the various Market Women's Associations. The struggle here is set against the wider political structure

of Nigerian society, especially in the context of the post-colonial period. She tries to show how the market women's leadership structure is directly traced to the various political cleavages in the country. Through this detailed case history, we obtain additional insights into the market women's views of marriage, family and their work.

The next autobiographical narrative is by the Alága (head) of 'our' market. This remarkable woman, now in her mid-nineties, takes us back over several decades. She vividly recalls the problems of her first childless marriage which lasted for sixteen years. Detailed accounts of her subsequent marriages (she went through three marriages and a number of liaisons) and her children are given. She also talks about her relationship with each of her former husbands (all of whom are now dead) and how these affected her relationships with her co-wives.

The head of Koso market also talks about her career as a market woman, the problems of her position and the politically explosive situations which can develop. In addition, and like all the other women, she (we have called her Iya Kareem) gives her views on issues such as polygyny, relations between co-wives, what she conceives to be differences between the 'modern' and 'traditional' ways and women's work. She covers the same range of issues discussed in chapters five and six.

She also makes a number of philosophical comments on, for example, the relation between life and death and the relation between good and evil. The latter is especially interesting as it is manifested in witchcraft. The detailed

case history of this old market woman gives us insights that we might have missed if we had stopped at the level of generalised interviews.

The last case history is by an Igbo woman whom we have called Mama Nkechi. This woman is currently 'deputy' to the leader of the Igbo women in Koso market. She is also one of the leaders in the Koso market leadership hierarchy discussed in chapter four. Before the Nigerian civil war this woman was directly below the head of Koso market women who was an Igbo.

Her personal history reveals some extremely interesting information. She has a total of five years of formal education, a rare event indeed in this market, especially among women of her generation. She is 55 years old. After some elementary school education she worked as a housemaid for a Yoruba physician then stationed in Calabar, who later took Mama Nkechi to England for two years when he had returned for post-graduate medical training in the 1940s. She speaks a great deal about this period of her life and how it has shaped her present world view. This experience also colours her views about the existing division between the Yoruba and Igbo peoples.

She also discusses such diverse issues as stories told her by her mother about the Aba market women's riots of 1929, and childbirth and burial in Igboland. This case history, apart from her personal perceptions of marriage, family and work, also highlights the inter-ethnic tensions among the market women.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Rationale for the Study

This study of the perceptions of marriage, family and work by Lagos market women was inspired by three interrelated factors. The first has to do with the dominant though changing theoretical orientation adopted by social anthhopologists in their investigations and analyses of various cultures. The second pertains to the predominance of women in Nigerian market places, and the virtual absence of their viewpoints from the various analyses of these markets. The third factor is a response to current views and notions about marriage and family in the Nigerian society.

It has been the case that in reporting on societies, anthropologists proceed as though these societies consist entirely of males. In these almost exclusively male studies, ethnographers report on societies through the 'voices' of male informants, and mostly about male activities. When activities involving both males and females are reported, the dominant view is that of the former, while that of the latter is frequently underplayed or greatly obscured. In this connection, E. Ardener (1975:1) has written:

> The classical monographs of the last forty years have purported to "crack the code" of a vast range of societies, without any direct reference to the female group, At the level of "observation" in fieldwork, the behaviour of women has, of course, like that of men, been exhaustively plotted: their marriages, the economic activity, their rites, and the rest. When we come to that second or "meta" level of fieldwork, the vast body of

> debate, discussion, question and answer, that social anthropologists really depend upon to give conviction to their interpretations, there is a real imbalance. We are, for practical purposes, in a male world. The study of women is on a level little higher than the study of the ducks and fowls they commonly own — a mere bird-watching indeed.

In African studies, the tendency has been to underrate or altogether to omit, the special perceptions of African women. Indeed, some ethnographic classics even relegated African women to a kind of limbo, and proceeded to give an exclusively male view of the social structures they described. There were notable early exceptions to this trend provided by Kaberry (1939, 1952), Leith-Ross (1939), Green (1947), Richards (1956), Smith (1954), and a few others. It must be pointed out, however, that these works did not receive the same attention as the African classics. Indeed, it is only quite recently that they have in a sense been 'rediscovered' as a result of a mounting interest in the study of women.

On the whole, however, the literature on African societies often provides no more than an African male view articulated by Western male and female ethnographers. The latter's intellectual antecedents and theoretical predilections also seem to have worked against an alternative approach which might have facilitated the inclusion of women's separate views. Furthermore, even recent efforts by African scholars, both male and female, have not paid serious attention to this crucial gap. The reasons are simple. First, academic research as a full-time occupation in African societies is a relatively recent phenomenon. Second, African scholars — both male and female — are largely the product of western educational systems and ideologies, where the emphasis has been mainly on male models of society. Third, African women,

who might have been inclined towards eliciting African women's views of their own lives, have only recently gained limited access to higher education. And, fourth, for those of us who opt for research posts in our universities, the pressure to 'toe the male line' is not a mean one. In consequence, women tend to avoid research on women's issues which are thought to be of lesser 'theoretical' importance and not quite so 'scientific'.

Recent attempts by western scholars such as Paulme (1964), Little (1973), Sudarkasa (1973), Hafkin and Bay (1975), Pellow (1977) and others, have all been welcomed as important contributions but are still open to criticism on at least two levels. First, when secondary data are used they present a male view of African women. And, second, when primary sources are used they almost invariably provide merely descriptive accounts of women's activities. In other words, they fail to provide rich analyses of women's views of their lives.

My research is aimed at bridging this gap by eliciting the women's views of marriage, family and work in Lagos, and more specifically, attempts to determine whether these views differ markedly from the male-dominated view. This is important because as Edwin Ardener (1975) has argued, even when data on women are collected, they are frequently combined with that of men and then analysed within frameworks that further obscure women's particular view. In paying particular attention to women's views, I have hoped to discover women's models which are otherwise ignored or obscured by male-dominated models.

To illustrate this point. I cite an example of Nsaw men's perception of Nsaw women as reported by Kaberry (1952:151-2) who writes:

> It is believed in Nsaw that women are more sensitive, quick tempered and capricious than men, and hence less capable of adopting the dispassionate attitude necessary for the judgment of cases. Women change their minds... Women are like children... Women are not sure of what they want... If you give the country to women, some will spoil the country. They have no intelligence like men. Anger burns women greatly and they have grieving hearts indeed... "Women can't rule because they can't control themselves. They vex easily, they lose their heads... Yes, a woman is like God, and like God she cannot speak, she must only accept".

In order for us to have a full understanding of Nsaw women, it would have been preferable if we were also given the Nsaw women's perceptions of themselves in the above respects. This would have provided an alternative to the Nsaw men's dominant models of their society.

It must be pointed out, however, as has been done by S. Ardener (1978:28) that sometimes women's perceptions of themselves may seem to be in correspondence with the dominant male models. In such cases, a study of symbolism (E. Ardener, 1975) and a deeper probing of women's views would greatly aid our efforts in determining women's 'actual' views, or perceptions of themselves. It is also important to state that, as a woman undertaking this study, I might be less subject to prevailing male bias and, as an African woman, less liable to follow dominant western prejudices. These last considerations could assist in eliciting facts and attitudes that might ordinarily remain unexpressed.

The second consideration, that is, the virtual absence of market women's views in the literature on West African markets, seems to be directly related to the issues discussed above. Markets of West Africa, and Nigeria in particular, have received a great deal of attention from many scholars for a number of years. To begin with the most extensive study, Bohannan and Dalton's volume Markets in Africa (1962), contains twenty-eight contributions, none of which pays any particular attention to the women's views of their lives or activities. This is also true of the volume edited by Bauer and Yamey (1968) entitled Markets, Market Control and Marketing Reform. The symposium edited by Meillassoux, The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa (1971), contains another twenty-six chapters, none of which pays any attention to women's views of their trading activities, except insofar as they relate to such purely economic matters as retailing, bulk-buying, distribution, consumption, supply and demand, and the like.[1]

Hodder and Ukwu's book on Markets in West Africa (1969) is a combination of two doctoral theses, concentrating mainly on economic aspects of markets in Nigeria. This serious omission applies to other major works on markets such as Sudarkasa (1973), Garlick (1971), to mention only a few. Even the uninitiated eye, after only a brief visit to West Africa, is quick to note that African women far outnumber men in the market places. Indeed, scholars are the first to concede this fact. Furthermore, trading in markets constitutes the most important economic activity

---

[1] See also, B.E.L. Shaw (1965), Traditional Exchange and Modern Markets; Galletti et al. (1956), Nigerian Cocoa Farmers.

for Yoruba women who dominate the female population in Lagos. Why then, one must ask, are these women so peripheral to the analyses of Nigerian markets? As suggested, this can only be explained by women's marginality in the scholarship of western investigators and their African students.

The third impetus for undertaking this study stemmed from a growing concern in Nigeria, as represented in the mass media (which are mostly male-dominated) and private discussions (again, mainly with male colleagues) that marriage and family in Nigeria were facing 'serious dangers'. Evidence conventionally cited to support this thesis ranged from statistics of juvenile delinquency to the 'frequency' of divorce cases; marital quarrels; 'irregular' matings and 'unions'; introductions of cash economy; and 'western' influence on Nigerian women. Given the importance of market women in Yoruba society, it was hoped that a study of market women's perceptions of marriage, family and work in Lagos would throw additional light on the growing problems of marriage and family in the Nigerian society.

Methodology and Fieldwork

Two years before this study was conceived, the chief method I contemplated for data collection was to conduct a survey based on recorded schedules. It was hoped that this would facilitate coverage of a large sample of women from different walks of life in Lagos city. However, subsequent personal research experience made me decide in favour of intensive personal interviewing and complete participant observation for the entire project.

The problems met with during other investigations based on surveys and questionnaires, especially in the administration of local research assistants, has made me more cautious about survey methods than I was when I began. There are genuinely serious difficulties in controlling accuracy and conscientiousness. Of course, there is considerable literature on these problems. I need only cite Lazarfeld (1935, 1944, 1958), Miller (1952), Huff (1954), Moser and Kalton (1961) and Okely (1975). Nevertheless, in an African setting, there are peculiar problems that confront a social scientist carrying out research based on formal questionnaire interviewing. Available research assistants are inevitably recruited from school students committed to educational goals, for whom survey work is merely a temporary job of no career importance. On the other hand, as far as the interviewees are concerned, the experience of a questionnaire is likely to be new and strange. Most Africans are used to informal chit-chat and are more likely to be relaxed and friendly if the interview is spontaneous, unstructured and cordial. And finally, there is the advantage in informal interviewing of dealing with 'real' people, albeit not an ideal statistical sample, in contrast to impersonal interviews, where human beings are reduced to 'respondents' in the name of 'scientific objectivity' (Okely, loc. cit.) My experience has led me to the conclusion that the hours spent on maintenance of standards in sample surveys are, for me, better spent in gaining further direct contact with the human beings I am studying. For this reason, I used intensive participant observation as the most efficient method.

The data to be analysed here, on women's views and models of marriage, family and work, were collected in Lagos Nigeria, during a period of thirteen-and-one-half months' fieldwork between September 1978 and October 1979, and February, 1980. The study primarily concentrates on women as represented by Koso market women, and was conceived along three main lines. The first explored women's definitions, and conceptions of marriage, family and their work. The second investigated the women's views of conjugal relationships and was aimed at discerning the nature of existing practices. The third used existing data aimed at establishing men's definitions and views on the same issues on which women were probed. Our aim was to establish whether the views of women were really separate and different from those of men on the issues investigated.

From the outset it was decided that the chief tool for data collection would be intensive personal interviews, cassette recordings of selected conversations, and general participant observation. This being the case, a market in Lagos which was small enough to be manageable seemed to provide a logical and ideal 'laboratory' for the research. The small size of the market was an important consideration, especially as I intended to keep track of the extended network of social relations between the traders and their customers, friends, and relatives, as they interacted in the market. A big market in Lagos, which may sometimes have as many as 1000 to 2000 licence-holders, and which may be visited by a further 4000 to 5000 people, would have made such a task all but impossible. Taking a sample of such a large market would

have meant imposing artificial boundaries on the market, or using dubious statistical techniques.

I made several visits to most of the markets in the Lagos area and held discussions with some of their leaders. Eventually I chose a small market with 85 licensed market women and 30 men who sold meat. In addition to the regulars, there were 48 women who occupied 'temporary' stalls, and who are described by the Lagos Local Government officials as 'squatters'. We held briefer conversations with these squatters because their attendance at the market was irregular.

Interviews and discussions were held with the 85 regular market women and, of these, 40 were interviewed regularly and intensively throughout the duration of the fieldwork. These interviews included 30-45 minutes of recorded conversations with each of the 40 women. Of the remaining 45 women, eight willingly revealed their personal histories which were tape-recorded over many hours during the course of the year. Recordings of personal histories were usually carried out at the homes of the informants, either during the late afternoon or early evening of a weekday, or on Saturday or Sunday afternoons, depending on the woman's schedule. On a few occasions I recorded personal histories on some of the eight women at my home, on their insistence that they should reciprocate my visits to their homes.

The home recordings of personal histories were in addition to the observation of daily interactions in the market. These included just sitting with the women in their stalls, and sometimes just 'chatting' about events of mutual interest such as rising food prices, good and bad customers,

the political situation in the country, hardships of living in Lagos, and so on. On some occasions, I deliberately avoided actively taking notes, so as to minimise the investigator-informant relationship, which tends to make information offered less spontaneous. On such occasions, I reconstructed the trend of our conversations immediately upon arriving home. This was not difficult to do since I had jotted down the main points.

It must be noted that since most markets in Lagos are very busy, and subsequently quite noisy, cassette recordings can often prove to be ineffective for interviewing.

In addition to the difficulty of coping with background noise, the very process of marketing or selling itself is not conducive to in-depth interviewing, because customers have to be attended to promptly. This could involve a lengthy 'chat' between the trader and the customer, sometimes interrupted by another customer, a process which may last for quite a long time, especially on busy market days. For these reasons, being able to record case histories at home proved to be a real advantage for it avoided all the interruptions of the market-place, not to mention the further opportunity it gave to gain insight into the relationships between these women and their families. By the middle of my fieldwork, I had been 'adopted' by these families to the extent that they insisted that my visits to their homes be made without formality; that I join in the family meals on frequent occasions; attend weddings, funerals and naming ceremonies, and on two occasions, to mediate in a family '<u>palava</u>' (quarrel). By paying frequent — if short — visits when I

was not soliciting information, I established a relationship with these families that went beyond giving and receiving information. In the course of the fieldwork, it soon became clear to me that most women in 'my' market actively disliked the status of mere informants as 'exploitative'. By being incorporated into their families, it was possible to observe private behaviour which would otherwise have been exposed only to members of the family. Since my visits did not have to be announced, it sometimes meant walking into a family quarrel without the situation being quickly reversed for my consumption or benefit. Indeed, of the eight women who gave their personal histories, four became so friendly that if I did not make my regular visits to their homes, and was absent from the market for a few days without first informing them, they would personally call at my house: if unable to do this, they would send a kinsman, usually one of their children or a grandchild, to enquire after my health.

The rapport which I established with the market women was achieved after much difficulty. Initially, I found that my presence in the market was suspect, and most women were extremely reticent in giving information about themselves. Several reasons accounted for this: first, most women were afraid that if they gave information it might be used against them especially as they were not sure at first that I was not — to quote them — 'sent by the government to find out about the prices and incomes'. This, they argued, might lead to their being taxed. Second, and as is shown in a later chapter, the relationship between market women and the

Local Government officials (formerly Lagos City Council officials) was scarcely a 'cordial' one. Some of the women, therefore, feared that I might inform on women squatters, which would have led to the increased presence of the government officials in their market, which would be undesirable. Third, a good number of the women initially felt that they should be paid for their information. The reasons given for this were that I must get paid handsomely for the information I was trying to get, otherwise why would anyone spend such long hours for so many months just 'talking' to women in a market? Fourth, most women at first argued that there was no need for me to talk to more than one woman. The rationale here was that one of the older women, indeed the head of the market, could tell me all I wanted to know.

To allay their fears, I had first to develop a good and close relationship with the leadership hierarchy (see appendix). To them, I had explained my affiliation with the University of Lagos and the need to talk to the women on their views of the various issues. This, it was explained, would greatly aid in teaching students at the university who were rapidly losing touch with ideas held by women like them. I further explained that it was important to record the ideas and views of the women in this market, since this had never been done and that such a record would be invaluable to future generations when reading about market women in Lagos, and that it could contribute to a better life for the market women themselves.

After confidence and rapport had been established with the leaders of this market, it became easy to get other women to co-operate. The leaders took it upon themselves to explain the importance of my project to the other women. We explained

to the women that their identity would be completely protected since their names would never be revealed. They were also told that the project had nothing whatsoever to do with the government, and that information given would only be used for teaching purposes at the university.

Protocol demanded that I start interviewing the women leaders first; this had the advantage of gaining the confidence of the other women.

Among the many functions of the leadership hierarchy in Lagos markets is the 'protection' of the generality of their women traders both from the government and any 'intruders'. Getting the leaders to grant interviews on a regular basis and to adopt a friendly attitude towards an investigator was therefore of immense value.

This study was conducted at two levels. The first, covering all the women, was intended to give a more general account of the women's perceptions. The second aimed at eliciting more in-depth information about the women by concentrating on the personal histories of a few women over a period of several months.

In an attempt to recover the material from the interviews as accurately as possible, the tapes had to be transcribed at the end of each day's interviews. This was to ensure that the experience gained from the day's work was recorded while it was still fresh. It also helped me to fill any gaps which might appear in the tapes.
In the appendix, I give a more detailed account of my fieldwork experience.

Plan of the Study

This thesis consists of ten chapters including this introductory chapter. In chapter two I have traced briefly the historical antecedents of Lagos City. These showed Lagos to have developed from a small fishing village community to the largest city in tropical Africa. The rapid growth of Lagos has been attributed to two major factors: the first is the large number of migrants into Lagos in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries due to the perennial wars then taking place in the Yoruba hinterland and also the return of expatriate slaves; the second is the pacification of Lagos by the British colonial authorities, thereby facilitating rapid expansion of trading activities, and so a further influx of people into Lagos.

Chapter three shows markets in a wider setting, indicating among other things, that the women's definitions of markets are at variance with the official definitions. To the women traders, markets are not abstract entities dominated by forces of supply and demand. They are personalised. The definitions of markets and the women's lives are so closely interwoven that trading activities and the women's perceptions of their lives are, in significant ways, integral to those definitions. Indeed, it is correct to say of Koso market women traders, as Geertz (1963:44) says of Indonesian traders that 'the trader sees trade as ... the expression of his [her] essential self'.

Chapter three also attempts to trace the development of the Yoruba market places. It is shown that these markets are a result of the Yoruba settlement patterns and division of

labour between the sexes rather than the internal feuding which characterised Yoruba communities in the past as suggested by some writers. This chapter also shows that the general organisational structure of Lagos markets is similar to that of other Yoruba markets and markets in West Africa, being either periodic or daily, and dominated by women.

Chapter four discusses the general socio-economic and political characteristics of Koso market on which this thesis is based. It points out such things as: the range of commodities sold, major sources of supply of commodities, socio-demographic characteristics of the Koso market women traders, leadership structure and relations between customers and traders.

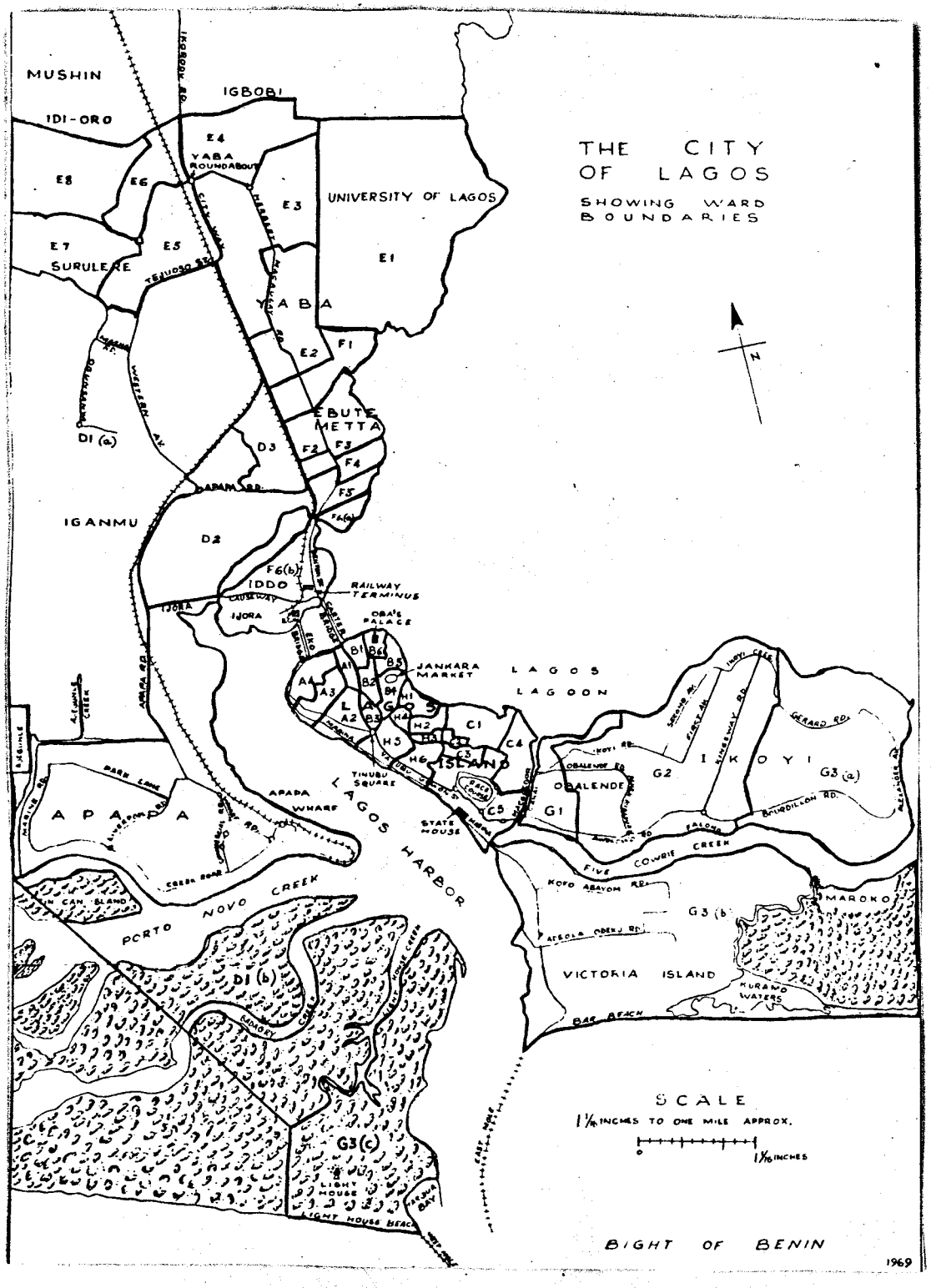
A detailed account of women's views of marriage in chapter five shows what Koso market women perceive marriage to be. The women reveal their views on such issues as the function of 'bride-price'; the importance of virginity before marriage; relations between (a) husbands and wives, (b) a wife and her husband's relatives and (c) between a married woman and her relatives; perceptions of barrenness and male infertility; the relationship between sexual intercourse, pregnancy, menstruation, women and the menopause; of children in marriage; women's perceptions of bastardy, adultery, divorce and the like.

Women's attitudes to work and the problems they face as market women traders are discussed in chapter six. Of great significance here is the way in which women have to cope with problems of inadequate sources of raising capital

for their trading activities. A woman's mother in particular, and the various mutual aid associations are shown to be the most important means of setting a woman up as a trader and subsequently raising capital for trade. Women's children (particularly the female children) are shown to play a significant role in aiding their trade. This chapter also shows the fierce competition between the traders and the institutional mechanisms adopted to prevent such competition culminating in crises and tension between the traders. The women traders at Koso are covered in this chapter.

The next three chapters are detailed case histories of three market women traders. All three cases point to the centrality of marriage and children to these women's lives. They show that the women's definitions of themselves and perceptions of their lives are closely intertwined with marriage and having children. Also, the struggle of market women traders against the official leadership structure is given pre-eminence in these three personal histories. They show the underlying tensions between the traders and the government officials consequent to perennial food shortages, particularly in Lagos. These have been incorrectly and unfairly attributed to traders instead of the insufficient and inefficient methods of food distribution and supplies to the city population. The inherent tension that characterises the relationship between market women traders and the official administration is demonstrated par excellence by the market women's struggle against taxation of women in Lagos, Abeokuta and Aba.

The problems that confront a researcher in attempting fieldwork in a foreign community are discussed in the appendix. It is shown here that establishing rapport may take several months, but that without it, an investigator may not get to the 'real' data. Establishing the rapport was, in turn, shown to depend largely on the nature of the relationship between the leadership structure and the investigator. Trust and friendship are shown to be the key variables to successful fieldwork.



Source: Baker (1974)

CHAPTER TWO

THE CITY OF LAGOS: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Lagos, the largest city in tropical Africa, is the capital of Nigeria, the most populous country on the African continent. It has an estimated population of about four million, growing (in 1975) at an annual rate of 13.6 per cent, mainly due to migration. It is the fastest-growing city in Africa (Sada and Adefolalu, 1975:81). Situated 850 kilometres north of the equator, it lies at the extreme corner of south-western Nigeria, It occupies approximately eighty square kilometres.

The Early History of Lagos

Depending as it does almost entirely on oral tradition and accounts, the early history of Lagos is conflicting and somewhat confused. As Crowder (1978:16) points out:

> Since so much of oral tradition is intimately bound up with socio-political relationships of the ethnic group, it is often in the interest of factions to distort it. The most common motive for distortion is dynastic disputes, and if the party with the weakest claim to the throne succeeds, it is certain that it or its court historian will immediately modify history to create an air of legitimacy.

There have, as a result, been varying views as to whether Lagos (Eko) was of Yoruba or Bini foundation. It seems very likely that the original inhabitants were from a sub-group of Yoruba people known as the Awori[1] of Isheri. This account

---

[1] See, for example, Pyne (1884); Losi (1914); Burns (1914); Mabogunje (1961 and 1965); Aderibigbe (1975); Cole (1975) et al.

is also in agreement with that of the Idejo land-owning White Cap chiefs of Lagos who claim to be the direct descendants of the Awori.

According to the various oral histories, the Awori of Isheri originally migrated from Ile-Ife, the ancestral home of all the Yoruba people, as a result of a feud between a certain Olofin and his younger brother over succession. The dispute culminated in Olofin being sent into exile, along with his followers. Olofin is said to have been the son of Oduduwa, the putative progenitor of all the Yoruba people.

Before commencing his journey, Olofin consulted oracles which stated that his final destination must be the basin of the Ogun river. On the way, Olofin and his followers established several settlements, the most prominent being Isheri, approximately twenty-five kilometres north of Lagos Island. In agreement with the oracle they next moved to Ebute Meta,[1] not quite at the basin of the Ogun river, but ideal for a people given to both farming and fishing. However, the Ebute Meta settlement was temporary due to the effects of the feuding known as the 'Iyakaye war' then taking place in the Yoruba interior. Desire for peace and security therefore forced a further move to Iddo Island, a stone's throw from Ebute Meta. Here the Awori were soon joined by other neighbouring peoples, such as Ijebu and Egba, who were presumably searching for trading opportunities. It is plausible, however, that they also fled the hinterland to escape the conflicts already referred to.

---

[1] Also spelt Ebute Metta.

The farming advantages of Iddo Island were soon overridden by a still greater need for political and economic security consequent upon the intensification of conflicts in the interior, which led to frequent raids on the Island. This led to a further migration to the next island, not ideally suited for farming, but protected by swampy creeks and lagoons. The original inhabitants, according to the Awori version, named this island Oko, probably from the Yoruba word meaning 'farm'. The name was later changed to Eko. Against this view, some scholars and early explorers have conjectured that the original settlers were Bini, since 'Eko' in the Bini (Edo) language means 'war camp'. This seems to contradict the Awori claim. In any event, Eko was the name of the island until the advent of the Portuguese merchants some time in the late fifteenth century, who renamed it Lagos. This may have been directly after the small Portuguese port of Lagos (Latin: Lacobriga) or it may be lagos, the Portuguese word for 'lakes' or 'swamps'. The indigenous people still call the island 'Eko'.

The case of Lagos provides, par excellence, a good example of diametrically opposed oral histories deriving from contradictory political, economic and social claims. The Bini claim is that Eko was founded by some of their people who, having lost a battle somewhere nearby, were unable to return home. According to another version, Benin took Eko as a result of a domestic squabble between the King of Eko and his wife Ajayi, who betrayed him. In the ensuing conflict, Aseru, a Benin 'war general' was killed in action.

Ashipa, a Yoruba 'chief' fearing reprisals from the Bini, undertook (following a Bini custom) to return the general's body to the Oba (King) of Benin for interment. In appreciation, the Oba of Benin rewarded Ashipa with the title of Olorogun (now simply Ologun) of Eko (Lagos). In addition, he was given a state sword and a royal drum as symbols of authority, and a group of chiefs to accompany him back to Lagos. Of these chiefs, one with the title of Eletu Odibo was the de jure 'kingmaker'. He was, and the equivalent office-holder still remains, the head of those chiefs who choose each new king of Lagos. The office is hereditary. The chiefs he heads are called Akarigbere, and unlike the Awori Idejos, are non-landowners.

Whatever the historical antecedents, the kingdom of Lagos paid tribute to the Benin Empire for some two hundred years. With the passage of time, however, the relationship became progressively less obligatory. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Lagos was no longer paying tribute to Benin. The question remains polemical among Nigerian historians, but they all acknowledge that Bini influence is now an integral part of Lagos 'traditional' culture.

The political history of Lagos, perhaps due to the confusion outlined above, is characterised by incessant disputes over the legitimate succession to office. The confusion may be, as Cole (1975:13) has suggested, the consequence of a merging or the juxtaposition of the Yoruba and the Bini tradition of succession to office. In the former, the eldest brother is the legitimate heir, while in the latter, primogeniture is the rule. In Lagos, both these principles were operative.

Trade and Politics in Lagos

Until the fifteenth century, gold and ivory, especially the former, were the backbone of commercial intercourse between Europe and West Africa. However, it was to remain relatively insignificant until the advent of European explorers and merchants. The arrival of the Portuguese at the Bights of Benin and Biafra and the opening of the gold trade at Mina on the Gold Coast, and in ivory and peppers at Benin in the 1470s were to completely transform the religious, socio-political and economic histories of these regions. Before this period, the coastal states had largely looked to their hinterlands for trade, based primarily on agriculture and craft production.

Intensive trade between Lagos and her other neighbours such as Badagry, Whydah, Port Novo and so on, survived to witness the Pax Britannica, but as Aderibigbe (1975:10) has noted, the trade was not created by it.

The advent of European merchants to Guinea Coast, particularly to São Tome and Fernando Po was to change decisively the structure of trade in West Africa. Until then, gold, ivory, peppers, cloth and tobacco had been the major items of exchange. The slave trade — one of the most remarkable phenomena in human history — rapidly changed all that. For the next 400 years, this trade became the dominant mode of commercial intercourse along what came to be called the 'Slave Coast'. The discovery of the New World by the Spanish and other European nations provided the principal stimulus to this trade. By the last quarter of

the nineteenth century, millions of captured slaves from the West African hinterland had been forcibly transported across the Atlantic.

Lagos — although new to this trade — became one of its greatest participants.

There is much written evidence to show that the coastal states guarded against external aggression using profits gained from the slave trade. After visiting Lagos towards the end of the eighteenth century, Captain John Adams (1823: 96) observed that:

> It has always been the policy of the Lagos people like those of Bonny, to be themselves the traders and not the brokers. They therefore go in their canoes to Ardah and Badagry, to the towns situated at N.E. extremity of Cradoo Lake where they purchase slaves, jaboo cloth and some articles as are required for domestic consumption.

The booming slave trade at Lagos brought huge fortunes to the ruling classes and helped to consolidate their positions of power. As Dike (1956:13) has pointed out, 'Not only had the slave trade been the mainstay of their economies, but the slave-trading kingdoms such as Lagos, Dahomey, Bonny and many others owed their origin and greatness to the rise of the slave trade'.

As Cole (op. cit.:8) has observed, by the end of the eighteenth century, Lagos had become so important a state that 'The northern Yoruba states — Ijebu, Egba, Oyo, Ilorin, Ijesha, etc. — had to court the friendship of Lagos because of its favourable trade position'.

The concentration of wealth from the slave trade in the hands of the ruling élite was not peculiar to Lagos. In Dahomey, a neighbour of Lagos, the rulers, backed by a well-

equipped army (Polanyi et al. 1957:154-86, and Polanyi, 1966: 33-5) held a virtual monopoly over trade. Here 'the King delegated power to a class of merchant-nobles who were the actual owners of the slaves and received an important percentage of taxes and dues'. So the slave traders in West Africa seem to have been largely the Kings and Chiefs. As Daaku (1970:170) has noted, 'This was because the declaration of war and the conclusion of peace were vested in Chiefs and their elders'. This is consistent with an earlier observation that the vast majority of slaves were victims of inter-ethnic conflicts or wars between rival kingdoms.

At Lagos, unlike other Yoruba kingdoms, the Oba (King) of Lagos did not own the land, even though the landowning chiefs (the Idejos) always acceded to any royal requests for use of land. The Lagos Oba, therefore, needed to accumulate wealth as an instrument of influence, power and prestige if he were to maintain the status of 'first among equals' with the other Chiefs.

As the power of the Chiefs increased, so did their demands for presents from European slave dealers and the custom of giving presents to the Chiefs prevailed long after the disappearance of the slave trade. These presents, or 'dashes', 'varied in amount, but they were always necessary before any trading could be attempted' (Burns, op. cit.:81).

Britain, the principal participant in the slave trade in the eighteenth century decided, in 1807, to abolish the practice because of mounting socio-economic and political pressures at home. It was suggested that palm oil could be an effective alternative since it was already an established

source of trade in this area. To hasten the end of the slave trade, a Preventive Squadron was set up, but for it to succeed and the legitimate trade to become the order of the day, the chiefs' positive support was an absolute prerequisite. Without it, the campaign against the slave trade would be ineffectual and legitimate trade a mere dream.

Ample documentation exists to show that slave trading was very lucrative for all parties. If the trade was stopped, the Chiefs, the African middlemen and the European traders would all lose financially. In consequence, a majority of African chiefs vigorously defended the continuation of the trade. As Dike (ibid.:13) has noted, at Bonny 'Africa's greatest slave market', the King spoke for the majority of his African colleages when he declared to Captain Crow in 1807 that:

> We [i.e. the King and Council] think that this trade must go on. That also is the verdict of our oracles and the priests. They say that your country, however great, can never stop a trade ordained by God himself.

Given that fortunes were being amassed, this is hardly surprising. Elsewhere along the slave coast, specifically at Whydah, King Ghezo was presenting pithy arguments against abolishing the slave trade. Based on the number of slaves exported annually from Whydah and the King's own accounts, British officials estimated the royal income for this Fon kingdom to be £60,000 annually in the mid-eighteenth century.

At Lagos, the succession dispute served to complicate and obscure the issue of legitimate trade. Interested parties giving support to warring factions exacerbated the problem:

on the one hand Kosoko enjoyed immense support from Dahomey (a very powerful ally) and important chiefs at Badagry and Lagos, and other slave dealers, in addition to his support from the Oyo, Ijebu and Abeokuta kingdoms in the interior; on the other hand, Akitoye was courted by repatriated Sierra Leonean slaves, the missionaries, the British officials and administrators, some slave dealers and a handful of chiefs at Badagry.

Although the real issues responsible for the constant feuding at Lagos had become very confused, this complex problem was now dichotomized into those for and those against the slave trade — Akitoye being identified with those against and Kosoko with those for the slave trade. In actual fact, both these chiefs had been intensely involved in this trade. Akitoye's association with notorious slave dealers such as Domingo Martinez are all too well known.

Akitoye, having been deposed in 1845, attempted to settle at Abeokuta, but had to move to Badagry because of swift opposition from Kosoko's supporters. We have also seen that, in an effort to consolidate his power base at Lagos, Kosoko had vigorously courted the friendship of the various important chiefs in Yorubaland with considerable success. Badagry was no exception. Akitoye's arrival at Badagry predictably divided the town into support for him or for Kosoko, leaving the place in a constant state of tension.

Beecroft, a British consul appointed to the Bights of Benin and Biafra by Palmerston, undertook to settle the crisis but without success. At Badagry he succeeded in

persuading Akitoye to accompany him to Fernando Po at the height of the crisis. Akitoye's departure showed a lack of political acumen, since his supporters and indeed his opponents, interpreted the move as flight and desertion. The mounting tension led to open violence culminating in a civil war. In June 1851, a group of market women from Lagos capitalised on the unstable situation and sang abusive songs about Akitoye in a Badagry market. In these songs, which in Africa (as we shall see later) are always symbolically very significant, the Lagos women traders derided 'the cowardice of the absentee Akitoye and the poverty of his supporters in contrast to the manliness and the prosperity of Kosoko and his partisans' (Ajayi, 1965:70). The civil war at Badagry, the continuous unrest at Lagos, the disruption of 'legitimate' trade, all gave greater impetus to the already mounting pressure in Westminster for direct British intervention at Lagos.

The evidence frequently cited for British military intervention can be summarised as follows. First, the geographical location of Lagos made it an excellent entrepôt for trade and commerce, since it had such an immense command of all the water communications behind the littoral (Newbury, 1961:75). In other words, 'Lagos commanded an entrance to the sea from the rough surf by the several swampy Islands, and it afforded communications through a number of inland waterways and creeks to Badagry and Dahomey to the west and the Benin empire to the east' (Baker, 1975:19). Access to the Ogun river was imperative for the expansion of trade with the Yoruba interior: Lagos was the entry.

Secondly, the supervision on the slave coast by the British Royal Navy squadrons had proved totally ineffective. As Mabogunje (1965:245) has noted, 'Lagos continued to provide the most effective hideout for the slaves'. Thirdly, effective political control of Lagos and of the surrounding kingdoms would pave the way for greater markets and trade routes to the interior. Rival factions in the Yoruba kingdom had kept these routes closed.

Akitoye, sensing the political climate of the day, offered to enter into a treaty with the British 'abolishing' the slave trade at Lagos if restored to power. This was not because he differed fundamentally from Kosoko on slave-trading ideology, but because it was politically expedient.

Beecroft and Commander Forbes decided before signing the treaty with Akitoye to try once again to persuade Kosoko to give up the slave trade. At a meeting in Lagos with Kosoko they repeated the 'old' arguments about the evils of this trade and the advantages of legitimate trade, especially in palm oil. Kosoko remained completely intransigent, which surprised Beecroft who had gone 'with a show of force as the moment could supply, with the firm belief that such a force, judging from the character of African chiefs, would have the effect by simple demonstration of our power, to cause him to accede to our terms' (Beecroft, 1851:147).

Attention was turned once again to Akitoye who, perhaps because he had less popular grassroot support than Kosoko, seemed more than eager to tread where his opponent would not dare. Thus, in December 1851, Beecroft without authority from his home government, attacked Lagos and suffered a devastating defeat. A second attack a few weeks later

brought victory, but not without much destruction of life and property.

Finally, in 1852, Akitoye signed a treaty prepared for him by Gollmer — a missionary from Badagry — guaranteeing, among other things, to abolish the slave trade at Lagos, allow the British to use force against it if necessary, destroy slave factories and baracoons, promote lawful trade, 'especially with the English merchants', provide protection and unrestricted movement for the missionaries, and help them to build churches and schools, abolish human sacrifice and so on (Ajayi, 1969:79; Kopytoff, 1970; Burns, 1924:126-7 et al.)

Akitoye's second regime was short-lived. He could not hold the fort at Lagos for a number of reasons. His alliance with the British, the missionaries and the repatriated slaves made him unpopular with the people. He lacked a strong military force to back up his weak authority. Kosoko's intensive and relentless campaign against him and his allies frequently led to loss of life and property and increased discontent and malaise among the Lagos population.

More importantly, the ruling chiefs of Lagos were fiercely divided over the Akitoye/Kosoko dispute with telling results. Since some of them had substantial farms in the interior, 'The Lagos chiefs apparently exercised control over most of the Lagos food supplied from the environs', and at times, 'they threatened to cut off food supplies to Lagos' (Cole, 1975:27 and 65). Added to this was their control over trade routes and markets in and around Lagos as well as in the interior.

And too, the initial marriage of the missionaries and the European traders and merchants had become increasingly uneasy and unwieldy. The missionaries accused the consular and British administrators of manoeuvres designed to placate the European traders who were abetting and engaging in the slave trade while the merchants were impatient with the missionaries' preoccupation with matters of the soul at the expense of trade. These factors combined to plunge Lagos into a state of near anarchy — a situation hardly conducive to trade and commerce.

Akitoye's reign lasted barely two years. How he died is not known for certain but he was widely believed to have been the victim of ritual poisoning. He had not stopped the slave trade and the constitutional crisis was still unresolved.

Akitoye was succeeded by his son Dosunmu. Thus, the Akitoye/Kosoko feud continued. The intractable Kosoko, now armed with more powerful allies in the interior and in Dahomey, proved a formidable foe. Dosunmu could not contain the situation at Lagos. From all available evidence he had neither the leadership nor the force of personality to deal with such complexities. The old arguments calling for total British intervention had steadily gained ground. In 1861, by the treaty of cession, Lagos formally became a British colony. With this treaty, the real powers of chiefs were usurped. Dosunmu was 'pensioned off on the grounds of incapacity of government and infraction of treaty' (Newbury, 1961:74). This treaty paved the way for a steady penetration of the Yoruba interior and the subsequent colonisation of 'Nigeria'.

Economic Expansion and Growth in Lagos

Captain John Adams (1823:96) having visited Lagos in the 1770s, described it as of an 'inconsiderable size'. He estimated the population to be about 5000. Some generations later, Sir Richard Burton (1863) estimated it to be about 30,000. Later, the government took a census every ten years. The statistics are subject to margins of error but they do give an indication of the impact that the suppression of slave trading made on the Lagos population. In 1866, the population census showed Lagos to be 25,000 (Mabogunje, 1965); by 1901, the population had risen to well over 42,000.

Several factors account for the rapid growth of the Lagos population during the last century. First, the establishment of British authority at Lagos had the effect of attracting a new wave of immigrants. First to arrive from Abeokuta and Badagry were a group of Sierra Leoneans — liberated slaves of Yoruba descent. They came to be known as Aku or Saro. Next were a group of Brazilian and Cuban emancipated slaves collectively known as Aguda or Amoro. They too were of Yoruba descent.

Secondly, a conflict between the Lagos government and Abeokuta led to a massive expulsion of the CMS missionaries and their large following from Abeokuta. They too settled in Lagos together with other European missionaries from Badagry who previously had had no access to Lagos.

Thirdly, word had got around about the British vigilance against the slave trade at Lagos. This led to a large influx of escaped slaves from the Yoruba interior into Lagos.

Fourthly, and perhaps most importantly, since this had the effect of attracting further immigrants, was the arrival of a number of European merchants. The European population, however, remained relatively small.

The original area for Lagos Island could not have been much more than 2.6 square kilometres. In 1863, Sir Richard Burton estimated the area to be 'about five miles in circumference'. (During the last few decades this area has been greatly expanded by a massive, multi-million pound investment which has reclaimed marsh-land.)

The greater political stability meant greater opportunities in trade and commerce. This in turn led to an upsurge of migration into Lagos creating a problem of space. By 1911 there was a pressing need to establish new settlements: hence Ikoyi to the east of the island, and Ebute Meta and Yaba to the north, on the mainland, were established. By 1921, the area of Lagos had increased to 33 square kilometres because of the expansion on the mainland. By 1927, the area was 40 square kilometres and by 1951, it was estimated at 45 square kilometres. Today, Lagos and its metropolis cover an area of some 80 square kilometres.

While Lagos population growth in the last half of the nineteenth century was substantial, the rate of population growth during the last 75 years or so has been phenomenal. In the fifty years from 1900-1950, the population increased 550-fold; while 1900-1963 saw an increase of 600 per cent. The most spectacular growth came after the 1940s. Thus in the 1950-1963 period, the city gained some 400,000 people, which represents an annual growth rate of 8.6 per cent. On

the suburban fringe, the city acquired another 390,000 people, an annual population growth rate of 19 per cent (Sada and Adefolalu, 1975:81).

In 1906, Lagos and the rest of Yorubaland, became amalgamated with the rest of southern Nigeria into a single administration and protectorate. This new political unit was to be known as Lagos Colony and the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. Lagos had the singular advantage of becoming the seat of government. A few years later — in 1914 — Lagos Colony and the Southern Protectorate were further amalgamated with the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria to give birth to what we now call Nigeria. With the second amalgamation, Lagos became the capital city of the whole of Nigeria. With the creation of 12 states in Nigeria in 1967, Lagos acquired the peculiar status of being the capital of the Nigerian federation and the newly-created Lagos State. The position of Lagos as the federal capital, Lagos State capital and the premier port of Nigeria has stimulated investment in and activity around it since the nineteenth century.

Port development, started some decades earlier, was intensified and with it came greater trading activities. Previously, sea trade had been seriously hampered by the rough surf and the sand-bar which blocked the entrance to the Lagos Lagoon.

To ease the movement of goods and people the road network also received its share of attention, some might argue a disproportionate share. By the mid-1970s, the federal government had spent many millions of naira on what

was to be a most elaborate and extensive network of roads and flyovers, most of which are concentrated on Lagos City.

The development of these infrastructural facilities not unnaturally had the adverse effect of attracting a disproportionate share of industrial development in Lagos relative to the rest of the country. Akinola and Alao (1975: 109) have noted that 'one of the most outstanding facts about the industrial geography of Nigeria is the dominant position which Lagos occupies in terms of the number of industries, the contribution of its industries to the gross domestic products, as an industrial labour market and as a market for the final consumption of local industrialised output'.

Thus by the mid-1970s, statistics showed that:

> 30 per cent of the value of industrial production in all industries employing more than 10 people came from Lagos. It also accounted for more than 86 per cent by value of the beer and soft drinks production, more than 70 per cent by value of the output of the printing and publishing industries, more than 50 per cent by value of the metal products, and over 80 per cent by value of electrical machinery and appliances (Akinola and Alao, loc. cit.:109).

Similar figures of the output of other industries could be added to this list. The statistics are indeed staggering, the more so because the trend has continued, so that current figures are much higher in practically all sectors. And yet, Lagos State is one of the smallest states in the Nigerian federation. Furthermore, these industries are not equally distributed all over this small state. With very few exceptions, they are clustered around the environs of Lagos City.

According to other scholars, the Lagos metropolis in 1970 accounted for '52.2 per cent of all the total national industrial gross output and 42.2 per cent of total national modern sector employment' (Diejomaoh and Anusionwu, 1980:25). The share of Lagos in industrial output has steadily increased. Thus by 1973 it had risen to 60.2 per cent and by 1975 it was up to 65.5 per cent. In other areas, the trends follow suit. For example, in terms of employment, by 1975 Lagos accounted for 44.8 per cent of all employment in the private and public sectors in Nigeria (Diejomaoh and Anusionwu, loc. cit.:29). These figures should cause no surprise. The government is, owing to the nature of underdevelopment, the biggest employer and Nigerian industries, as mentioned above, are concentrated in the Lagos area. The cumulative effect is the unprecedented population explosion which, as we shall shortly see, has created untold problems for the Lagos population.

Lagos City Today

There are two important events, yet unmentioned, which have a direct bearing on developments at Lagos. The first is the 1966 military coup and its aftermath, which culminated in the Nigerian Civil War (1966-1970). The causes and effects of this war are beyond the scope of this chapter, but the Nigerian nation has still to recover completely from its devastating effects. For our purposes, and since it has been widely dealt with by others, it suffices to observe of the 1960s — particularly in the period following the outbreak of the civil war — that there was a massive

emigration of the Igbo from Lagos. They had feared that their lives were in danger following repeated attacks on Igbo in Lagos.

The exact number of Igbo that fled Lagos during the crisis is unknown but it is estimated that as many as 97 per cent returned to their homelands in the old Eastern Region. This constitutes a significant movement of people from Lagos since the various population estimates in the 1960s and before had shown Igbo to be the largest group in Lagos after the Yoruba.

An estimate of the ethnic composition of Lagos in the early seventies derived from Sada (1980) shows that the Yoruba continue to constitute about three-quarters of the population of Lagos. They are followed by Bendelites/Mid-westerners (since the creation of new states the old Midwest is now called Bendel State) who constitute about one-tenth of the population. The Igbo have moved to third place with about 6 per cent of the population. Previously they had formed 10 per cent of the Lagos population and formed the second largest group. In addition, non-Nigerians accounted for about 4.5 per cent, South-eastern/Cross River State people for 3 per cent, Rivers State people for about 1.5 per cent, and people from the northern states for about 5 per cent of the Lagos population.

The second event was the so-called 'oil boom'. This had more immediate and manifest effects on Lagos problems than the Civil War. For instance, the oil revenues had to be spent, and predictably, the expenditure concentrated on Lagos as the capital of the federation and Lagos State.

The importation of machinery and consumer goods, both by the government and the private sector, led to unprecedented port congestion, while massive construction activities disrupted transport and social life in general. Domestic trade and street circulation seemed to be almost at a standstill.

The new opportunities for employment in Lagos, stimulated by the expenditure from the oil revenues, had a further centripetal effect, with more and more people leaving the interior for Lagos. With the new-found wealth, and easy terms of credit, people bought cars and motorcycles as never before. Like the ports, the road networks were crippled. They simply could not cope. Traffic congestion, lasting for hours at a time, became the order of the day. As one medical expert noted 'traffic congestion in Lagos has now become a threat to health of inhabitants' (Daniel, 1975:161).

The government's efforts to deal with traffic congestion by rapid construction of new roads has improved the situation since about 1975. However, the rapidity with which the volume of cars and other vehicles increases has not been matched by road construction. The only effective and permanent solution to the problem of Lagos traffic, and the decongestion of Lagos in general, seemed to be the removal of the capital to some other part of the country.

In the meantime, the Lagos State government has instituted a regulation (edict) which removes approximately half of all cars from Lagos roads, specifically the main roads, during working days. The vehicles are kept off these roads between 0600 and 1800 hours. Penalties for infraction of the edict are stiff — 100 naira (about £78) to be paid

immediately. While this has been effective, projections of population growth and industrial development suggest that this solution is, at best, temporary.

Air transportation facilities have also suffered. They have, however, been considerably improved especially on the international side, by the building of the modern Murtala Mohammed airport.

In search of a permanent solution to the problems outlined above, the Federal Military Government decreed in 1975 that the capital of Nigeria was to be moved to the North — to Abuja. This move is planned to start in 1983 when the Federal Government intends to move some of its staff to Abuja. By the same decree of the Federal Military Government, Lagos ceased to be the capital of Lagos State, which is now at Ikeja. In the interim, Lagos is still functioning as the federal capital. The population density is one of the highest in the world, while the inadequacy of social amenities is almost unsurpassed, notwithstanding the fact that in national terms these facilities are disproportionately concentrated in Lagos. For example, there is a relatively high concentration of all grades of medical personnel and facilities by comparison with the rest of the country. The ratio of doctors, nurses and technologists to patients, and hospital beds to patients, is still the best in Nigeria. However, given the population 'explosion' these statistics hardly tell the true story.

In addition, Lagos has to face the rapid deterioration of the existing neighbourhoods, and the growth of shanty towns in its environs. The shortage of dwellings has led

to great overcrowding with its attendant health problems. Attempts by the government to deal with slums, especially in central Lagos, have been to no avail, and some assert that the slums of Lagos are only rivalled by those of Calcutta. The low income groups have been the worst hit. They have to suffer the main effects of high rents and mediocre and mean accommodation (Marris, 1961). In 1960, Carter described Lagos as:

> ... unlike anything I had ever seen before in Africa; it was more like an overcrowded city in India... Perhaps 400,000 people are jammed into this area, almost all of them selling something to someone. And most in evidence are the market women, for woman are the small traders, buying on credit from any kind of concern, making their shilling on the pound profit, and buying again. Whole sections of the town are devoted to head-scarves, and women walk nonchalantly down the streets with two- or even three-foot piles of these scarves on their head. One section concentrates on openwork sandals; another on notions. Down by the dock are shellfish and salted and fresh fish, while tied to the dock behind these stalls are what are called "canoes"... While women dominate the markets, both men and women have little shops, like boxes, with their wares lining the walls, on the floor or at their feet (Gwendolyn Carter, 1960; quoted from Baker, 1974:16).

Today, the impression of Lagos cannot be said to differ significantly from the above description. Indeed, the impression one gets on entering Lagos (some have suggested and I agree) is of one big, continuous 'market'. The preponderance of women in markets in Lagos is the subject matter of the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

MARKETS OF LAGOS AND MARKET WOMEN: THE WIDER SETTING

The markets of Nigeria, particularly those of Yorubaland,[1] and to a lesser extent those of Lagos[2] have been the subject of prolific documentation. These investigations have been carried out by geographers in the main. Predictably, their orientation has been distinctly economic. Sada and McNulty (1974:9) have observed, 'The bulk of this research has concentrated on the explication of the role of the market trader and the nature of the marketing process in ensuring the smooth flow of goods and services to the consumer'.

As a consequence, the market women themselves and the non-economic functions of these markets remain relatively peripheral to the existing analyses. Markets in Nigeria, especially in Yorubaland, are largely dominated by women. 'Even in the largest urban centres, goods and services for the bulk of the urban population are handled in traditional markets' (Sada and McNulty, ibid.) The marginality of women in these works and the neglect of the socio-political and religious aspects of these markets is a consequence of the theoretical predilections and conceptual tools employed in these studies. This chapter aims (1) to give a description of Lagos markets, and (2) to provide information on Lagos market women who are the dominant actors in these institutions.

---

[1] Hodder (1961, 1962, 1965a, 1965b and 1971); Hodder and Ukwu (1969); Marshall (1962, 1963 and 1970); Mabogunje (1968) et al.

[2] See also, Sada and McNulty, (1970, 1971, 1972a, 1972b, 1972c, 1974a and 1974b); Mcnulty and Sada et al.(1978) to mention only a few.

Definitional and Conceptual Problems

Markets in theory: the 'formal' definition

Market places have been defined as 'an authorised concourse of buyers and sellers of commodities, meeting at a place more or less strictly limited or defined at an appointed time' (Hill, 1966:295; Hodder 1969:19; Smith, 1978:12 et al.) In most works on markets in Africa, this definition or its variation, now 91 years old (it was first used in the UK Commission on Markets Rights and Tolls in 1899) is generally accepted as standard. It is essentially an economic definition.

Polanyi and his collaborators (1957:366 and 267) attempted a distinction between a 'market place' and 'market institutions'. The former is a 'specific location where people meet for the purpose of transferring goods from one to the other'. The latter are defined as 'comprising a supply crowd and a demand crowd or both. Supply crowds and demand crowds, again, shall be defined as a multiplicity of hands desirous to acquire or alternatively to dispose of goods in exchange. Although market institutions, therefore, are exchange institutions, markets and exchange are not coterminous'.

Intrinsic to markets in an economist's world is the supply-demand principle. This is not necessarily contingent on either location or a congregation of buyers and sellers. In market places, on the contrary, these two conditions are necessary. This is presumably what Bohannan and Dalton (1962:1) mean when they say that 'The market place is a specific site where a group of buyers and a group of sellers meet. The market principle is the determination of prices

by the forces of supply and demand regardless of site of transactions... the market principle can and often does operate outside the market place'.

In a further elaboration on the distinction between these two institutions, Polanyi and others (ibid.:367) continue:

> For instance, farmers could come to the town market only to sell while the townsmen come only to buy. Furthermore, the farmers might bring a fixed quantity of food and sell it all no matter what the price, and the townsmen buy no matter what the price. The price itself might be fixed by some official or simply be the traditional price. In these cases, price would not determine either the amount supplied or the amount demanded.

These interpretations are fraught with difficulties as will be seen when we examine market women's definitions of markets. The first difficulty pertains to the phrase 'authorised concourse'. If we were to use this definition, we would be in a position to give a precise number of markets in Lagos because it is almost the same as that originally given by the then Lagos City Council which defines markets as 'legally established or gazetted'.

Defining markets in terms of 'legally established' or 'authorised' does not, however, nullify the fact that there are many markets in Lagos — albeit 'unauthorised' or illegally established — which exist outside this definition. Some Lagos City Council officials acknowledge that there are 'unauthorised markets'. This is paradoxical since they have to be 'legally established or gazetted' to be markets. This, as we shall see throughout this chapter, is not a trivial point. It explains, for example, the existing discrepancy between the Council's statistics on the number of markets and those of the Lagos City market women's associations. The

number given by the latter is, as shown by the data obtained by Baker (1974:258) more than twice the number acknowledged by the former. More recently, the Lagos Local Government has attempted to up-date the statistics on the number of markets existing in Lagos, as can be seen from the tables on pp. 45-46. The leaders of Market Women's Associations, however, continue to insist that there are more markets in Lagos than the local government officials are ready to admit. This has important socio-political and economic ramifications. Clearly, definitions of markets have to vary according to time and circumstance. They must take into account the socio-political and economic milieu in which the markets being defined operate.

For example, the characterisation of markets by Polanyi and his collaborators is too medieval for Lagos. Numerous studies on West African markets show quite explicitly that they are multi-functional. The economic aspects are very much in evidence and at times central. Thus, people do not necessarily frequent markets just to sell or buy 'no matter what the price'. The intense haggling, characteristic of these markets, is designed without a doubt, to reach a 'reasonable price'.

Competition, especially between sellers, is keen, in contrast to the Indonesian case reported by Geertz (1964:34) where the competition is between sellers and buyers only. In Lagos, on the contrary, the competition is essentially triangular, being centred around the buyers and the sellers, as well as between the sellers; hence the institutionalised mechanisms designed to contain this potentially explosive situation.

TABLE 1:

MARKETS RECOGNISED BY MARKET WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION IN THE 1960s

1. Abule-Ijesha
2. Abule-Okuta
3. Adebayo
4. Ademuyiwa
5. Agege
6. Ajegunle
7. Ajelogo
8. Alakoro
9. Alayabiagbo
10. Apapa Elemu 1
11. Apapa Elemu 2
12. Apapa Elemu 3
13. Apapa Elemu 4
14. Apapa Elemu 5
15. Awolowo
16. Ariyoke
17. Ebute-Elefun
18. Ebute-Ero
19. Ebute Sako Olowo
20. Elegbata (Daddy Alaja St.)
21. Egerton Eroko
22. Gbaja
23. Idera
24. Iddo
25. Idumagbo (Jankara)
26. Idumagbo (Marina)
27. Ita-Fasi
28. Ita-Omo
29. Kajola
30. Laleye
31. Latilewa
32. Lawanson
33. Maroko
34. Obalende
35. Obun-Edo
36. Obun Edo
37. Ako Awo
38. Olorun Sago
39. Oyingbo
40. Oshodi
41. Sabo
42. Sandgrouse (Araromi or Lewis St.)
43. Tejuoso (Ojuele-Gba)

GAZETTED OR LEGALLY ESTABLISHED MARKETS IN THE 1960s

1. Apapa Elemu
2. Apapa General
3. Anikantamo
4. Abule-Ijesha
5. Alayabiagba (Ebute-Elefun)
6. Ebute-Ero
7. Egerton
8. Oyingbo
9. Gbaja
10. Iddo
11. Idumagbo (Jankara)
12. Ijera
13. Sandgrouse (Araromi or Lewis St.)
14. Moloney Bridge Street (Idumagbo Marina)
15. Oko Awo
16. Obalende
17. Obada
18. Ojulegba

Source: Baker (1974).

TABLE 2:

LIST OF ALL MARKETS IN THE METROPOLIS OF LAGOS (GOVERNMENT APPROVED) AT THE TIME OF FIELDWORK

Lagos Island Local Government

(a) Faji Market
(b) Lewis Street Market
(c) Ebute Elefun Market
(d) Jankara Market
(e) Ereko Market
(f) Obalende Market
(g) Anjorin Market
(h) Maroko Market
(i) Ilado Market
(j) Obun Eko Market
(k) Alayabiagba Market
(l) Gbobaniyi Market

Lagos Mainland Local Government

(a) Iddo Wholesale Market
(b) Oyingbo Market
(c) Odada Market
(d) Ijero Market
(e) Gbaja Market

Mushin Local Government

(a) Awolowo Market
(b) Mushin/Mushin Planks
(c) Amu Planks
(d) Kajola
(e) Onigbongbo
(f) Shogunle
(g) Oshodi
(h) Mafoluku
(i) Isolo Market
(j) Oshodi Express-way Market
(k) Itire Market
(l) Ijeshatedo Market
(m) Miniru Baruwa Market
(n) Aguda Market
(o) Mafutau Adegbite (Lawanson)
(p) Majolete Market
(q) Farombi (Isolo) Market
(r) Ilasamaja Market
(s) Oduduwa Planks Market
(t) Papa Ajao Market
(u) Ejigbo Planks Market
(v) Afijalo (Mafoluku) Market

Somolu Local Government

(a) Alade Market
(b) Alaleye Market
(c) Mafowoku Market
(d) Abete Market
(e) Oja-Oba Market
(f) Adebayo Market
(g) Owolowo Market
(h) Alarape Market
(i) Fafunke Market
(j) Ojote Market
(k) Bakare Bello Market
(l) Adaranijo Market
(m) Kosofe Market

Source: Ministry of Local Government Office, Lagos, 1979.

Markets in practice: the market women's 'informal' definition

ọjà is the Yoruba word for market. 'The word market has a great number of meanings, referring to many things and ideas; and the same can be said of the Yoruba word ọjà' (Hodder, 1969:19, emphasis original). Among other African peoples (see especially Bohannan P. and L., 1968:chapt. 12), market means more than a 'physical location' where a group of women congregate to buy and sell.

During my field work in Lagos, I asked women in different markets to tell me as precisely as they could what they perceived a market to be. After expressing dismay at what they considered to be a rather silly question, market was repeatedly defined as 'This place, here, now, where we are selling, is our ọjà'. 'Ọjà is any place where women meet to sell — that is their ọjà.' 'For example, if they sell gari (a cassava meal or flour), rice, cloth, yams, "medicine", vegetables, or oranges, that is their ọjà'. 'Women might meet once or twice a week or even every day to sell or to buy. That place where they meet, you can call it their ọjà'. The 'once or twice a week' is an obvious reference to a periodic market while 'every day' refers to a daily market.

In addition to these definitions there was frequent mention of the traditional leadership structure in defining ọjà. For example, a woman talking of another woman 'owning a market' means that she is the head of a particular market. I asked the woman head of one of the biggest markets in Lagos to tell me how many markets existed in Lagos. Without hesitation she started to name other women who she said were

heads of other markets. After she had named thirty-one women she announced there were thirty-one markets! She added that while she could not immediately remember more names, there were more women and, by definition, more ọjà. As can be seen then, ọjà is defined entirely without reference to the official definition of 'legally established' or 'gazetted'.

The Lagos market women's attitudes towards markets, and especially to problems of definition and of origin, are similar to the Mossi case reported by Skinner (1962:224-5). He argues:

> The Mossi do not appear to have any legends about the origin of markets in their country. When asked how and why markets first arose, they say that markets developed simply because people wanted to exchange goods with each other or because the chiefs wanted markets in their own villages so that their people need not go to other districts. When one asks the Mossi directly "What is a market?" the response to this question is: "A market is a place where people meet to buy and sell..."

Market women in Lagos are well aware that 'their' markets are under the jurisdiction of Lagos Local Government if they are gazetted and legally established. But at no time was the official authority incorporated in their definition of ọjà. I therefore decided to bring up this aspect by asking:

Q. If women were to meet often to sell in a place not approved by a Lagos Local Government, would this still be ọjà?

A. Well, if they are able to continue selling at that place, and they are not driven away by local government officials, yes, that is ọjà.

Q. Doesn't a proper ọjà need registration by the local government?

A. Yes, but if they don't register it and if women sell there, then it is their ọjà like this is our ọjà now. At first they did not register it, they kept driving us away, then I think they got tired and registered it.

Q. If the local government decided to close a market because it was not approved by them, and therefore not registered, would you agree with them that it was not a proper ọjà?

A. Look, women must sell in markets. That is the only way they get chop (food) for their children and themselves. We don't know about authorities and what they call a "proper market".

Several older women, obviously irritated by my questions on what a market was and particularly by the references to the local government retorted: 'You know, in our youth this local government that you keep talking about did not exist, and you know what? The markets where we used to sell are still there. Do you know Obun Eko Market? Yes, my father's father told me that this market was there before the White man's arrival in Lagos. So you see, in the olden days, well before the Lagos City Council, we would start selling in a place with the blessing of a chief and that became our ọjà.' Another woman added:

> In Lagos now we don't even need anybody's permission to start an ọjà. All we need is hungry children and then you do not enquire as to whether you are allowed to sell here or there. You sell where you can and if they [City officials] drive you away, you give them a kola and a few minutes so that they may go along and then you return to where you were selling and start all over again. If enough of you do that long enough that will surely become your ọjà, wouldn't it? Look at Yaba railway crossing, the City Council officials have been there trying to clear the traders for more than ten years. When the police come, the traders grab what goods they can and then take to their heels. Since the police must do their work [she laughs] and cannot live there, the traders continue to sell at Yaba, which is now their ọjà. When people are hungry, they can't wait for police to give them an ọjà any more than the police can wait when they are hungry before they go looking for kola (bribe) from market traders. Many of

> the markets now recognised by the officials started that way.[1]

It is clear then that the women's definition and perception of markets differs from the official definition. There is, for instance, an element of possession as when the women talk about 'our' or 'their' market. A market to these women is not an abstract entity, it is personalised. Women talk of having a 'good' or 'bad' market, depending on how the sales have fared. A market is said to be 'lucky' or 'unlucky' again depending on how the entire market turns out. For example, if a woman should have a serious altercation with either a customer or a co-seller (a not infrequent event) then her market is not altogether a 'good' market. This would

---

[1] This observation, which I believe to be substantially correct, is in sharp contrast to, for example, Kenya, where — according to Wood — establishment of markets is firmly under official control. He states:

> ...trading ... may only be conducted at official market places or in designated trading centres... The County Councils usually authorize new markets only after requests have reached them from the local population via the local government hierarchy. If the people of an area feel that they have too few market places or market days, representation is made through the local sub-chief to the chief and the local council for an increase in market provision. The request is then passed to the relevant committee of the County Council... This body usually refuses requests for new market places in close proximity to existing markets; indeed, some districts have by-laws prohibiting the establishment of markets within five Km (three miles) of existing markets and committees only approve new market days that do not create conflict with existing market days. In a few instances, County Councils have unilaterally decided where markets should be sited and when they should operate. It it not unusual for markets imposed by the County Councils to fail completely, indicating presumably that the markets have been established where there is little demand for market facilities or that inappropriate operating days have been chosen (1978:224-5).

be true even if her sales were generally good. A market may also, as we shall see in a later chapter, bring 'good' or 'bad' luck to a woman. This is why, in Yorubaland, it is of critical importance that a woman should start the day with a 'good market'. Failing this, the rest of 'her market' on that day will not be 'good', it will not bring 'good luck'. In short, she will not sell well.

Lagos Markets

Lagos markets follow the same general pattern found elsewhere in Nigeria and in Africa.[1] In this context, markets are broadly classified as urban-rural and periodic-daily. However, as we shall see later, markets — particularly in Yorubaland — do not always fall directly or neatly into these categories.

Markets in Lagos are also classified as either traditional or modern. They are traditional if they antedated the Pax Britannica and modern if they owe their existence to the modern administration. There are also many markets which have sprung up spontaneously in response to the rapidly growing population of Lagos. These, as we have already noted, are difficult to classify.

Origins of Lagos Markets

Markets of Yorubaland, of which Lagos is a part, are — as noted in the last chapter — an integral part of Yoruba traditional culture. Reports by early explorers such as

---

[1] See, for example, essays in Bohannan and Dalton (1962); Hodder and Ukwu (1969); Sudarkasa (1973); Meillassoux (1971); Garlick (1971); Hill, (loc. cit.); Sada and McNulty (1974) and many others.

Adams (1800), Clapperton and Lander (1829) and some missionaries show that they existed before contact with Europeans. Any attempt to reconstruct their origin relies, perforce, on oral accounts which are sometimes conflicting.

For example, it has been suggested that their origin can be traced to Yoruba settlement patterns and political organisation. The former are characterised by urban clusters, while the latter centres around chiefs who invariably founded town markets near their residences. The function of these markets was to facilitate exchange of goods within towns and between towns. Of these markets, Johnson (1921:90) has written that:

> ... the principal market of the town is always in the centre of the town and in front of the house of the chief ruler. This rule is without an exception and hence the term Ọlọja (one having a market) is used as a generic term or title of all chiefs...
>
> The larger the town, the larger the principal market. The central market also contains the central mosque of the town and the fetish temple of the chief ruler, if he be pagan.

It has also been suggested that the origin of Yoruba markets can be explained by (1) the perennial insecurities discussed in the last chapter, and (2) the long-distance trading or caravan routes characteristic of early Yoruba history. In other words, constant internal strife necessitated the creation of markets as neutral grounds where peaceful commerce and trade could be carried out. In this connection, Hodder (1969:25) has written:

> Insecurity was also reflected in the exact location of many early markets a number of which were outside the settlements. Clearly neutral grounds between warring factions were unlikely to be within a town; and should a fight break out in a market, the damage was certain to be less in farm or bush

> than in compound land. Even when a market was held in town, its precise location still reflected the need for security. Many of the Yoruba towns were walled and the market was held just outside the gate ... insecurity often explains why the earliest markets were often associated with names of ... strong capable men of influence who could keep the peace, ensure safe conduct to travellers and protect those who came to trade.
>
> Traditional markets then, reflect in a number of ways certain adaptations to the prevailing conditions of insecurity within the Yoruba country.

Apomu market, in the old Ife Kingdom, is a famous example of a traditional market where traders from different kingdoms met regularly for trade.

Long-distance trading could not have been possible if people along the caravan routes proved constantly inhospitable. Long-distance trading required that traders, sometimes as many as 4000 (Townsend 1856:92) should be able to find resting places where they could secure food and shelter, but above all, friendly relationships. Eventually some of these 'resting places' became 'permanent' markets. Of this, Johnson (ibid.:90) has written, 'if the site be on a caravan route, so much the better; the wives of the farmers, ever ready to provide refreshments for weary travellers, render the spot in time a recognised halting place'.

Ṣapọn market in Abeokuta is one such example. Its origin and name (Ṣe Apọn Li Ọrẹ, that is, doing favours to bachelors) are said to date back to the time when caravans would stop there for food and shelter (Ajiṣafe, 1924:69).

On the question of the origin of Yoruba markets, Krapf-Askari (1969:45) writes:

> Major markets could only, in traditional Yoruba-land, be created by command of an Ọba:... The market is thus, in most cases, both spatially and ritually related to the Ọba from whose existence, in Yoruba eyes, the settlement derives its status; or, in the case of a non-metropolitan town, to the bālẹ ọlọjà, the "bālẹ who owns the market".

It is probable, then, that the Lagos markets such as Ebute-Ero, Obun Eko, Iddo, Ebute-Ero Wharf, and so on, were similarly founded. Indeed, Aderibigbe (1975:4) notes that Ebute-Ero Wharf in Lagos was used as a 'landing place for traders and travellers from different parts of Yorubaland and a most successful market place'.

Periodic Markets

One of the main purposes of periodic markets, it seems, is to replenish the stock of traders in the daily markets (Mabogunje, 1968:80). Generally, but not necessarily always, Yoruba periodic markets operate a four-day and eight-day cycle. There are some that have a two-day cycle but they do not exist in Lagos. This classification has been queried by Marshall[1] (1962:159). In taking Hodder to task over this issue, her contention is that Yoruba people speak of a 5-5 day market (ijọ karun karun) and a 9-9 day market (ijọ kẹsan kẹsan), and hence they should be so classified. Sudarkasa writes:

> Yoruba markets of the present day are still held daily or periodically. Yoruba speakers refer to the periodic markets as 'five-day' markets or 'nine-day' markets. They are held at intervals of four days and eight days respectively, however, in reckoning market days. Yoruba speakers calculate from the day on which the market is held, up to and including the subsequent market day. Thus, when a five-day market is held on Monday, the subsequent market falls on Friday, which is reckoned to be the fifth day following. If a nine-day market

---

[1] Originally Gloria Marshall, now Niara Sudarkasa.

> meets on Monday, the next market day would be Tuesday of the following week, which is the ninth day hence.

Hodder's classification of a 4-day and 8-day cycle is used here not because as Hodder (1969:60) has said: 'Educated Yoruba use the term "4-day" and "8-day" to refer to these time periods;' but rather to indicate the significance of the number four in Yoruba cosmology. Indeed, as Hodder (ibid.) himself notes: 'Four is the sacred Yoruba figure and their standard unit of calculation. This is rooted mainly in Yoruba religion, one day being set aside for each of the four major deities and their local variants'.

It is tempting to suggest that the Yoruba market 'ring' of a four-day and eight-day week is a consequence of Yoruba social organisation. That is, the holding of markets every four-four days, or every eight-eight days, the latter being a multiple of four, seems more than a coincidence. As another writer (Kamau, 1976:340) has noted, 'The association of the number four with stability and order is clearly shown in the Yoruba concept of cosmos. The natural world (ile aiye) and the supernatural world (ile orun) are believed to be isomorphic and the former is a reflection of the latter. Ideally, both are four squares'.

Lagos Periodic Markets

Originally, most Lagos markets seem to have operated either as periodic or as daily (l'ọjọ́jùmọ̀) markets. According to Mabogunje (1968), Sada and others (1968:159), only seven (Ebute-Ero, Obun-Eko, Oyingbo, Mushin, Iganmu, Apapa and Agege) remained periodic by 1940. By the 1970s, only five exhibited marked periodicity. These are: Obun-Eko, Ebute-

Ero, Mushin, Oyingbo and Agege.

Obun-Eko is the oldest of all Lagos markets. Located in the heart of the city, it operates a four-day week mostly as a food market, although locally produced and imported goods can also be found. This market has strong links with the Ọba of Lagos, which suggests that it may originally have been founded by the first ruler. Important ceremonial occasions, in particular the installation of the Oba of Lagos, are carried out at this market.

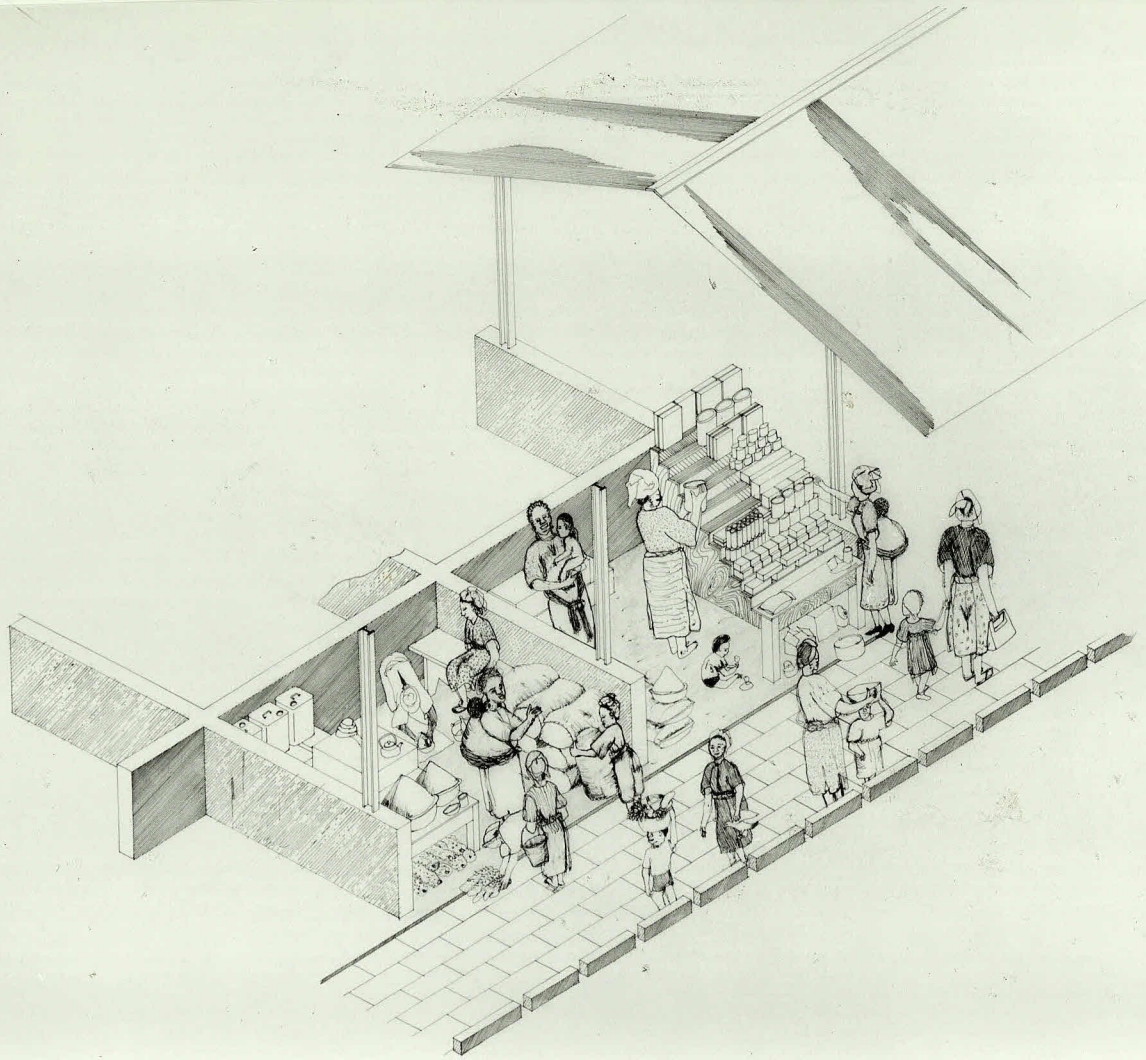
Ebute-Ero. There have been disagreements as to whether this market is to be classified as daily or periodic. The discrepancy arises from the fact that a large number of traders at Ebute-Ero are known to visit other periodic markets, thereby reducing attendance at this market considerably. Also, traders from other periodic markets converge there on 'market days'. This leads to significant variation in size and attendance. Traders at this market classify it as periodic.

Mushin has a four-day cycle. Founded in the mid-eighteenth century, it serves as a distribution centre for smaller markets, mostly of food products. It has a strong daily attendance which is about half its market day capacity. Like most periodic markets, it has a strong pre-market session. This usually takes place the evening before the actual market day. The Yoruba term for this phenomenon is Ana'le from the Yoruba word Anaṣile (Sada et al. 1978:160), and is characteristic of periodic markets. Mushin has the advantage of being served by a railway facilitating movement of goods and traders from all over the Federation.

Oyingbo is the biggest of all Lagos periodic markets. It is near the Lagoon and a major highway. Because of its convenient location between Lagos Island and the mainland, it is attended by people from all parts of the city. Like Mushin, Oyingbo also has a substantial pre-market session. On non-market days it is slightly more than half its normal size. Like most of the other periodic markets in Lagos, it serves as a bulk and distribution centre mainly for food products.

Agege, like the others, has a four-day week. Of the Lagos periodic markets, it is the furthest from the city centre, bordering on the rural areas. Like Mushin, it enjoys a railway service specialising in kola-nuts brought by Hausa traders from the northern parts of the country. Like the other periodic markets, Agege usually doubles its size on market days. Also, perhaps due to its proximity to the rural areas, Agege serves as a wholesale vegetable market for other markets in the Lagos area (Sada et al. ibid.:161).

There is considerable disagreement as to whether the periodic markets in Lagos should be classified as periodic or daily. The fact that none of them is substantially deserted on non-market days accounts for the difficulty. In some of the literature, the majority of these markets are termed periodic. Other works describe them as daily. The daily characteristic of these markets may be explained by Stine's (1962) thesis that as communities become progressively more urban, periodic markets gradually become daily markets. To this extent, there are no purely periodic markets in Lagos.



MARKET IMPRESSION
IN LAGOS

Lagos Daily Markets

There are three types of daily market in Yorubaland. Firstly, there are the morning markets which start between 0600 and 0700 and end about 1100. Secondly, there are the day markets. These are the most numerous and most important of urban daily markets. They usually open between 0700 and 0800 and close by about 1700 or 1800. Thirdly, there are night markets starting at about 1800 and ending at about 2200 or 2300. The first and last of these types of daily markets have all but disappeared from the Lagos scene. The daily markets discussed here, therefore, refer to the day markets.

The difficulty in reporting the exact number of markets in Lagos has already been discussed. As the list given shows, only eighteen markets were, until recently, officially acknowledged by the local government as 'legally established'. During the same period, the Market Women's Organisation recognised forty-three. Their counting was based (as it is now) on their traditional leadership structure which has one chief leader for each market. Their reporting is here taken as probably the most accurate.

The number and complexity of daily markets in Lagos rules out any detailed reporting on them in this work. It is enough to say that daily markets vary considerably both in size and importance. For example, in terms of space, the really big markets may occupy as much as ten acres or more, the smaller ones no more than an acre.

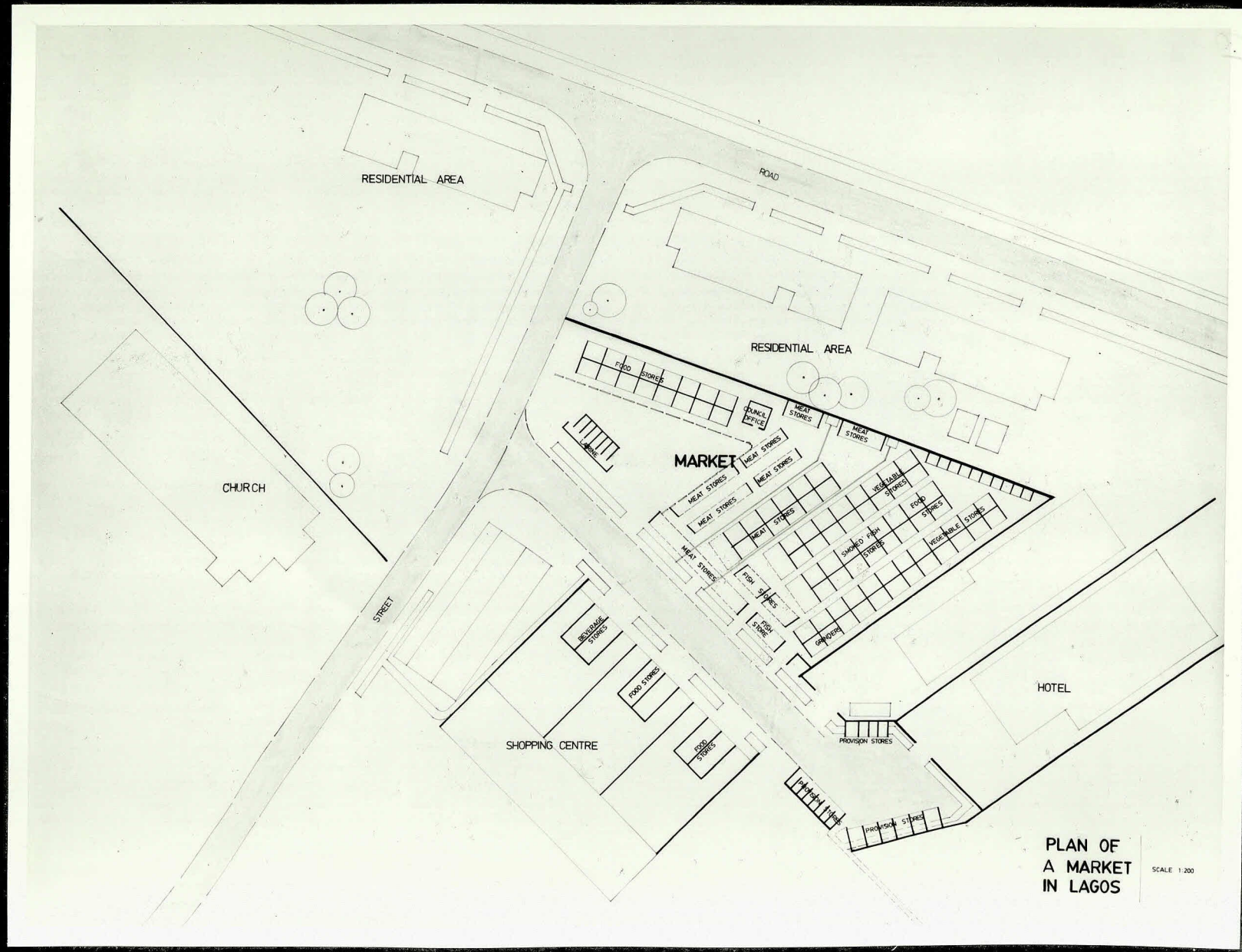
The bigger markets (such as Idumagbo, Ebute-Elefun, Tejuoso, Sandgrouse, Iddo, Ebute-Ero, Alayabiagba, etc.) may have up to 10,000 people attending them on a busy market

day. This excludes the regular traders in these markets, who normally number about 1000-3000 licence holders. The smaller markets, like the one described in the next chapter, may have as few as 80-85 regulars; that is, traders who hold licences. The number in attendance in these latter markets is correspondingly smaller.

These figures give some indication of the volume of activity carried out in the market place. For instance, Kataria (n.d.:91) who carried out field work at Agege periodic market reported an attendance of some 10,000 people on market day. While this figure may be slightly on the high side, 10,000 is not an impossible figure. McCall (1962:674) reported, albeit with some caution, 28,632 people attending Koforidua market in Ghana on a non-market day. These data were collected over thirty years ago. Some of the really big markets in Lagos could easily rival these figures on a busy day.

Daily markets in Lagos are either general or specialised although these labels are relative. They are general if they stock 'practically everything' from motor-car spare parts to foodstuffs. Idumagbo, the biggest market in Lagos, is an excellent example of such a market, perhaps because of its enormous size. Specialised markets tend to be mostly food markets.

Markets, particularly daily ones are — as this thesis will attempt to show — supremely important. It is impossible to imagine Lagos without them. Two factors in particular account for their significance. The first has to do with problems of storage facilities, particularly of perishable


RESIDENTIAL AREA
ROAD
RESIDENTIAL AREA
CHURCH
STREET
MARKET
FOOD STORES
COUNCIL OFFICE
MEAT STORES
LORRY
VEGETABLE STORES
FOOD STORES
SMOKED FISH STORES
FISH STORES
GARDENS
BEVERAGE STORES
SHOPPING CENTRE
HOTEL
PROVISION STORES
PLAN OF
A MARKET
IN LAGOS
SCALE 1:200

commodities. The second to the general level of cash-income which means that most urban dwellers can only afford to buy small quantities at any particular time. Since they cannot buy in bulk, they are entirely dependent on small retailers. These are usually — but not always — concentrated in neighbourhood markets.

Street Trading

In conjunction with daily markets there are thousands of vendors and small traders in Lagos. The latter attach themselves to the various daily markets, hence the official term 'squatters'. They also occupy various streets, especially around the business areas in central Lagos. They sit in front of their houses, displaying their small quantities of goods for passers-by. Here, women can care for their children as well as take care of their homes or 'chat' with neighbours and relatives. Or they might sit with their wares in any open space where customers can be found. Pavements outside big department stores and offices are particularly favoured because of the large number of people going in and out of these places.

Boys and girls, especially the former, can be seen hawking small imported items which they carry on trays along the major trunk roads. Busy highways are important and logical targets because of the heavy concentration of motorists, who are not averse to buying goods ranging from toys to pocket calculators. The perennial traffic congestion discussed in the last chapter gives an added incentive to highway trading.

Night street trading, as opposed to night markets, is also prevalent. Traders, mostly young children and women, display their goods by candlelight (many streets are unlit). They sell anything from sticks of imported cigarettes to tinned food products and toiletries. Chief Dare (the late secretary to Lagos City Markets and the Women's Association) made the observation that 'all Lagos is a market' (Sada and McNulty, 1974:10). The statement is indeed a graphic one.

Street trading in Lagos, however, is illegal. It is an offence to sell or to buy. The trading causes innumerable problems of congestion and sanitation. Police attempt to arrest street traders but their remarkable resilience seems to defy all police efforts.

Lagos City Local Government Administration

Initially, markets in Lagos came under the traditional leadership structure of market women's organisations with the Oba of Lagos as the ultimate head. However, with the usurpation of the Oba's authority, the running of the City's markets was transferred to Lagos City administration through an ordinance passed in 1922. This also empowered the City Council to establish new markets as the need arose. The Council began to exercise this power in the early 1930s when they took over several markets and instituted levies on stallholders. By 1942, the Council was collecting some £3,400 annually, which reached over £100,000 by the mid-sixties.

From 1967, until recently, markets in Lagos have been under the supervision of the public health department following the recommendation of the Saville Tribunal Report. They are



Traders take their turn to pay their stall dues

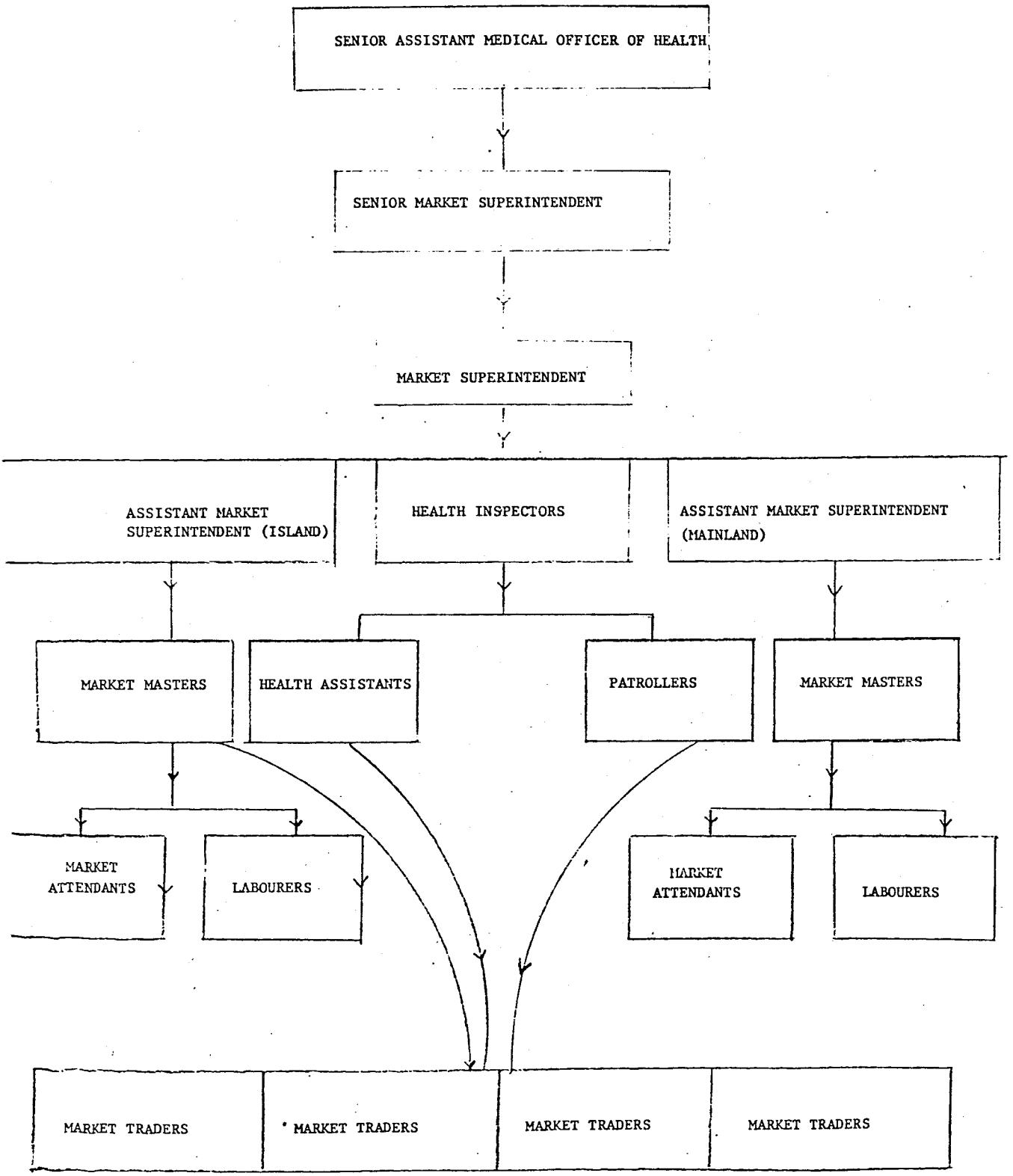
now technically under the supervision of the various Lagos Local Governments. But as we shall see, Lagos City markets are effectively under two administrations. In addition to the local government, all markets in Lagos are also under the various market women's associations. The local government is invested with de jure power over all 'legally established' or 'gazetted' markets and 'wares'. The market women's leadership exercises de facto authority over all markets without exception (Sada and McNulty, 1974a:150). The figure overleaf indicates the leadership hierarchy of the former Lagos City Council market administration.

In return for the revenue collected, the Council is expected to provide a minimum of essential facilities and services. These should include at least drinking water, garbage receptacles, toilet facilities, adequate drainage systems, and repairing of dilapidated stalls. The extent of facilities existing in Lagos markets in the mid-1970s is shown in the table on page 67.

From the figures in this table it is obvious that essential facilities are grossly inadequate. Flooding in some markets makes walking all but impossible. The existing toilet facilities are extremely poorly maintained. Stalls roofed with mat-thatch and loosely-connected sticks constitute — in the event of fire — a real threat to life and property. Drinking water is inadequate. At Agege and some other big markets, traders can be seen queueing for water in nearby petrol stations, sometimes for over an hour. On busy market days, it may well be several hours.

FIGURE 1:

THE LEADERSHIP HIERARCHY IN MODERN MARKET ADMINISTRATION AT LAGOS CITY



Source: Sada and McNulty, 1974:151

TABLE 3

MAJOR FACILITIES IN THE MARKETS

	No. of Markets	Gov't. Built Stalls	No. of Sanitary Labourers per Market	Health Facilities			No. of Markets with Concrete Floors	Roofing			Drainage
				Water	Dustbins	Toilets		Corrugated Iron	Asbestos	Mat/ Thatch	
Lagos Municipal Area	16	12	5	13	16	10	13	11	2	2	12
Mushin	8	3	1	2	5	2	5	6	1	1	1
Ajeromi	4	0	2	0	2	1	1	3	1	0	0
Ikeja	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	-	1	-	1
Agege	1	1	6	1	1	1	1	1	-	-	0
	30	17	16	17	25	15	21	21	5	3	14

Source: Sada, P.O. and McNulty, M.L. (1974:165)

Some of the biggest markets like Oyingbo, Iddo, Mushin, Sandgrouse, and so on, have only a few cleaners, sometimes only one. The women are understandably resentful of and angry with the local government officials. They incessantly complain of 'taxation without benefits'.

During my field-work I was told that women had to raise funds in order to provide some of the most essential services which the Council had failed to provide. This was in addition to the rents they pay for their stalls. The money they raised went to, for instance, the payment of night-watchmen and cleaners. The former are needed because a large number of stalls, probably most, are not lock-up stalls, and traders cannot carry all their wares home each day.

In the meantime, Council officials are much in evidence collecting one form of fee or another. Market women consider them exploiters and a menace. On one occasion, I witnessed a serious conflict between health inspectors and traders in a market. Police were called in but the case was settled out of court after a long debate chaired by one of the leaders of the market women. She had to give kola to the police.

Traditional Leadership Structure at Lagos Markets

The traditional leadership hierarchy is centred around the various market women's associations with, as I have said, the Oba at the top of the pyramid. But as Hill (1966:297) has pointed out, any serious attempt to understand this authority structure has to be divorced from the concept of 'owner of the market' (ọlọjà). The Oba and other chiefs do not 'own' Lagos markets in the sense reported for many



Head of United Market Women's Association

markets in West Africa or in the way they did in traditional Yoruba society. This is not to deny that some chiefs do exercise influence over certain markets in Lagos, but rather to emphasise the fact that the authority structure is invested in a group of women in each market. This division of labour means that no ceremony of significance can be contemplated, let alone performed, without, for example, the presence of the Olu of Mushin (the chief who is the de facto head of the markets in the Mushin area) or in his absence, his representative.

The chiefs' authority over Lagos markets is at this level. It is extremely rare in Lagos and indeed unusual that a dispute at a market place would draw the attention of the Oba. He could, however, intervene in conflicts between official administration and the market traders and this is as far as his intervention goes.

To understand how the markets are run in terms of settlement of disputes and the maintenance of peace, we have to turn to the leadership hierarchy in the markets.

In terms of market peace, markets in Lagos are well-run. Strict discipline is maintained by a well-organised leadership hierarchy headed by Àlàga (presidents or market chairwomen). Their authority is rarely questioned. Àlàga are usually very old women: other women tend to look up to them, the way they would to a mother. Àlàga are only answerable to the Ìyálóde who is second only to the Oba. The Ìyálóde or Ìyálójá is not head of any particular market. As such, she is not



The Alàga of Tejuoso Market

directly involved in the day-to-day running of the markets. She is, however, regularly consulted by all the Alaga about market matters through meetings frequently held at her home. She wields immense power with market women but this is usually restricted to political issues affecting them.

There is only one Alaga for each market. Baker (1974:230) asserts that 'two or three leaders may co-exist for some time in a single market but usually one emerges as a dominant Alaga'. My information contradicts Baker's. Prominent women leaders such as the Alaga of Tejuoso, the head of the United Women's Association, Alhaja Abibatu Mogaji, and the Alaga of Gbaja market told me that such a leadership vacuum cannot be allowed to take place. Indeed, this would not ordinarily arise since the hierarchy is always well-defined. In the event that an Alaga should die, her deputy automatically takes over, until a new leader is chosen.

The selection of an Alaga by market women is based on such criteria as age, character, temperament, skill, wealth, wisdom and personal popularity. She only settles disputes that are relatively important. Some of these would include theft, persistent price-slashing, frequent and serious altercations (especially with customers, but also between sellers), failure to repay debts and disobedience to one's husband!

An Alaga may suspend or even expel a recalcitrant and difficult woman trader from a market. She can also levy fines according to the seriousness of the offence. Women have been suspended for periods ranging from one week to several months. Her decision is usually final. An appeal

may be made to the Iyálóde against an Alàga's decision, but again her verdict is usually upheld. Alàga usually retain their position until death. They may relinquish their positions if forced by family circumstances to move to a new environment but this rarely happens.

Next to the Alàga in the leadership hierarchy are heads of sections, especially in big markets. These section heads are called Iyá Egbe. They see to relatively minor disputes and are responsible for price fixing. That is, they determine the price below which a commodity may not be sold. They only take cases to the Alàga if, after trying very hard, they cannot settle them.

Below the Iyá Egbẹ are commodity heads, known as O-Lòri - Egbé. These are responsible for keeping the peace within their small sections where women are selling identical commodities — for example, fresh fish sellers, cooked food, rice, yams, gari, fruit, beans, palm oil, groundnut oil, fowl, native medicine, peppers, and the like. Sellers of each of these commodities are headed by an O-Lòri - Egbé and like the Iyá Egbé, she settles all disputes that take place within her domain. She also sets the minimum but not the maximum price for which a commodity should be sold. This, like in the bigger sections, is decided consensually through consultation with the sellers. In Lagos markets, in contrast with markets elsewhere in West Africa, consistent under-selling is considered a serious infraction of market rules, and is not tolerated for long. On the other hand, selling beyond the fixed minimum price is enormously admired as a manifestation of business acumen.

According to one Àlàga, the leadership hierarchy in market places is structurally similar to that found in an Oba's palace. For example, each Àlàga has a council of elders who assist the Àlàga in dispute settlement. The following shows the order of seniority.

Alaga's Council	Iya Egbe's Council
A	B
1. The Àlàga (President)	1. Ìyá Ẹgbẹ́ (Head)
2. Awotegun (Vice-President)	2. Apase (she gives orders)
3. Balogun (War Chief)	3. Asoro (the Speaker)
4. Otun Awotegun (Secretary)	4. Olopa (Policeman)
5. Otun Balogun (Asst. Secretary)	

When there is a debate, these are the elders who take evidence from witnesses and then give their verdict. Since cases which reach the Ìyálóde do so through these channels, it is clear why appeals to her often prove futile. For the Ìyálóde to go against the decision of the market hierarchy would seriously undermine authority structure in the market, since the judgement of all the leaders would be called into question.

Market Women: An Occupational Group?

The term 'market women' has been in common usage in West Africa for centuries. 'Who is a market woman?' 'Any woman who sells in a market is a market woman'. In Lagos, this would be a typical response to the question. It is taken for granted that who a market woman is, is self-explanatory.

Yoruba women are traders first and foremost, even though some do combine farming with trading. This is in contrast to the Igbo women who combine agricultural work with some trading and are not usually full-time traders (Ottenberg, P. 1959 and Ottenberg, S. and P. 1962; Ukwu, 1969:174). Among the Yoruba people, selling and buying in market places is predominantly a female occupation. A major exception to this rule is the selling and distribution of meat. This is almost exclusively a male sphere. But there is an exception. Among the Ijebu-Yoruba, women do sell meat, and in fact I found that all Yoruba women in Lagos who sold meat (and there were extremely few) were Ijebu. On the absence of women in meat trade, Vagale and others (1974:4) remark that, 'This may perhaps be so, owing to the superstition that trading in cattle is bad for women and also owing to the fact that women find it difficult to drive cattle'.

During my field work I discovered a lot of manifest hostility directed towards men who came shopping in markets. They were generally looked at askance. I was informed that 'men who go to market places are not nice. You can tell a man's character if you know how frequently he goes to markets. In all probability he is very mean with money, and generally distrustful of his wife. You know he is a miser'. Several times I witnessed women sellers become overtly aggressive with men buyers and at times outrightly abusive. Men buyers are subjected to such caustic remarks as 'Oh, what is wrong with your wife, or don't you have one; what of your "house-boy".

A male 'stranger' in Koso market

Surely Oga (big man) must have somebody to shop for him, or eh! you bargain better than a woman?' and so on.

Women buyers are even more aggressive to these men. They complain that these 'greedy' men push up the prices because of their inability to bargain. They have a point. Men feeling coerced and harassed by women sellers tend, more frequently than not, to haggle less, thereby paying several times the 'actual' price. They also go there exclusively to buy and therefore they do not waste time and are impatient about chatting and arguing about the price as women buyers are not. Women customers are seldom in a hurry. Kataria (n.d.) in a major work on Yoruba markets calculated that 'Each customer spends on an average three hours in the market'. On the whole, both women sellers and buyers said that men shoppers at markets tend to be exasperating. In addition, men buyers are less likely than women buyers to tour an entire market bargaining and comparing prices of commodities. Embarrassed that traders will accuse them of 'bargaining like a woman', which is considered humiliating, they usually tend to buy from the first trader that stops them.[1]

In the next section, I attempt to answer the following questions:

1. Who are the market women?
2. Why do women dominate market trade in Lagos?
3. What role, if any, do women play in modern politics?

---

[1] Intense haggling is not peculiar to Nigerian markets. Elsewhere in West Africa, Tardits and Tardits (1962:97) have noted:

> Bargaining is the rule. Prices asked by sellers as well as buyers are always higher or lower than those which are finally agreed upon. Long debates ensue in which praise and insults have their place. The merchant seldom loses money since she may always refuse a disadvantageous bargain, whereas a buyer may be unaware of the market prices or become impatient and lose money.

4. Will the markets in Lagos survive?

Who Are Lagos Market Women?

My field data, which are corroborated by Sada and his colleagues, show that market women are on the average between the ages of twenty and fifty. Eighty to ninety per cent are Yoruba, depending on the market. They are largely illiterate, although the younger women may have had some elementary schooling. They are mainly Muslim, with an ardent desire to ~~pay~~ On pilgrimage to Mecca, which is prestigious and a status symbol. A significant proportion of market women are married polygynously and many of those who are not, aspire to be. Over 90 per cent of Lagos market women are married, with - on average - four children (Sada et al. 1974). They aspire to a higher number, 'as many as God gives'. A substantial number of them are migrants, mostly from nearby Yoruba rural areas and towns. Their average income is about ₦300 per annum (£234). This was roughly true of the market where I carried out my field work.

Women's Dominance in Market Places

Women's dominance in market trade is not a recent phenomenon. Available written records on Yoruba trade show that this has been the case for centuries. Today, over 90 per cent of traders in Lagos are women. The 1952 population census showed that over 80 per cent of traders in Lagos were women,

while the 1963 population census showed that over 70 per cent for Lagos and more than 66 per cent for Ibadan (another predominantly Yoruba city) to be traders. The official statistics may be on the low side due to women not reporting correctly because of fear of taxation.

Hodder traces Yoruba women's dominance in trade to 'times of insecurity when women normally met for trading purposes on neutral grounds between warring groups' (1969:50). For him, the predominance of Yoruba women 'dates back to conditions of internal insecurity in which it was unsafe for men to move away from their farms, while women enjoyed relative immunity from attacks' (1962:116). To the extent that Yoruba were not the only people torn by tribal wars, Hodder's explanation seems inadequate.

The Yoruba form of settlement is probably the single most powerful explanation for women's dominance in market trade. Yoruba farms are invariably several kilometres from their towns. As Sudarkasa (1973) argues, since division of labour left minding of the young and taking care of the home to women, it makes sense that they should stay close to the home. Trading activities, then, as is true today, could easily be combined with other family duties.

In some Yoruba areas, it is customary for the husband, on marriage, to give his wife a small amount of capital with which to start trade. In Ghana, where some Yoruba migrant women are keen traders, Goody (1969:167) observes that:

> Yoruba women undertake a great deal of petty trading... These trading activities require knowledge, skill and determination; at marriage wives are set up as traders by their husbands, who then provide them with a loan so that they

> can select, at cost price, those goods from his store which they think likely to sell.

In most African societies, women are expected to contribute towards family maintenance. They do this mostly by helping in the fields. These are usually located a short distance from their homes so that they too are able to combine familial roles with farming. Since Yoruba women do not usually work in the fields, it seems reasonable that they should have turned to trade. Another reason for trading was that a woman could sell her husband's agricultural produce in the market place.

In urban centres today, there is also the problem of limited opportunity for gainful employment. Women with small children cannot work in the factories. Lack of skills militates against them in practically all spheres of the modern sector, as well as in businesses which require a substantial outlay of funds. In small-scale and petty trading as Mintz (1974:270) has shown, the story is quite different. Of Haitian women traders he has written:

> A young girl, the daughter of landed peasants, may initiate her career in commerce with no more stock than several hands of ripe bananas coming from her parents' land. No cash outlay is calculated in the acquisition and resale of this stock. She will try to sell it to other retailers at the mouths of paths leading to the market road, thus avoiding the payment of taxes or market fees. By repeating this manoeuvre, she may be able to acquire enough capital to begin buying hard goods such as soap or matches to sell in local markets; or to buy fowls in her rural district to resell to poultry merchants from the town... The distinction here is not one of scale of capital; rather it has to do with the family associations of the marketer. If she can draw on the family's resources in kind, her capital, however limited, is endowed with a manoeuvrability which that of the indigent or "detached" marketer rarely possesses.

This is how most 'petty traders grown large' to use Hunter's (1962:32) terminology, started their trading careers.

Lack of education also excludes the illiterate woman from businesses which are beyond mental arithmetic. However, as Hunter (1962:135) points out, the myth of the illiterate African trader with 'a large roll of hundreds of pounds' has persisted, despite massive data to the contrary. Child-bearing and home-making preclude her from long distance trade which would be more lucrative. As Nadel (1942) discovered, she would have to be barren to survive in long distance trading. All these factors combine to exclude her from money-making activities which are outside small scale trading.

There are in Lagos today several women traders who, like Madame Tinubu (a great slave dealer in the last century) or like those reported by Bauer (1954) operate businesses worth hundreds of thousands of naira (1 naira is approximately 80 pence). Some of these women are illiterate but they have access to thousands of naira-worth of credit with various banks, maintain services of hired accountants and deal mainly in textiles. Their numbers are statistically insignificant compared to the majority of women engaged in trade. 'Numerically, the great majority of these traders will be small and poor, making a few shillings, sometimes a few pence in the day, pin-money for women, a little cash from surplus vegetables or handicraft. Their skill is in selling, in carrying in their heads figures of pennies and halfpennies, in finding a bargain from each other and selling to a stranger' (Hunter, loc. cit.:133).

There are also women traders who operate other sorts of businesses, ranging from small provision shops to hair-dressing salons and dressmaking establishments. And though they outnumber the textile dealers, they are also in a comparatively small class. Again, this is because of the initial capital required to start these businesses. This is usually far greater than that required to start trading in a market when women can start with a few oranges or tomatoes.

Market Women and Modern Politics

Market women in Lagos are not organised as a pressure group in the sense that workers in Euro-American continents are. They are, however, acutely conscious of local and national politics to the extent that these affect food prices and their well-being. The word 'inflation', for example, is used freely (untranslated) by most women, whether illiterate or not.

Politicians are categorized into those for market women and those against. The former are those who advocate lower food prices and education for all. Herbert Macauley is one of their greatest heroes since the women say he spoke for them. That was almost forty years ago. Today they feel that politicians have not been concerned with their lot, otherwise 'inflation' would not be allowed to hit them so hard. This is a recurring theme with most market women.

Market women in Lagos have been known to put up stiff resistance against government policies. The most memorable incident occurred in the 1940s when the government introduced

food rationing, price control and the directive that women should be taxed. Led by Alimotu Pelewura, the Alaga of Ereko market, women stayed away from Lagos markets. Pelewura, several times arrested, continued a gallant struggle against the government. With the full support of all the market women, she refused to acquiesce until the demands of the women were met. The government had to yield. Unfortunately, she died soon afterwards.

More recently, the market women at Oyingbo went 'on strike' and for almost six months refused to pay rents for their stalls. They were protesting against what they considered to be appallingly poor conditions existing in this market.

There are other precedents of women's revolts in Nigeria. The Aba women had acted similarly against the colonial government, although with graver consequences, in what came to be known as the Aba women's riots. Ifeka-Moller (1975) prefers to call it the women's war. This incident left several women dead and many wounded. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti also waged a brilliant campaign against the government about forty years ago when women were about to be taxed in Abeokuta. She and her followers forced the Alake (king) of Abeokuta to flee his palace for a considerable period. The struggle continued until their demands had been met with the result that women did not have to pay taxes.

Experience has made Lagos politicians aware of the market women as a force that can make or break their careers. The struggle between the two major political parties in Lagos in the past, the N.C.N.C. and the Action Group, has split

the market women into two major groups. They are the Lagos City Market and Women's Association and the United Market Women's Association. The former claimed to have a membership of 63,000 traders in the 1960s, over 85 per cent of them women. The latter, headed by Alhaja Abibatu Mogaji, who succeeded Alhaja Pelewura, told me that their organisation is the true representative of all market women in Lagos, a claim vehemently denied by the leadership of Lagos City Market and Women's Association.

Another less important market women's association is Ebutero-Alakoro-Elefun Market Women's League. The leadership of this organisation claims that the other two have totally failed Lagos market women. They think they can offer women a real alternative. They admit, however, that they have yet not achieved much for the market women but 'pray' for time.

On the whole, the women are not enthusiastic about politics and politicians. They make two major points. The first is that politicians are not always to be trusted; the second, they mistrust the bureaucratic machinery in government offices.

In the past, politicians have been known to coerce market women into voting for them. Money has also been collected from them for services that were never rendered and that money never refunded (Rapson Report, 1959). As to bureaucracy, they argue that this is not African. Their loyalties are mainly to the Oba whom they feel still understands and upholds 'the African way of life'. They consider him their leader, although they are aware that the

real power lies with the politicians. They argue that for most of the market women, the Lagos government represents some sort of an abstract entity, far removed from their daily aspirations. They are alive to the powers of the Lagos local government hierarchy which they abhor. The older market women express nostalgia for days gone by when government meant 'holding a parley', where conflicts were resolved through 'talking things over'. This they constantly talk about, comparing it with the government of today and the conclusion is that the 'old way' is better and more humane.

Will the Lagos Markets Survive?

Most economists (Hill, 1966 is one of the few exceptions), argue that as the supermarket syndrome proliferates, market places will disappear from the African urban scene. The argument presupposes that developments in African urban communities will be similar to those in western countries. So far, markets — particularly in Lagos — have shown remarkable resilience. Rather than diminishing, they have tended to proliferate.[1]

The percentage of the Lagos population that patronises the few supermarkets, either frequently or exclusively, is infinitesimal compared to the rest of the Lagos population. It is more than likely that this holds for the rest of the country. In fact, we should expect, given the heavy concentration of the nation's wealth in Lagos, that a lot more people in that city would be visiting supermarkets than elsewhere in the country.

---

[1] See, for example, Barnes (1968:77).

I am unaware of any study attempting a correlation between market attendance on the one hand, and the variables, education, income and age, on the other. My own observations and research show that markets are attended by women of all levels and classes. Even the highest élite would be unlikely to visit the stores of Kingsway, United Trading Company (UTC) or Leventis to buy beans, gari, yams, oranges, peppers, and the like. A study I conducted among senior women civil servants in the Nigerian federal civil service in Lagos, showed that over 90 per cent of this select group shopped exclusively for their foodstuffs in the local markets. The rest said they sometimes bought local foods in the supermarkets, but added that they only did this when they had no household help and had to combine office work with shopping for food.

This is understandable, since foodstuffs in supermarkets are several times more expensive than in local markets. The convenience is too small a gain to be taken into consideration and in any case, we have already seen that most neighbourhoods are blessed with a market, whereas few have supermarkets.

Even for educated women, market shopping is preferable since, invariably, the shoppers come to establish relationships in the markets that are absent from the European-type supermarkets. Educated women of all levels do not hesitate to combine having their hair done in the market (usually plaiting or what is called 'weaving') and doing their shopping at the same time. At market places, the buying and selling is

not strictly an official affair. Most of the élite women I know in Lagos reserve at least one day a week, usually Saturday, for market shopping. Even if economists are right in their prediction, it will be many generations before the Lagos market place disappears.

At the moment, indications are that markets in Lagos — at least as far as food products go — will continue to dominate food trade for a long time to come. In the next chapter, I give an account of one such market in Lagos.

PART TWO

CHAPTER FOUR

KOSO MARKET: THE IMMEDIATE SETTING

History of Koso[1]

Of the Lagos markets, Koso is one of the smallest. A daily market specialising mostly in food products, its history dates back to the 1950s. It is located in Abule, one of the new residential areas of metropolitan Lagos.

In 1955, the Lagos government decided, under the auspices of the now defunct Lagos Executive Development Board (L.E.D.B.) to put into effect a slum clearance scheme, contemplated several decades earlier. The scheme was to affect some 200,000 people, who would eventually be forced out of central Lagos. The City government envisaged that the slum clearance scheme would take place over a period of five to seven years (Marris, 1961:84). It was to cost the government several million pounds and the residents of the affected areas untold misery, anxiety and hardship.

The principal purpose of the scheme was not only slum clearance, but perhaps equally as important was the decongestion of central Lagos. Here, the population density was said to be approaching dangerous proportions, the consequences being frequent outbreaks of infectious disease affecting many people but particularly causing high infant mortality. Of the 200,000 people then, a good number had to be resettled off Lagos Island altogether.

---

[1] For obvious reasons, the name of the market and district described are fictitious.

A housing estate was to be built at Surulere (which in Yoruba means 'patience is rewarded!') on the outskirts of Lagos Island about eight kilometres to the north. For a long time, Surulere was to be known and called workers' quarters; some market women still refer to it as such.

In the initial stages, the housing estate tended to attract a large number of immigrants, mainly Igbo. The immigrants had no primordial ties with, or sentiments for central or 'old' Lagos. In fact, many of them more than welcomed the opportunity to move out of an area where they had hitherto remained 'kobo-kobo' (a Yoruba pejorative term for non-Yoruba). On the other hand, the Yoruba, most of whom had lived in central Lagos for many generations (some claimed that their descendants had been there for centuries), resented being forced to move out. Indeed, many considered central Lagos their ancestral home, a factor only slightly appreciated by government officials, who probably were either ignorant or indifferent.

Many of the displaced Yoruba preferred to move in with relatives not affected, or to some of the older neighbourhoods on the mainland such as Ebute Meta, Yaba, Somolu and Mushin. Marris (ibid.:100) found that 31 per cent of the residents were non-Yoruba, compared to only 6 per cent resident in central Lagos. Most of these 31 per cent were Igbo.

As is characteristic of slums the world over, most of those forced out of central Lagos were illiterate, and therefore, lower-class workers. Trading by their wives had been a major source of income and in most cases the only way of augmenting the family's meagre resources.

At the rehousing estate, women started a campaign for a market. To this day there are several women at Koso market who vividly recall the struggle with the government for a market to be built. This, they argued, would not only give the women a site where they could trade, but would also serve the new community as a whole. The current 'deputy' to the Alaga of Koso market told me, 'For quite a while we campaigned vigorously among women in the workers' quarters to join forces with us. Going from house to house, we would ask women to attend meetings held in my house twice a week, when we would discuss strategies for getting the government to build us a market'.

Koso was finally born in 1961, some four years after the first group of people had moved to the rehousing estate. At this time, a good number of Lagos City councillors were National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (N.C.N.C.) sympathisers, as were most Igbo. Not surprisingly, the allocation of stalls at Koso market overwhelmingly favoured the Igbo with a few Yoruba and a handful of Bini women. I was told that this was because the allocation had been based on party support. Some of the women leaders who had agitated for the founding of Koso were publicly known to have been N.C.N.C. supporters. The Igbo woman who was the first Alaga of Koso market (she is now dead) was also an active N.C.N.C. party member.

However, events at Koso market quickly took a different turn. The Nigerian civil war which broke out in 1966 had the effect, as we have already said, of forcing most of the Igbo out of Lagos, and other non-Igbo cities. At Koso they abandoned their stalls and fled to the old eastern region.

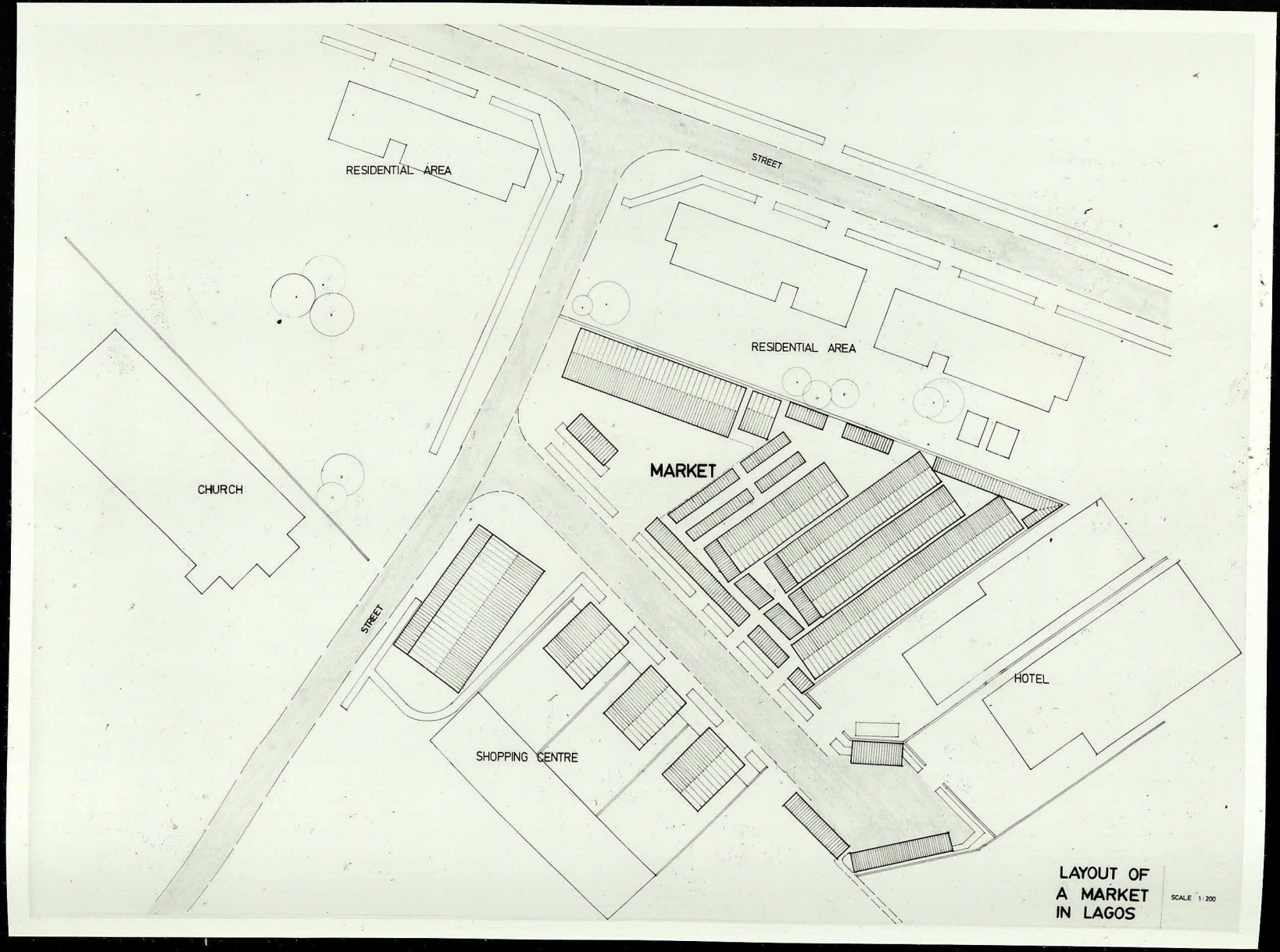
The market was almost deserted. Some had the time to transfer their stalls but most simply left.

The then City Council stepped in and re-allocated empty stalls. By this time, the council was dominated by Action Group (A.G.) sympathisers and supporters. This is the party to which an overwhelming majority of Lagos Yoruba belonged. Predictably, the re-allocation of stalls went mostly to Yoruba women. The present Alága of this market was appointed by the officials. She was a staunch supporter of the Action Group. Today, well into her nineties, she is still actively engaged in Unity Party of Nigeria (U.P.N.) politics. She campaigned vigorously for U.P.N. (a later version of the old Action Group) during the last elections.

In terms of regular licence holders in Koso market, of whom there are about 85, this market is now predominantly Yoruba. At the time of my field work, there were only five Igbo women. The other 14 non-Yoruba women came from the various so-called minority groups, such as Itsekiri, Ishan and Bini. With the Igbo women, they form one block against the Yoruba in Koso market politics. There were no Hausa, or other northern women represented. Without an understanding of the political antecedents outlined here, it would be difficult to grasp the ramifications of the existing cleavages at this market, to be discussed later.

The Physical Layout of Koso Market

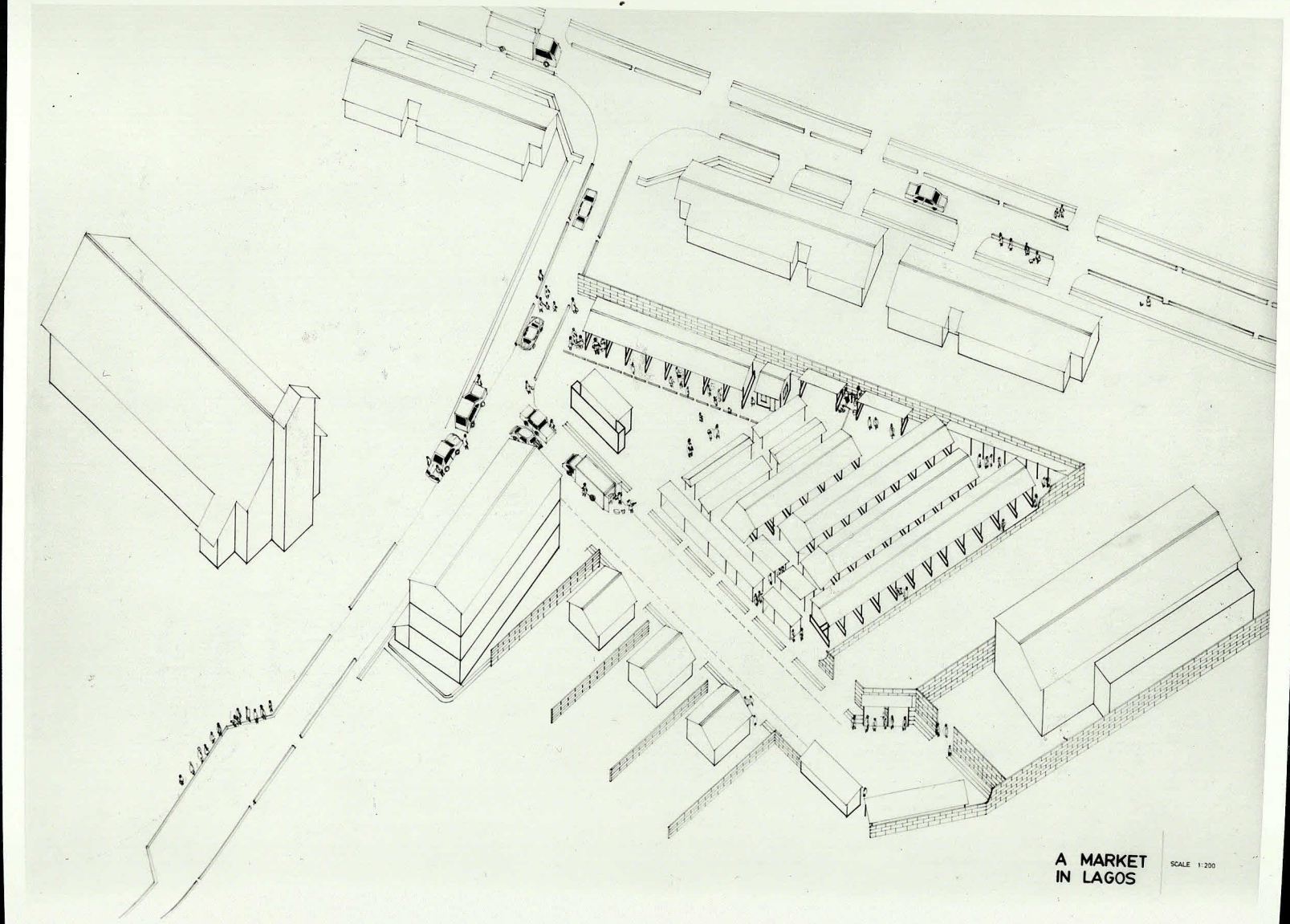
Koso is a very small market occupying about an acre of land. Unlike some other markets in West Africa, this particular market is not completely walled (see figure overleaf).


RESIDENTIAL AREA
STREET
RESIDENTIAL AREA
CHURCH
MARKET
STREET
HOTEL
SHOPPING CENTRE
LAYOUT OF A MARKET IN LAGOS
SCALE 1:200

Instead, it lies inside a 'U'-shaped enclave made possible by a wall which encloses about half to two-thirds of the market. The wall ultimately joins a row of shops and provision stores, thereby completing the 'U' shape. Behind the shops is a block of houses which are mostly residential. A wide, semi-tarred road demarcates the market from the shops and some of the provision stores located on the eastern side of the market. The road going through the market is not a thoroughfare, even though at the southern end there is a small opening or path leading to a major road several metres from the market. On the northern side of the market the road opens into a major street to form a 'T' junction. At the junction there is a large open area, with some open stalls on the side of the market. Across the road, and in front of some shops, is a small car-park. This open area, together with the small opening at the southern side of the market, combine to make it difficult to estimate the number of people visiting this market on any particular day. This is because many people pass through the market without necessarily stopping to shop. However, during the course of the year, I estimated — with the help of research assistants — that on the average about 1200 people visit this market daily. On a Saturday, and around the various Christian and Muslim festivals, the number of people visiting rises sharply to between 2500 and 3000.

Public Facilities

There are 68 open stalls at Koso market, some of which are shared by two women, though most are run by one. Another



A MARKET
IN LAGOS

SCALE 1:200

48 open stalls are also to be found but these are considered illegal by the Local Government authorities. Traders using these stalls are labelled 'squatters' and are the object of constant harassment by the market officials. I was informed that the squatters have to give 60k kola (about 50 pence bribe) to the officials from time to time, in order to be allowed to stay in the market.

The drainage system at this market is relatively good, but despite this, the market does get flooded, particularly during the heavy rain seasons. This is also due to the fact that the general altitude around this area is rather low. (Indeed, some areas in Lagos are said to be below sea level.) Facilities include one public toilet, two water taps and a garbage collection point in the south of the market. The garbage collection is not maintained to the standards that should prevail.

The market is also served by a bus-stop, which is a few yards from the centre of the market. The street passing by the market is a rather busy one so that transportation is frequent and convenient. There are no public buses serving this market, but private transport in the form of Volkswagen mini-buses, known in Lagos as kya-kya, are regular and fares are comparable to those charged in public transport.

The main street serving this market runs into Western Avenue, about one and a half kilometres to the west of Koso market. Western Avenue is one of the main trunk roads in Lagos which connects the mainland with the island, as well as the rest of the country.

The shops (ten of them) mentioned earlier, stock all sorts of commodities ranging from electrical goods to stationery and soft drinks and beer. Even though they are

contiguous to the market, most people do not regard them as part of the market proper. There is also a local government office located inside the market. It opens five days a week, from Monday to Friday. I was unable to ascertain the precise function of this office for fear that women in the market might become suspicious and hostile if they thought I rubbed shoulders with the local government officials. This is because of the existing hostility between the council and the market women, referred to in the last chapter. However I was informed by the women that the office helped to collect stall fees, and generally saw to it that the market ran smoothly.

Commencement of Trading Activities at Koso Market

Serious buying and selling at Koso starts in earnest at about 0830 to 0900 and continues until about 1700 to 1800 hours. These are the busiest hours of the day, although the market is open by about 0700 and does not close until about 1900. Most of the women in this market, on the other hand, like all other market women in Lagos, start their day much earlier than 0700 and may not get home before 1900 or 1930. Over 95 per cent of the women I talked to in this market said they rose at 0500 to prepare breakfast for their families before setting off for the market. A good number of the women also had to attend one of the periodic markets about three times a week, especially those that sold vegetables. For these women, their days began earlier, say, between 0400 and 0430 hours.

The early hours of rising enable women not only to take care of their families before going to the market, but also to travel to and from the periodic markets. Most women prefer to get to the market early, allowing enough time to prepare their stalls, and to display their wares, well before the first customers arrive. Most women too attend the market six days out of seven, while almost half of them attend every day (unless they are sick), especially if they do not have children to help on Sundays.

Table 4 shows market attendance by women at Koso. The table indicates the level of labour input by these women. This has to be viewed in conjunction with the other market activities such as replenishing their stocks in periodic markets. The hours that are recorded for this market are similar to those reported for most of the other markets in Lagos. The women on whom we report here include the 85 regular stallholders, plus 48 other women who occupy temporary stalls. Data on children and men, of whom there are more than 150, are excluded. Observations on time of arrival and departure were collected over a one-year period. To this extent the data are fairly accurate.

Table 4: Distribution of Average Arrival and Departure Times at Koso Market

No. of women	Average time of arrival	No. of women	Average time of departure
1	0700	2	1600
2	0730	15	1630
55	0800	77	1700
64	0830	21	1730
6	0900	14	1800
2	0930	4	1830
133	0815	133	1715

Source: author's field data

Of singular importance for this market is the large number of women who attend the market every day of the week. The table below indicates market attendance by days of the week. Again the data are from the same groups of women as in Table 4 and the work schedule does not inform on children and men at the market. The data cover the same period, October 1978 to October 1979.

Table 5: Average Daily Attendance at Koso Market by the Traders

Week-days	Number of women
Monday	133
Tuesday	134
Wednesday	134
Thursday	130
Friday	134
Saturday	133
Sunday	65

Source: author's field data

As can be seen from Table 5 virtually all the market women attend the market daily, except Sundays, when about half of them attend. Most of the women who stay home on Sunday send their children to take over from them. Women attending market on Sundays, therefore, tend to be — on the average — generally older than those who do not. Most of the women who come to the market on Sundays told me that besides not having helpers, they enjoy meeting their friends at the market on those days. Asked why they could not visit each other at home, the typical reply was that it made sense 'to sell and talk with friends'.

This also makes sense since a large number of workers in private and public sectors do their shopping on Saturdays and Sundays. Most market women cannot afford to let such an

opportunity pass. In fact, most markets are busiest on Saturdays and to a lesser extent on Sundays. As already said, a large proportion of the Lagos population is Muslim and so church services on Sundays do not significantly affect trading activities.

Women going to a market to 'sell and chat with friends' is another indication of the social dimensions of the market place. Most husbands would not query their wives going to the market on Sundays. But, as many women said, they would certainly frown on a wife taking off every Sunday to go and 'chat' with a friend or friends. At market places, where in any case most of their closest friends are, they can easily combine both.

Effects of Christian and Muslim Festivals on Trade Activities at Koso

Like all the other markets in Lagos, Koso is very busy towards the end of each month, when most workers have received their pay. Friday afternoons are the least busy days. Most women and men close their stalls, if they do not have children or other helpers, to attend prayers at mosques.

However, the busiest times in the market are during the various Muslim and Christian festivals. These are the times when people spend a relatively substantial amount of their income on feasts. These festivals, therefore, tend to make market-trading activities rise sharply. Prices of food items are highest at these times in response to high demand, and the fact that market women know only too well that people

save for these occasions. Those selling poultry, lamb, other meat and meat products benefit most, but other food items also tend to be in high demand.

Allocation of Stalls

It is the responsibility of local government officials to allocate stalls and fix the rents to be paid on them if the market is under local jurisdiction. Stalls at Koso are five naira per month (about £3.94 at the current exchange rate). When a woman no longer needs her stall, she is expected to hand it over to the appropriate local government officials, who then re-allocate it to those on the waiting list. My findings indicate that this is seldom done. What actually does happen is that a woman, if she has to vacate her stall, quietly passes it on either to a relative or to a friend — usually the former. During my field work in Koso market, three stalls changed hands this way. Two women died, and one — whom I had come to know extremely well — passed on her stall to her sister's daughter. The two former stalls also went to relatives of the deceased women.

Passing on stalls in this way is done with the permission of the leadership hierarchy and the co-operation of the other traders. They rarely betray each other. My informants said that the local government officials only get involved on the few occasions when a woman dies intestate as it were, and has no children or relatives to 'claim' her stall. Given the African close-knit family, together with classificatory relatives, this is a rare occurrence indeed. But when it

A section selling rice, gari and beans

does happen, the leadership authority at the market has to report to the appropriate local government officers. The Alàga of 'my' market told me that this is because most Alàga would be afraid to give out such a stall, lest they are accused by the other traders of malpractice. Stalls in Lagos markets are in exceedingly high demand as shown by the number of women who are squatters in the various markets. Their allocation is thus political and tricky and most leaders are well advised in steering clear of what could be a politically explosive issue. And, of course, it is not legal to pass on stalls in the manner described here, except in non-recognised markets.

Range of Commodities Sold at Koso Market

The range of commodities sold at this rather small market is quite staggering. There are literally thousands of different items for sale. Indeed, it would be difficult to give a list of all of them, while such an exercise would serve little useful purpose. The following list, then, indicates the major commodities sold in this market, and is far from being exhaustive.

Table 6: Major Commodities Sold at Koso Market

Staple Foods		Fresh vegetables	
Gari	Rice	Green leaves	Okra
Yam	Beans	Tomatoes	Peppers
Yam Flour	Maize Flour	Melon seeds	Onions
Corn	Sweet potatoes	(etc.)	(etc.)
Coco-yam	Wheat flour		
Macaroni	Spaghetti	Fruit	
(etc.)	(etc.)		
		Oranges	Tangerines
Kola nuts	Coconuts	Pineapples	Mangoes
		Paw-paw	Plantains
		Bananas	Grapefruit
		(etc.)	(etc.)

Table 6: (cont'd)

Major Protein

Fresh Meat	Liver
Kidney	Tripe
Cows' feet	Fish (fresh and
Stockfish	dried)
Snails	Shrimps
Dried meat	Poultry and eggs
(etc.)	(etc.)

Tinned foods, etc.

Vegetable oil	Groundnut oil
Margarine	Palm oil
(etc.)	(etc.)

Miscellaneous Items

Condiments	Beverages (i.e. Milo	Baby Foods (i.e.
Native medicine & herbs	Ovaltine, Lucozade,	Cow & Gate, S.M.
Firewood	coffee, tea, etc.)	etc.)
Grinders	Detergents	Insecticides
Stockfish cutters	Modern drugs (but	Locally-made brooms
Pottery	not antibiotics)	Palm kernels
Perfume & toiletries	Local and imported	Sundry foods
Jewellery	textiles	Hardware
Locally-made mattresses	Soft drinks and beer	China & enamelware
and mats		

The wide range of commodities makes it difficult to give an exhaustive list of prices. Also, even though the prices are 'fixed' and 'standard' for some of the items, they are not fixed for the bulk of the commodities. Instead, prices are determined through a process of intense haggling, popularly termed 'bargaining'. The units of measurement also combine with these factors to make it difficult to report anything but very rough price estimates for goods sold at this market.

For example, rice, gari (and other kinds of flour meal), and beans, are measured in small cups or large tins. The latter may sometimes contain twenty or more pounds weight. Vegetables and fruit are sold in batches, and the price one pays depends on whether the batch is small, medium or large. These measurements again vary in the same market depending on the time of day, and to some extent on customer-trader relationship. The difficulty reporting prices accurately is further compounded by seasonal fluctuation. Thus, if one were to report that

Male children assisting their fathers

Women shown selling cow foot, cow skin and tripe

tomatoes are, let us say, 50 kobo per batch of three tomatoes, we would need to know what time of the year this was, as we would in many other countries.

Meat products are never sold in European standard measurements of, for example, pounds or kilograms. These are priced by cuts, even though most meat sellers nowadays do use weighing scales, and their 'final price' for a piece of meat is usually in reference to its weight. Usually, however, both the seller and the buyer do not refer to the scale. It is a guide to the former and severely ignored by the latter. This point is interesting, for while both pretend that the scale is irrelevant, the buyer also knows that the seller will not sell below the 'price' going in the market for, for instance, a pound of meat. In fact, it is the case that if a pound of meat is, say, ₦2.00, no meat seller will sell below this price. The bottom, or minimum 'price', as we shall see later, is usually 'fixed' in advance.

The following table, therefore, is intended to give a very rough idea of some of the major food items sold at Koso market, while the prices shown are also rough guides only.

Table 7: A Selected List of Food Commodities at Koso and their Approximate Prices

Commodity	Approx. price ₦	k	Quantity/Unit of Measurement
Gari		30	Per small tin
Yam	2	50	For one
Rice		30	Per small tin
Yam Flour		25	Per small tin
Beans		30	Per small tin
Chicken	6	50	For one
Fresh fish	2	00	For one (small)
Dried fish	2	00	For one (small)

Table 7 : (cont'd)

Commodity	Approx. price ₦ k	Quantity/Unit of Measurement
Stockfish	2 00	For one (small)
Tomatoes	20/50	For three
Onions	10/20	For one
Peppers	10	Per batch
Eggs	2 40	Per dozen
Salt	50	Per package
Groundnut oil	1 00	Per bottle
Palm oil	1 00	Per bottle
Tinned tomatoes	50	Small tin
Leaf vegetables	40	Per bunch (small)
Fruit	1 00	Per small bunch
Liver	2 00	Per pound (a small piece)
Kidney	2 50	For one
Tripe	3 00	For a small piece
Cows' foot	7 00	Each
Crayfish	50	Per bunch (small)
Snails	1 00	Each
Shrimps	1 00	Per bunch (small)
Plantain	1 00	For four
Semovita	1 70	Per small bag
Bread	50	Per loaf
Milk	25	Per small tin

Source: author's field work

In addition to the few commodities shown in the table above, there is a wide variety of imported food products offered. These generally tend to be sold in what are termed 'Provision Stores' or stalls, located mostly at the fringe of the market.

A few traders specialise in a wide range of cosmetics. They also tend to sell toiletries, perfumes, cheap jewellery, first-aid items and a limited range of modern medicines. These include, among other things, aspirin, milk of magnesia, a variety of laxatives, cough syrups, vitamins, and so on. Traders in this markets, unlike many others in Lagos city (especially street traders) do not sell antibiotics.[1] At least, there were none at the time I carried out my field work.

[1] A wide spectrum of antibiotic is sold in Lagos streets and markets, sometimes one capsule at a time. In local parlance, antibiotics sold this way are termed 'the pill'.

Women selling fish

Three women sold cooked foods. One sold rice and stew while the other two sold stew and staple carbohydrates, such as amala (made from yam flour) and eba (made from gari or cassava flour). The cooked foods are prepared entirely from local foodstuffs. These women prepared breakfast and mid-day meals, the latter being served between 1300 and 1430 hours.

Women selling fresh fish and shrimps do not sell any other commodity, unlike some of their colleagues in the market who may stock several commodities in the same stall. Fish and meat sellers are the busiest traders on any given day in the market. Fish, sold exclusively by women, tends to be cheaper than meat. Women selling a variety of dried fish, on the other hand, tend to be less busy, which explains why they combine fish-selling with other items, such as tomatoes and peppers.

One very elderly woman sold a wide variety of native herbs and medicines. These include cures for menstrual pains, headaches, nausea, stomach-ache, measles, body rashes, back-aches; hair dyes for those going 'prematurely' grey; native powders for beautifying the skin; 'fertility medicines'; herbs for virility and so on.

Meat, and some meat products such as liver and kidney, are sold only by men. This is true for most of Lagos, except as noted in the last chapter, a handful of Ijebu Yoruba women who sell meat in some of the Lagos markets. In fact, the head of meat sellers at Tejuoso market — one of the biggest markets in Lagos City — is a woman. This, I think, is the exception rather than the rule. At Koso there are



A section of the market where plantains, yams and snails are sold

approximately 40 male meat sellers, excluding their assistants. They are located in a particular section of the market (see plan) near the road, and except for women buyers, there are no women or female children selling in this area, which can be considered a male domain.

There are, however, meat products such as tripe, cows' foot and intestines, which are sold by women only. I have never seen a man in Lagos (and I was informed that it happened nowhere in Yorubaland) selling these parts of a cow. Interestingly, these are the most expensive parts of the animal. Live chickens are also sold exclusively by the women in this market as in all others in Lagos.

A few women sell hardware, such as buckets, iron cooking pots, frying pans, scissors, plates, cups, nails, clocks, knives, kerosene lamps, batteries, et cetera. These women also sell other things such as plastic buckets, cups, glasses, toys and machetes.

The following table indicates the number of stalls stocking similar commodities. The list includes the 68 permanent stalls and the 48 which are temporary. It shows clearly that this is primarily a food market.

Table 8: Summary of Major Commodities Sold and the Number of Stalls Selling Them

Similar Commodities	Number of stalls
Staple foods	14
Vegetables	13
Fish, snails and shrimps	20
Palm and groundnut oil and salt	7
Meat, and meat products	29
Provisions	8
Hardware and plastics	7

Table 8: (cont'd)

Similar Commodities	Number of Stalls
Locally-made equipment	3
Fruit	4
Jewellery, cosmetics and drugs	4
Native medicines and herbs	1
Stationery	1
Fabrics	4
Grinding equipment	1
	116

Source: author's field work

Major Sources of Supply of Commodities

The majority of the women at this market obtain their supplies from the periodic markets around Lagos, discussed in the previous chapter. Those selling imported food items said they bought wholesale from United Africa Company (UAC) and Leventis. A few said they travelled out of Lagos two or three times a month to buy their stocks. One woman said she travelled to her home-town in Ijebu every eight days to buy gari. Another went to Oshogbo twice a month where she bought gari and rice. One woman travelled to her home town in Bendel State once or twice a month to get gari, while yet another occasionally travelled to Imo State to buy rice, yams and gari. She said she only did this when she had something important to do in her village. Recently, her aged mother had been unwell; this, she said, offered her a good opportunity to go home more frequently than she otherwise would. The latter four women said, however, that they also used the periodic markets in Lagos.

A broader view of the market



Women traders arrange tomatoes as they talk to each other

Travelling to the hinterland to buy cheaply and sell expensively in Lagos has several drawbacks. Most women cited their family obligations in Lagos as the most dominant factor in not venturing out of Lagos. For example, none of the women, except the one who went to Ijebu, could leave Lagos, buy and return in a day. As the women pointed out, the advantages gained by such long trips would be offset by other factors, such as fatigue, loss of regular clients, transportation costs and wàhálà (trouble) at home with husbands. These arguments make sense. As said earlier, most of the market traders have very little capital for trade and investment. Most cannot afford it, and it would not benefit them to go to the sources of supply. They have to be content with middlemen.

This is where the periodic markets come in. The role of the middleman as distributor in the Nigerian food market is beyond the scope of the present study (it has been extensively dealt with by others), except to say that markets in Lagos are almost entirely dependent on middlemen, so that before commodities finally reach their consumers, they have passed through many hands. The market women repeatedly told me that this is what made food in Lagos so expensive.

One woman summed up the situation in this way:

> In olden days, a woman bought food products directly from a farmer, including her husband, if they were on good terms. This way one could be sure of making good profits. Today, the story is different. We in the markets no longer see the farmers. We buy from those who can afford

Some temporary stalls

> to go to the farms in the interior. Sometimes these people may sell to other people who sell in the big markets like Oyingbo and Mushin or Iddo [all are period markets] before we go to buy it there. Everybody of course wants to make a few shillings and we too have to show a profit. Otherwise our children would not chop. I don't know why they are blaming us. We are not farmers, are we?

Her last remark referred to the fact that a lot of people in Lagos, frustrated and angered by the never-ending rise in food prices, tend to blame the market women for 'hoarding' and 'driving' or pushing up the food prices.

This is not peculiar to Lagos. The recent clashes and conflicts between the Ghanaian market women and the Ghanaian Military Government (A.F.R.C.) drew the attention of the world press. Of that crisis, Harrell-Bond (1980:6-7) has written:

> The women of Mokola market are indeed a force to reckon with as there is a strong bond of unity among them which makes them rally round to protect their interest... Women were regarded as responsible for creating artificial shortages of essential commodities and for other trading malpractices. Market women in particular and traders in general have over the past three years been a thorn in the flesh of both the government and the public as a result of hoarding, profiteering, conditional sale, refusal to sell and smuggling. One of the A.F.R.C.'s first actions was to attempt to enforce controls through policing the market with soldiers. The fact that there were almost no foodstuffs available in the market was blamed on the women who were accused both of diverting goods and of discouraging producers from selling.
>
> The revolution provided an opportune climate for attacking women's dominance in the market place. Justification for these attacks was based on a simplistic view of a market system: there was no food in the market because women had so intimidated the producers that they would not sell. The producers should sell directly to the consumer so as to eliminate the middlemen, i.e. the women traders.

Market women are a convenient scapegoat, but as the woman quoted earlier said, it is hardly their fault. They operate within economic systems of which they are not the architects.

The frequency with which a trader replenishes her stock depends on three factors. Firstly, it depends on what she is selling, for while most food products are perishable, some take longer than others. For example, yams, rice and gari are not as perishable as fruit and most vegetables.

Secondly, her storage space dictates her buying pattern. If a woman is a fresh fish seller, for example, and has a refrigerator, she can store what she has not sold for a day or two. If, on the other hand, she buys more than she is able to sell, and has no refrigerator, she would lose her surplus. Most Koso women (I would say at least 98 per cent) do not own refrigerators. I often witnessed fresh fish sellers weeping, after they had lost several pounds' worth of fish after two consecutive 'bad market days'.

The third factor has already been mentioned, and relates to the funds available for stocking up, or expanding, a woman's trade.

The following table indicates the markets most frequently used by women at Koso to replenish their stocks. The data refer to the 85 women who are licence holders.

Table 9: Markets most frequently used by Koso Women Traders

Name of market	No. of women using them
Agege	2
Ajegunle	6
Alayabiagba	2
Apapa	5
Ebute Ero	2
Egerton	2
Iddo	8
Idumagbo	3
Mushin	36
Oyingbo	16
Sandgrouse	3
TOTAL:	85

Source: author's field work

Of the eleven markets most frequently visited by Koso traders, five are within a four-five mile radius. They are Mushin, Oyingbo, Iddo, Ajegunle and Apapa. As the table shows, they are patronised by more than 73 per cent of the 85 women. Of further interest is the heavy attendance at Mushin. Thirty-six women (42.4 per cent) buy their stock there — not surprising when you consider that it is the closest periodic market to Koso. The three closest — Mushin, Oyingbo and Iddo — are utilised by 60 women, which is more than 70 per cent of the 85 women. Indeed, a good number said they regularly walked to Mushin, a few to Oyingbo, on market days, returning by bus after they had bought their goods. And although Agege is the wholesale distribution centre for vegetables, and therefore the cheapest, it was only regularly patronised by two out of the 85 women (2.4 per cent of the total). Incidentally, even though this market is one of the largest periodic markets in Lagos, it is also the furthest from Koso market. It would seem, therefore, that there is a positive correlation between the distance travelled and the market visited.

There are other markets, not mentioned here, which are occasionally patronised by Koso traders.

Socio-demographic Characteristics of some of the Women Traders at Koso Market

In the previous chapter we attempted to answer the question 'Who is the Lagos Market Woman?' To a very large extent, women at Koso Market conform to the generalisations made about the Lagos market women. Table 10 sums up age, marital status, number of children per woman, religion, ethnicity, education and length of stay in Lagos. Most of the women who said they were divorced, separated or widowed tended to be much older than the others. By 'divorced' I refer to women who said that they had not been living with their spouses and that owó ōrí ('bride-price') had been returned to their husband's lineage.

Conversely, the category 'separated' were those women not living with their husbands and who said they definitely had no intention of returning to their husbands. I was careful to ascertain this point because of the customary practice whereby some women, after childbearing, simply 'leave' their husbands to live with a relative, usually their oldest male child. This being the case, one has to be careful in applying such a Western and value-laden term as 'separated'.

Most of the widowed and divorced women said they had not remarried and did not intend to because they were 'too old'. They said they had already passed the 'marriage age' — said to be after a woman has reached the menopause.



A Koso market trader

TABLE 10 : SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DATA ON 85 KOSO MARKET WOMEN

(Each cell is independent of the others)

AGE	No.OF WOMEN RESPONDING	MARITAL STATUS	No.OF WOMEN RESPONDING	No.OF CHILDREN BORN PER WOMAN	No.OF WOMEN RESPONDING	RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION	No.OF WOMEN RESPONDING	ETHNICITY	No.OF WOMEN RESPONDING	EDUCATION	No.OF WOMEN RESPONDING	LENGTH OF STAY IN LAGOS	No.OF WOMEN RESPONDING
20-24	3	Married	59	None	2	Moslem	60	Yoruba	70	None	76	Born in Lagos	29
25-29	6	Divorced	12	One	2	Protestant	13	Ibo	5	Some Primary	7		
30-34	9	Separated	8	Two	1	Catholic	7	Bini	4	Some Secondary	2	10-14 years	2
35-39	23	Widowed	4	Three	3	'Pagan'	5	Itshekiri	3			15-19 years	5
40-44	19	Single	2	Four	36			Itshan	2			20-24 years	13
45-49	16			Five	35			Efik	1			25-29 years	20
50 yrs and above	9			Six	4							30 years and above	16
				Seven and above	2								
Total	85		85		85		85		85		85		85

Source: From author's field-work.

The categories 'divorced and separated' constitute 18 per cent of the 85 women which tend to corroborate widespread speculation that divorce among the Yoruba is not rare.

The table indicates among other things that (1) the majority of women are between the ages of 30 and 50 (most women did not know their precise age). This was calculated from the birth of each woman's first child. Most women marry between the ages of 16 and 18 years and are likely to have their first child soon afterwards. (2) Most women say they are Muslim. This corresponds to population statistics which show Lagos to be predominantly Muslim. (3) That a significant proportion of the women is Yoruba. (4) That most women are largely illiterate. And (5) a large proportion of the women (over 85 per cent) were either born in Lagos, or had lived there more than 20 years. Of these, 18.8 per cent of women not born in Lagos had lived there for more than 30 years.

The category 'pagan' in religious affiliation, is of my own creation. The five women so pigeon-holed did not describe themselves as 'pagan'. This is not fashionable. Rather, they said they did not subscribe to any of the òyìbó (white) religions, and this they said included Islam.

Those with some elementary and some secondary education were generally the younger women, usually between the ages of 20 and 29 years, most being closer to 20 than 29.

Leadership Hierarchy at Koso Market

Authority structure at this market is congruent with that outlined in the last chapter. That is, the Alága (head of the market) is assisted by a council of women who are, on



Alága of Koso market

average, older than most women. Since many markets are no longer homogeneous, due to infiltration by other ethnic groups, there tend to be two streams of leadership. The first, chaired by the ultimate head of the market, is usually made up of Yoruba women only. The Igbo women constitute the second line of authority, since they usually form the next largest group of traders. However, the first category leadership is always recognised by all women as the ultimate one.

In Koso, due to the political events outlined earlier, there is more than the average amount of hostility between the two groups of leaders. The Igbo women, one of whom is a founding member of this market, argue that the market is legitimately an Igbo market; that the Yoruba women should concede them this point. They also resent the overwhelming dominance of Yoruba women who, they say, act as if they legitimately 'own' this market.

The head of the Igbo Women's Association frequently refused to attend meetings called by the Alága. She always found one excuse or another not to attend, usually claiming that she was unwell, even when she had been in the market all day. She told me that since this had been an Igbo market, she should have been made its head. The Igbo women, and the other non-Yoruba women kept mostly to themselves, interacting with Yoruba women only if they had to.

The political division in the market is so explosive that it took me a bare few days to gauge that the equilibrium here was very unstable. For example, there are constant altercations between the Igbo women and their supporters, and the Yoruba women.

Women who form the Council of the Alága told me that they were tired of settling petty disputes between the two groups. Rather than follow the normal channels of dispute settlement outlined in chapter three, they now refer even relatively minor feuds to the head of the market to settle. However, intra-group disputes are still handled through the 'normal' channels.

The Alága of this market told me that the wàhá là between the two groups had taken a heavy toll on her rather fragile health. She is about 94 years old. On several occasions, both at the market and at home, I was present when she tried to settle various inter-group conflicts. On some evenings, she would receive her deputies in her house to discuss the perennial conflicts which had become the order of the day. She would then spend several days afterwards worrying about what she considered the incapacity of her leadership.

Her eldest son[1] told me that he had on several occasions pleaded with his mother to give up her position in the market. His argument was that her ill-health had recently been greatly exacerbated by the Yoruba/Igbo palava. Recently he had been very cross with his mother because she had not heeded his advice and prayer to 'retire' from the market altogether, especially since he was now entirely responsible for her maintenance.

Recent pressure from her son to 'retire' had been precipitated by a crisis in which this Alága had collapsed and was seriously ill for weeks after a long arbitration in which the Yoruba/Igbo conflict had not been satisfactorily resolved.

---

[1] He asked me whether I could plead with his mother to give up her leadership; this I told him, I could not do.

My research assistant and I had spent an afternoon with this Alága on that day. She had been talking to us about the cleavage in 'her' market, and how distressing it had all been, when she collapsed.

Both the Igbo and the Yoruba women felt that each group, collectively or individually, was out to 'spoil' the other's market. My informants on both sides told me that there was habitual use of 'medicine' to ruin each other's trade. This explains why quarrels which were seemingly minor often took a dramatic turn. Without understanding the underlying hostilities, the squabbles that usually culminated into major crises, seemed — at best — petty.

When fighting with words did take place, the women involved did not of course, accuse each other directly of using 'medicine'. It is against market etiquette to do so publicly. However, certain innuendoes and insinuations left no one in doubt of what was meant.

It must be added that despite this rather tense atmosphere, women did manage to settle their differences without resorting to outside help — for example, the police. The conflicts also became relatively diffused by elevating them to the level of the two leaderships.

At times of life crises affecting any one women in this market, past grievances were normally held in abeyance, and the women presented a common front.

Another variable exerting an added aggravation to the conflict is the national political climate which divides Igbo and Yoruba into two camps.. At Koso, the women seemed

more politicised than other market women. This is perhaps because national politics have so fundamentally and profoundly altered events at this market. Other markets in Lagos had been affected by the Igbo exodus from Lagos, but none to the extent that Koso had. The information obtained from other markets indicated that conflict wherever it existed between Yoruba and Igbo women was of a much lower order of gravity. However, in all the markets that I visited, the two groups tended to maintain exclusive identity, except again in matters that affected the entire market or in times of life crises. It must also be emphasised that all markets which are heterogeneous do have similar dual leadership. The difference is that in other markets there is not such a persistent struggle in the leadership cadre, as there is in Koso. There might be a certain amount of latent hostility, but on the whole, all women tend to acknowledge gracefully one form of leadership as ultimate. At Koso, the Igbo women leaders acknowledge the Alága of the market as the Ọgá (big person) but they question the legitimacy on which her claim rests. And so, the struggle is likely to continue, for as long as the market is predominantly Yoruba, the Alága will always be a woman who represents that majority. The crisis reached its zenith during my field work, since this was the first time in almost fourteen years that national political activity had been allowed. Perhaps as the nation settles down, Koso politics might also become less charged.

Social Dimensions of Market Places

Lagos markets, like those elsewhere in West Africa, constitute excellent communication centres. Political and economic news is exchanged, as well as gossip about neighbours and friends.

Most of the Lagos markets by and large, are not important beer-drinking places in the way that Tiv markets have been said to be (Bohannan, P. and L., 1968). Because, as Mabogunje (1967:44-5) warns:

> The new centre[s] is [are] in many ways the converse of the old. Time and space have acquired scarcity value often measured in pounds or sterling. Trading is no longer an activity of the open space. It is probably housed in buildings whose growing height is one measure of the increasing scarcity of land.

However, the older markets, as we shall see, still retain most of the social aspects of West African markets. Relatives meet at markets to exchange news of their families and generally to keep in touch. Important news, both from traditional rulers and more recently from government officials, may be quickly spread by first announcing them in market places by the use of a bell which draws the attention of traders.

The following remarks about the Oja Iba market in Ibadan, are applicable to most traditional Yoruba markets. Mabogunje (loc. cit.:44) has written:

> Oja Iba, however, has other and perhaps more compelling attractions for the majority of the people in the older part of the city. It is not only a forum of economic transactions, it is also the centre for social intercourse.

> On an evening, a young man may attend the market in the hope of meeting a young lady who may appeal to him. He may also attend it to hear the latest in the politics of the city, or even of the country, to share comradeship with his friends or even just to feel a sense of belonging

In some markets, especially where a few older market women may have some modern education, women are known to organise lessons. These lessons[1] include cooking, especially western dishes. Cakes and biscuits are the most popular.

Relations between Women Traders and their Customers

Relationship between traders and their customers is extremely informal. Both try to underplay the economic aspects of their interaction. Greetings and enquiring about each other's families are one way of de-emphasising the commercial element of the relationship. For example, in addition to the common everyday greetings, a customer will invariably enquire about the trader's 'market' or sales, by asking the latter whether she is selling well — 'se e ntà?' The customer may alternatively greet the trader because she is selling by saying 'e kù títà' or the customer may choose to praise (e kù oro ajé) the trader for persevering in the effort or business of making money.

In addition, both the trader and the customer would enquire about the health and the well-being of their children and that of their husbands. Sometimes they both 'pray' that each would do well in their respective endeavours.

---

[1] This information was given to me by the Alaga of Tejuoso market, Mrs. Caxton-Martins. She told me that for many years she conducted classes in baking and sewing in her house for women in 'her' market. This Alaga, now 69 years old, had spent many years in England. She was formerly married to a high court judge, who has since died.

All this preamble usually takes place before the haggling starts. It would be considered rude, and indeed hostile, for a customer to start asking about the price of a commodity without first observing some of the above preliminaries.

On entering a market, buyers are usually confronted by traders who try to draw the former's attention to their stalls. The really aggressive traders may physically, but in a very friendly manner, attempt to lead a buyer to their stall. The competition among the traders to win customers, as pointed out in chapter three, is indeed quite fierce.

The potential conflict that underlies such fierce competition is contained by well-defined market rules, which every trader is expected to observe. The infraction of such rules is thought to be a threat to market peace and is, therefore, actively discouraged by all the women. For example, if a customer should stop at a particular stall, market norms require that all the other traders should immediately stop further attempts to draw that customer's attention to their stalls. Competition for customers, thus, is only allowed when the customers are walking in a market, and it is clear that they have not decided on a stall.

During the course of their trade, most women come to acquire a relatively steady clientele. Customers, therefore, tend to buy from specific women, rather than shopping around the market. There is, therefore, an understanding between traders that they should not try too aggressively to win each other's customers. Most women adhere to this unwritten code.

Except for a few commodities, customers have to haggle for most of what they purchase. The process takes the following form.

Customer: 'How much is this yam? (Elo ni iṣu yí?)

Trader: 'Seven naira' (Naira méje)

Customer: 'What of six naira?' (Naira méfà nkó?)

Trader: 'OK, pay'. (oda sanwó)

Customer: 'What of five naira?' (Naira márun nkó?)

Trader: 'OK, pay' (oda sanwó)

Customer: 'What of four naira?' (Naira mẹrin nkó?)

Trader: 'OK, pay' (sanwó)

Customer: 'Three naira?' (Naira méta?)

Trader: 'That is the last price'. (Eyi yen ni jale)

Customer: 'Would you not take two naira and fifty kobo?' (Se kò gbà naira méjì àti ãdóta kobo?)

Trader: 'Three naira is the last price'. (Kó gbà. Naira méta ni jale)

At this stage, the customer attempts to walk away and then one of two things usually happens. (1) The trader will call the customer back to come and pay. If the latter should go back, she may not attempt to price that item below the price she offered last; in this case, two naira and fifty kobo. If she should try, the trader will, in all probability, become aggressively insulting. She (the trader) might say to the customer that she may go home and 'eat' her money, or that she (the customer) is not the only one with money, and the like. If the customer should try to respond aggressively, the quarrel could escalate. The other traders would then give total support to their colleague. They might collectively

join to abuse such a customer. This happens particularly when a customer prices an item quite below what a trader regards as a 'reasonable' price. For example, in the case of the yam above, it would be considered offensive and provoking for a customer to offer to pay one or two naira for the yam which the trader says is seven naira, especially without haggling. In other words, a customer may not offer two naira as her first response to the trader's quotation of seven naira. This, even though the yam may finally be sold for two naira fifty kobo. Should a trader get angry, it is incumbent on the customer to 'pray' and 'beg' the former not to be annoyed.

And (2) if the trader does not call the customer back to pay the price the latter offered last, the customer will know that she cannot get that commodity for less than that price.

Haggling is an integral part of market relationship trade. It takes place even when trader/customer relationship has been in existence for many years. As most women said to me, it would not be interesting to sell in markets if the 'bargaining' element was removed. This explains why most women traders get irritated or annoyed when a customer is impatient with haggling. The general attitude was, 'If a customer does not want to haggle, then let her go to Òyibó stores where they have fixed prices. That is the difference between our trade and Òyibó trade.'

CHAPTER FIVE
THE KOSO MARKET WOMEN'S PERCEPTION OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

In talking to the women of Koso market, it soon became apparent that marriage (arédè or ìgbéèyàwo) or wifehood (ìyàwó or aya) is seen as the most important single event in a woman's life.

For a woman, all forms of personal fulfilment and success (o kiki — literally 'fame' or 'renown'), were always defined in terms of legal marriage (alárédèèrè) and ultimate motherhood. Men also needed to get married and have children in order to gain respect (ojú rere) and esteem from their families and the community. However, the women told me that it was possible, occasionally, for men such as (in the past) wealthy men or famous warriors, to achieve high status and prestige without being married. This, the women said, would never apply to an unmarried, childless woman.

A single woman might enjoy similar status only if she had been widowed, or had left her husband and had adult male children who themselves possess fame or renown, and enjoyed power (ó lágbára). Even then, the women insisted, such a rare woman would still be less esteemed in her community, town or city (ìlú), than would a man in similar circumstances.

When told that in some European societies some women choose to remain unmarried, Koso market women traders found this totally incomprehensible. They argued that such women must be 'bad' (that is, of questionable sexual morals), or

have some serious (hereditary) disease such as epilepsy (iwárapa) or madness (ṣiwèrè or sínwín), or leprosy or an extreme physical disability which prevented them from finding husbands. They insisted that, failing this, no woman would choose to remain unmarried purely of her own volition.

One woman said:

> Without marriage and children, a woman is nothing — she would have no standing in her family (aráálé) and in the community. Such a woman would be an embarrassment to her own family. She would not be respected as the wife of so-and-so, and she would not enjoy or be honoured with the title of mother of so-and-so. These are the most important things in a woman's life.

The Women's Definition of Marriage

The Koso market women frequently defined marriage in terms of the various rites and ceremonies that must be performed if a woman is to be considered properly married. One of the major ceremonies which involves the community at large is the betrothal ceremony, known as ìjóhùn or ìṣíhùn in Yoruba society. Another is the creation of or entering into affinal relationships, termed by the Yoruba ìdána, which involves the 'payment' of marriage gifts called owó orí (literally 'money for head') by the bridegroom to the bride's kinsmen and some senior female relatives.

Thus, one woman said:

> Marriage to me is when a request for marriage from a man's family has been granted, and his family has performed all the marriage ceremonies... This to me is marriage even if the girl has not formally moved into her husband's house, either because she is too young, or because the husband is not yet ready to receive her...

This definition of marriage is consistent with the Yorùba custom whereby a girl is addressed as ìyàwó by the relatives of the man to whom she has been betrothed.

The reference to a 'request for marriage' being granted literally means that the voice of the god of divination (ifa) or the oracles have been heard, and that their response has been positive. Ifá must be consulted before any marriage can take place - hence the expressions ìjóhùn, ìyinfá and isihun.

A woman may also define marriage by saying 'Marriage to me is when ìjóhùn and idana ceremonies have been performed, and the girl is carried (ìgbéèyàwó) to her husband's house.' The term ìgbéèyàwó refers to the custom among some Yoruba whereby the bride is carried shoulder-high to her husband's people, first by some of her agnates (usually not her full brothers), and then by some female relatives, and handed over to her husband's female affines, who then deliver her to her husband's father or his senior kinsman if the former is deceased. It is from this custom that the expression wọ́n n'ìgbéèyàwó, which literally means the carrying of the bride to her husband's house is derived.

Women also seemed to find it difficult to define marriage without children.[1] A frequent remark was 'Marriage means living with a man and having children'. When asked for their

---

[1] In his study of divorce and fertility in the Cameroons, Ardener (1962:47) found 'those unions in which no children had survived suggested a somewhat greater instability than did the data from all unions'. He continues:

> The association of more divorces with childlessness would admit no simple causal link. While childlessness may be, as indeed the Bakweri say it is, a cogent motive for divorce, it is at least as possible that the more unstable or ephemeral the union for some other cause, the greater is the chance that it will also be childless.

views on a marriage in which all the ceremonies had been satisfactorily performed and the woman had been carried into her husband's house but which was childless, they seemed to feel that such a marriage was not as complete as the one blessed with children. As we shall see throughout this chapter, having children for these women is integral to the definition of a full and complete marriage and of womanhood. L. Bohannan (1949) has termed the sort of rights and obligations transferred at marriage, rights in uxorem and rights in genetricem. The former refer to rights over a wife's domestic and sexual services and the latter to her reproductive capacity. This has been referred to as uxorial and genetricial rights by many scholars, among them Mitchell (1957:319).

The Function of Owó Ōrí ('bridewealth' or 'bride-price')[1]

We have already noted that the closest Yoruba translation of marriage 'payments' is owó ōrí, while the ceremony in which these gifts are exchanged is known as ìdána. This is considered by the women to be the most important of all the marriage ceremonies performed before a girl moves to her husband's house.

---

[1] The function of 'bride-price' or 'bride-wealth' has been studied by many anthropologists, among them Gluckman (1950); Fortes (1945 and 1949); Schapera (1960); Leach (1961); and Ardener (1962). Gluckman's (loc. cit.) correlation between marital stability and marriage payments or 'bride-price' led to a polemical debate and correspondence in the Journal Man in 1953 and 1954. (Man, 1953:75, 122, 223, 299; 1954: 96, 97, 153).

The gifts and the services given to the bride's family are variable. However, in recalling preparations for their own marriages, the women cited the following items as the most common: bitter kolanuts (orógbo), a bottle of gin or schnapps (in the pre-colonial era this would have been locally-distilled gin), palm oil (epo) and shea butter (òrí) alligator pepper (ata) and money, which is distributed to the bride's affinal and consanguineal relatives. All the women emphasised that in their youth, the money which was sometimes in cowries, was usually a small amount — the equivalent of 3 to 5 naira. This would be in addition to gifts given during the courtship, which are called ìfé.

Ìdána and owó ōrí, the women said, confer the status of a wife (ìyàwó) on a woman. In addition, they implied that 'a husband acquired control (agbára) over his wife...[1] That is why when there is a quarrel between a husband and a wife, the husband will always remind his wife that he has paid money for her head, and therefore she cannot behave in any way she likes...'

Ìdána and owó ōrí, I was informed, had both good and bad sides:

> Should a woman move into the house of a man who had not "paid" money for her head she would be ostracized and ridiculed... People would say she had been given to her husband like a free gift. She would not be respected, and she too, would lack pride (ìgbéraga).

And again,

---

[1] The rights and obligations created by African marriages have been extensively discussed by Radcliffe-Brown (1951) and also by other contributors in the same work.

> If a man performs ìdána before marrying a wife, everybody knows that the woman was not imposed on him... If he does not, he may feel free to maltreat his wife because she has been given to him free. The Yoruba have a saying: "Any medicine that is not paid for is always left in the kitchen". But there is another side to it. Because the man and his family have to give presents to almost all the members of his wife's family, they [the husband and his family] may feel that the woman belongs to them;... If a man's relatives are wicked and unreasonable, especially ... his mother and sisters, may God help her, for she [the wife] is certain to be treated like a slave (ẹrú)...

Another woman said:

> It has been the custom of our fathers, and their father's fathers before them, that the man should be the head (bãlé) of his home [house] (ilé)... It is owó ọ̀rí that gives the man this right and control (agbára) over his wife... Owó ọ̀rí also gives the woman the pride and satisfaction that she has been properly married. Without the ìdána ceremony, and owó ọ̀rí, a woman who is living with a man is no different from a concubine (àlè) and nobody respects her...

The commercialization of ìdána and owó ọ̀rí, and in some cases, their total abandonment, the women argued, is what makes marriages today so unstable. On this subject, Baker and Bird (1959:102) argue that:

> The vexed question of a monetary bride-wealth raises its head in many places, being liable to abuse by parents who marry their daughters to the highest bidder and subsequently dissolve the marriage either to effect a new one to a higher bidder or to punish a slow-paying husband. The high bridewealth demanded in some areas also involves the newly-weds in heavy initial debts with which to start their married life and which the husband frequently cannot repay by his own efforts...

A typical remark was:

> The amount of money demanded these days spoils marriage. Some parents want to make as much money out of their daughters as they can. And the men, they are angry that they have to pay so much. And so, should we be surprised if a man ill-treats his wife? Also, these women of

> book [that is, educated women] think they are equal to their husbands... If a man does not have control (agbára) over his wife, this is the beginning of trouble.
>
> Also, since men are now forced to pay so much money for their wives they feel that they own them. When there is no owó ōrí, there is no head of the household or home. A home without a head cannot know peace; it can only be full of wàhálà.

Many women said that ìdána and owó ōrí which were intended to create marriage ties, and bring respect to the girl's family and show a man's appreciation for the girl he is marrying, are now being abused.

One woman said:

> It is almost like selling your own daughter... During my youth, the money given to the girl's family was never more than five pounds. But now I hear that some parents demand as much as five hundred naira [about £400 or more]. Some people say that if a woman knows book [is educated] they should be compensated. For book women some parents demand as much as 1000 naira or more [about £800] depending on whether the girl has been to university or not. Now, I ask you, why should people be surprised if such girls cannot find any man to marry them?... These are the girls that we find roaming the streets of Lagos as prostitutes (pā n ṣágà), while others can only become concubines (àlè) to some rich man. Somebody should put a stop to such mockery and abuse of our traditions.

However, most of my Yoruba informants felt that there was nothing wrong with the current system of owó ōrí, but argued that they had been told or had heard of the rapid increase in marriage payments, especially in Igbo areas. They all said they abhorred the development. Most of the Igbo women I spoke to were more reticent than other ethnic groups on this subject. However, the two Igbo women who freely gave their views tended to agree that the 'bride-price' in their areas had risen far beyond traditional norms and expectations.

On Becoming Married, and the Women's Attitudes towards the Changing Definitions of Marriage

Among the Yoruba as among all African peoples, marriage was traditionally an affair between the families of the bride and her bridegroom, as the Yoruba custom of ìdáná shows. As already noted, ìdáná literally means the acquisition of affines or creating affinal ties between families who were not previously related by blood, since marriage is usually exogamous.

In contrasting the marriage practices of their young days with those of today, the women of Koso market were always quick to point to the significance of marriage as a process in which important ties were created between their families and those of their husbands. One old woman, whom I have called Iya Eleja, said to me: 'In our days, when a boy and girl wanted to get married, there was no question of their meeting one another to discuss the matter'. She continued:

> Rather than talk to the girl, if a boy saw a girl he thought would make a good wife, he informed one of his mothers, usually his father's most senior wife. This woman would inform the boy's father who in turn informed one of his most senior male kinsmen. It would be one of the boy's father's senior male relatives who paid a visit to the girl's relatives to inform them that they [the boy's family] had seen a flower in their garden that they would like to pluck... But now, as the children of nowadays adopt new ways, may God help us... Some boys and girls no longer think it necessary to inform their parents of their intention to get married. The Òìbó[1] marriage of the ring and the church are replacing our age-old traditions (ìtan àtọwọdowo), and this, I assure you, is the cause of wàhálà in many marriages.

Another woman, Iya Onisaki, in explaining why it was important

---

[1] Also spelt òyibó or ọyinbó.

for the marriage plans to involve the parents of the boy and the girl stated:

> ...as you know, in the olden days, the family of the girl got somebody who investigated (ó wáàdi òrò nǫ́n) [that is, a person who can unravel the facts underlying a particular matter] the family of the boy, and that of the boy did likewise... The idea behind these investigations (òrò nǫ́n or wíwáàdi) was to make certain that there was no serious impediment to a proposed marriage. These would include: serious diseases, physical handicaps or disabilities, the presence of proven thieves in either family, sexual laxity or laziness on the part of the girl...

The women's sentiments on the traditional process of choosing spouses and the contribution this made to marital stability were summed up by a woman I have called Iyá Onipánlá.[1] She lamented:

> Only God can tell what is going to happen to marriage and children. You see, in my youth, before a marriage could take place, the family of the boy and the girl would have known each other for a very long time... In many cases they would have been good friends. In those days, people from adjacent villages knew each other's families well. This was because one could reach most of the surrounding villages (abúlé ilétò) near our home in half a day's journey on foot...
>
> My candid opinion is that marriage between people who do not understand each other's customs should be avoided at all costs. That is the same thing as avoiding conflict or trouble... Also it is good that a boy and girl should not meet before marriage because if this were to happen, they might be tempted to know each other too well [that is, engage in sexual intercourse]. A girl who loses her virginity (iwa wúndia) before marriage is looking for trouble. Nobody would ever be quite certain who had deflowered her. Even if her future husband admits that he was responsible, people will always have doubts in their minds. They may even think that such a husband is only trying to cover up for his wife. Such a woman is certain to suffer; her life will be a misery, for even the husband may harbour

---

[1] Her name means 'owner of stockfish'. In Lagos, it is quite common for women to be known by the name of the major item they sell.

> doubts about her sexual morals... You do not know men. He may say to himself, "if she could sleep with me before marriage, what guarantee do I have that she did not sleep with other men?" It is better for a girl to keep her body clean and completely untouched.

The Importance of Virginity (ìwa wúndia) before Marriage

Like many other African peoples, the Yoruba consider a girl's pre-marital virginity (ìwa wúndia) to be a public issue of great importance. For instance, after a girl has been carried to her husband's house (wọ́n ń ìgbéèyàwo) some of her female relatives, together with her husband's relatives, are required to stay or sleep outside the room used by the newly-married couple, awaiting cries of pain. The purpose of this is to bear witness to the defloration, and to take back to the bride's family evidence of their daughter's virginity. This is usually a piece of white cloth which must be stained with blood. Should the wedding night coincide with a girl's menstrual cycle, her husband is required to abstain from any form of sexual intercourse for at least four to five days, thus ensuring that the menstrual flow does not obstruct the process of establishing a girl's virginity.

One woman related:

> In my youth, if the bridegroom's relatives were to pay the bride's mother a visit the night after the wedding (ìgbéèyàwo) with a covered calabash, the bride's mother would immediately start to dance wildly with joy [she demonstrates how the dance was done]... However, should the bridegroom's relatives pay a visit with an uncovered calabash, the bride's mother would immediately go into hiding for she would know that her daughter had been deflowered before marriage.

> That is why a daughter's pending marriage is always a moment of great anxiety (hilà-hilo) or grief (ìbanújé) for any mother for she shares the blame for her daughter's sexual immorality and bad character (ò hùwà burúkú). Every mother prays God that her daughter will be found a virgin on her wedding night.

Should a girl not be found a virgin, I was told that it was not uncommon for her father to beat his wife (that is, the girl's mother), sometimes severely, for what he considered to be a dereliction of duty on her part. Indeed, the whole community blames the mother of a girl who has lost her virginity. Mothers are expected to keep a close watch on their daughters' moral conduct, including a periodical vaginal check.

In some cases, a girl who had lost her virginity before marriage was not only severely beaten by her mother and father, but would also have extremely hot peppers inserted into her vagina (òbo). My informants told me that this latter punishment served as a definite deterrent: 'a girl who remembers the agony (òbo ríro) of a peppery vagina is likely to take to her heels at the sight of any unrelated man!'

Another woman said to me:

> You cannot imagine the joy felt by the girl's female relatives when she was found to be a virgin. In those days they danced and sang for several days and sometimes weeks. They would demand and receive many gifts from her husband and his relatives. The husband was required to send many presents and beautiful hand-woven cloth (aṣọ eki) to his wife's mother. The piece of white cloth spread on the bed the night she was deflowered would be folded with the blood-stains exposed for all to see, and money would be placed on the stains. It would then be put in a calabash, covered, and sent to the bride's mother, who would display it for the girl's father's relatives to see... This brought respect and prestige to the girl, her mother, and her entire family.

According to this woman, of prime importance was the fact that the girl's husband and relatives were forced to show the utmost respect and admiration for such a girl and her family. It was an occasion for all to rejoice. She also added that in her youth, if a girl was not a virgin, her husband was entitled to display extreme anger. It was not uncommon for such husbands to beat their wives severely, sometimes inflicting permanent scars, or disfiguring their faces.

However, the customary course of action in such cases, according to my informants and Fadipe (1970:84) was for the man to send the girl back to her family and to demand damages from the man who had violated his rights. The girl would not only be ridiculed, she would usually be severely beaten by her father, and forced to confess or name the man who had violated her.

Even though the marriage arrangements were not always called off, a girl in such circumstances knew only too well that uneasy days lay ahead. I was also told that such girls considerably reduced their bargaining (so-ipanpa) power (alágbara or agbára) should the marriage remain intact; they were less esteemed by all concerned.

The subject of virginity was a recurrent theme with most of the women I interviewed. They argued that virginity, besides determining a woman's standing in the community, and particularly in the family into which she married, also contributed to the stability of the marriage. Virginity, the women would say, 'brought prestige to the woman and her family, because it was an indication that the girl had been brought up properly. Also it brought prestige to the family

of the man because people would say he had married well'.

It was said that a 'man who had deflowered his wife after he had married her, would treat her with great care because he took pride in the knowledge that he had been the first man to have sexual intercourse with her'. A wife who was a virgin at the time of her marriage, according to Koso market women, can always remind her husband, when there is a quarrel, that she was not a loose woman when he married her. But if the woman had already been deflowered, then her husband would never let her forget it: he would continually raise this issue to start a quarrel, even when one might not be necessary. Also, the husband's family and the woman's family would not let the man ill-treat his wife if she had been a virgin. They would say to the man, 'You must remember the fact that when you married your wife she was innocent. You must treat her gently and with care, otherwise her people will be aggrieved and may be forced to take their daughter away...'

A woman's pre-marital virginity was also said to be important to her fertility. The women would say 'A girl who was a virgin before marriage conceives soon afterwards. This is because her womb has not been spoilt by disease and the sperm of different men'.

Even though the women agreed that the loss of virginity was not the only cause of barrenness (iyàgan, àìléso or ṣíṣà) they argued that it was a major cause. Moreover, they pointed out that a girl who had kept her virginity intact until marriage would enjoy sympathy should she be unable to conceive, whereas otherwise she would be tormented.

If a woman's marriage had been peaceful, blessed with many children, and had lasted a long time, it was said that pre-marital virginity had played a crucially important role.

As for a man's virginity, the women thought the idea totally absurd.

> A man should not be a virgin before marriage; he ought to and should be experienced in sexual matters. He should know how to have sexual intercourse with his wife. If a man is a virgin before marriage, how would people know he was not impotent (ọ̀kọ́ bọ́)? And in any case, how could you tell that a man is not a virgin since there are no marks left on his penis (okó) after sexual intercourse?

Thus, while a woman's virginity was seen as a symbol of purity,[1] and was said to bring prestige and honour to her family and that of her husband, a man's virginity connoted disaster. It was a sign of sexual inadequacy and a bad omen for any impending marriage.

The women told me that fathers and mothers had a duty to ensure that a boy acquired sexual skills before he set out to marry. For example, in the market, I often saw mothers rubbing their little sons' penises so as to precipitate an erection. As the boys grew older, their elder brothers or some other male relatives, would see to it that they did not remain virgins.

I was interested to learn how men were supposed to acquire sexual experience before marriage, since all unmarried women were supposed to keep their virginity, married women were out of bounds, and infraction was severely punished before and after marriage. When this question was put to the women, their rather vague answer was that women had always

---

[1] See, for example, Douglas (1966); S. Ardener (1978); Hastrup (1978) et al.

been expected to be virgins before marriage and men to be sexually experienced.

The Relationship between Husbands (ọkọ) and Wives (aya)

All the women cited children (ọmọ), respect (bọ̀wọ̀ fun) (especially for the husband) and love (ifẹ́) in that order as the most important aspects of any marriage. These three factors were said to determine the nature of the relationship between a man and his wife, and the stability of the marriage.

A woman I have called Iya Dada said:

> If a marriage is not blessed with children there is bound to be trouble, since that is the reason why people get married... If a woman cannot have children by her husband she is bound to think of other ways of getting children. Her mother will be the first to advise her to try another man and keep it a secret, especially if they suspect that the fault lies with her husband. A woman feels she must prove to herself and to other people that she is not barren, and so she is bound to seek a lover (olùfẹ́) by whom she hopes to get a child, and she will then behave as though it is the husband who got her pregnant. If the husband should find out that his wife is having intercourse with other men, he is bound to get very angry; sometimes he may beat her and may even send her away, especially if she continues after she has been asked to check her ways.

She continued:

> If it should turn out that it is the woman who is barren, her husband is sure to get a wife who will bear him children. The relationship between such a woman and her husband cannot be a happy one, especially if her co-wives have children. They will torment her with their barrenness. Also her husband's relatives will not be happy with her — they will incite him to get rid of her. Some people say that women who are barren are likely to be witches (ajẹ́). They are said to use witchcraft (iṣẹ́-ajẹ́, oṣó) and bad medicine (ọ̀ọ̀gùn or mágùn) against their co-wives and their children.

I was also told that:

> Many husbands are suspicious of their wives if they are childless... This is why women pray to have children so that their husbands and their relatives will also love them... A woman must bear her husband sons; if she does not, she will never know peace. Her husband, his relatives and her co-wives will all give her trouble. The co-wives will suspect her of using witchcraft against their male children, since she has none of her own. And the husband and his relatives will treat her as though she was barren even though she may have a dozen female children.

Respect, especially on the part of the wife towards her husband, was thought to be crucial in establishing an amicable relationship between a man and his wife. As one woman said:

> It is the woman's duty to respect her husband first, if she desires peace in her marriage. This is because the husband has given her relatives owó ōrí and therefore the wife should respect and obey her husband. When she does this, it makes her husband happy and he too will try to be reasonable.

All the women traders I interviewed at Koso market, and other markets I visited in Lagos, ranked men above women; that is, they argued that generally men enjoy more power than women. As already indicated, owó ōrí was cited by all women as the most crucial factor in conferring on men power over women. 'It is men who marry women. A woman can't marry a man', were frequent remarks. Another factor cited for ranking men above women was physical strength or power. One woman said:

> You see, if there is a quarrel between a man and his wife the man must be sure to win... There is not much to say about men having more power (agbára) than women... If you have a quarrel with your husband, and you become very annoyed, can you beat him up?... Well, a man can always beat up a wife who is trouble-some... but a woman can only report her husband to his relatives... between husband and wife alone, there is nothing a woman can do... She may shout

> and abuse her husband but she will have to do that on her heels because should her husband catch up with her, he will beat her well-well [properly] ... that is why we say men are more powerful than women... And so, if you don't want palava, you must show your husband respect... by greeting him properly and kneeling down for him.

However, in contrast to Coker (1958:36, 38-9), a Yoruba man himself, women of Koso market did not think of themselves as 'properties' of men, either because of owó ori, or widow inheritance. But what they did do, was to recognise and accept degrees of structural authority[1] of husbands over their wives. They acknowledged the existence of the institution of levirate but argued that to pass judgement on it would depend on the particular circumstances involved. For example, whether the man and his family were agreeable or not. Four women said they had rejected their husband's brothers, and one, her husband's son. Another woman said:

> Wives must always respect and obey their husbands. This is what husbands like most — a respectful wife. This is because it is our custom that a wife is always younger than her husband. No man will marry a woman older than himself; if he does, everything will be confused. Our customs and traditions demand that a younger person must respect the older person. One way of showing respect for those who are older than us is by kneeling down (kúnlè), or prostrating ourselves (dòbálè) when greeting them, or when they [the elders] are annoyed with us. A husband cannot prostrate himself before his wife — that would not make sense... A wife must also kneel to her husband when giving him food. If she refuses, it will cause ill-feeling; the husband will not accept food from a wife who does not show respect for him by kneeling down. He may suspect her of using mágùn (bad medicine) against him...

Thus, a wife who bears children for her husband, and shows respect, earns love from him. It is the combination of these

---

[1] Radcliffe-Brown (1950:31) has shown that 'Differences in rank may show themselves in many different forms. They are perhaps most easily seen in rules of etiquette, or in attitudes of deference that the inferior is expected to show to his superior...'

factors that defines the nature of the relationship between a man and his wife.

Rights and Obligations between Husband and Wife

In addition to bearing children and showing respect to her husband and his relatives (particularly when greeting)[1] a wife must cook for her husband when it is her turn, if he is polygynously married. She must also participate cheerfully in activities that involve her husband's family, such as childbirth, weddings, and burial ceremonies, and she must always do these things without showing reludtance or hesitation, unless she is ill. She also has the duty to cook for and entertain her husband's relatives who come to visit her husband. She must also help her husband in his farming activities, if they live in a rural area, but within reason, since she too, ordinarily, has her own trading activities.

A good husband is kind to his wife's children. He must also protect her from the molestation of co-wives, if he is a polygynist, and from his own relatives, especially if it can be established that they are to blame or are unnecessarily hard on his wife. A husband also has duties and obligations towards his wife's relatives (these are his _ana_, affines), to whom he must show extreme respect. He is expected to give them gifts from time to time, and any help they may demand,

---

[1] Of greeting among the Gonja, E. Goody (1972:40) says:
> First it is used to open a sequence of communicative acts between two persons... Second, it is a means of defining, affirming, both identity and rank. And third, the standardized forms of greeting contain an element of deference which is status-enhancing, "greeting" becomes a mode of entering upon or manipulating a relationship in order to achieve a specific result.

if it is within his power. During rites of passage, he is expected to contribute gifts in kind and cash, and must participate like all the other sons of his wife's family. Also, upon marriage, a Yoruba husband has the duty to set up his wife in trade, by giving her some capital, according to his wealth and status in the community, and to come to her rescue should she become bankrupt. In addition, he is expected from time to time to give his wife gifts in kind and cash, depending upon his economic position. And, of course, he must have sexual intercourse with her regularly, when it is her turn, if he is polygynously married.

The Role of Sex in Marriage

The women of Koso believe that sexual intercourse between a husband and wife is for procreation only. During my field work in the market, I never came across a woman who thought sexual intercourse had any other function.

One of the most common methods of expressing disapproval and anger at a wife's behaviour among the Yoruba people is to refuse to eat her food or to have sexual intercourse with her. Food is regarded as the most common and convenient way of getting rid of one's enemies; just as sharing of food with people is thought of as an expression of friendship. No Yoruba would ever accept food or drink from people with whom he is quarrelling or has a strained relationship, no matter how close the relationship is. The only exception to this rule would be between parents and their children.

While the primary function of sexual intercourse is thought to be for purposes of procreation, women said that regular sexual intercourse in marriage was an indication of marital stability. There is no contradiction here. Women use sexual favours from their husbands to out-manoeuvre their co-wives. And, husbands too sometimes use withdrawal of sex to express either temporary or permanent loss of interest in a wife. Also, women desire and expect to have as many children as God gives before reaching the menopause. For this reason, they expect their husbands to have sexual intercourse with them regularly, unless they are menstruating, mourning, ill, lactating or have reached the age of the menopause, after which sexual intercourse must cease.

Koso Market Women's Perception of Barrenness and Male Infertility.

Since the worst tragedy that can befall a woman, according to my informants, is barrenness, women dreaded this beyond all else, excepting perhaps death. This view of barrenness is not peculiar to Yoruba women; indeed, numerous ethnographic accounts inform us that among African peoples, the view is prevalent. For example, among the Kpelle of Liberia, Bledsoe (1980:59) reports that:

> Perhaps the most important female function in the eyes of most Africans is childbearing. Among the Kpelle, for example, the main purpose of Sande rituals is to confer fertility on young female initiates. Only women who have borne a child or two may assume the prestigious role of assiting in deliveries, and mothers of several children are highly esteemed. Sterility is a source of great anguish, especially for women,

> and sterility of either partner provides legal grounds for divorce. Even sterile men and women, however, may take in children as wards and men have legal rights over the children their wives bear, even if they are not the natural fathers. Consequently, few people are completely childless, even though they are biologically incapable of producing children.

To bear children, for Koso market women, is to be a woman or at least a complete woman. Again, it is not surprising that women should be defined in terms of childbirth in ways that men are not. On this subject, Callaway (1978:164) has written:

> What does it mean to be a woman? To be a man? Here, a curious lack of symmetry emerges in the everyday, expected definitions. To be female is first to be identified with biological reproduction — "the most essentially female function of all". In contrast to a woman, a man is likely to be designated a father of a family only incidentally to the list of public activities and achievements which proclaim his identity.

Among many African peoples there seems to be a general belief, implicit or explicit, that biological infertility for a man is all but impossible. Koso market women in discussing this point would often ask, 'How can anyone tell that a man is incapable of impregnating a woman?' 'Men do not get pregnant and therefore they don't give birth, and so, whether they are capable of impregnating, can only be confirmed by their wives'.

Thus, a man's fertility or infertility can only, as far as my informants were concerned, be deduced or is dependent on their wives. The reasoning, already touched on earlier in this chapter, went like this:

> Only a foolish girl or woman would sit there doing nothing about herself not having a baby. She would have known long before she married that her marriage will not last unless she bears her husband sons and daughters... otherwise she cannot have peace. From very early on we teach our daughters that if they don't get pregnant after a few years of marriage, they should know what to do [that is, get a lover and attempt to become pregnant by him]... Of course, they must be careful... A husband who thinks his wife [or wives] is cheating him can get very annoyed... And everybody supports him... This is why we say you can't tell whether a man is capable of impregnating the wife or not... but after some years, then you may be able to tell whether a woman is barren or not.

Most of my Yoruba informants at Koso market agreed with this view. Asked to reconcile this with their earlier statements which on the whole condemned adultery, the women saw no contradictions. 'A woman gets married to bear children for her husband, that is what is expected of her by everybody'. It was therefore generally felt that if in the performance of her 'most essentially female function of all', she had to resort to such unconventional methods as taking a lover, she was pursuing the 'right' course of action, indeed, the only course. One woman put it this way:

> If you get married and you don't bear pikin [children] for your husband, a smarter girl will [she laughs] ... because the next time he gets married, he will know that this wife will give him plenty of pikin...

Asked how the husband will know this in advance, she laughed at what she considered to be naiveté on my part and retorted:

> My pikin,[1] people must eat. If they don't they will die... It is the same about producing children. The man wants the children too... His wife may want them even more, but don't let

[1] Here she is referring to me. It is not unusual to refer to a non-relative as 'my child' especially if the speaker is much older than the addressed and they are on friendly terms.

> anyone tell you lies. Men and women want children. And so, if a man suspects that it may be his fault that his wife is not getting pregnant, he will get a girl he knows is clever ... that girl will go ahead and get children for him from somewhere... Sometimes a man looks for a girl who has borne pikin before... he is sure she will give him issue. In my life I have known a few men to arrange with their wives to have children with other men for them... Nobody except the wife will know the secret... All they will know is what they see ... a man and his wife having children. That is why my people say you can't say whether a man is man [that is, fertile or not] but you can say a women is barren if she no longer sees her blood and has not borne any pikin.

I was informed that it was unusual, even though it does happen, for a man to instruct his wife to seek lovers, or inform his relatives (Fortes, 1949:23-4) in order for her to get pregnant. The more usual practice is to turn a blind eye or plead caution with an indiscreet wife. Of course, all this presupposes that the man doubts his own fertility, otherwise a persistently adulterous wife among the Yorùbá is not tolerated. This is in contrast to the Kofyar of Jos Plateau, Nigeria, where for example:

> If a Kofyar woman does not wish a divorce but is dissatisfied with her marriage... she may take a chagap, a legitimate lover or cicisbeo who sleeps with her in her husband's homestead with the knowledge and tacit consent of her husband. The relationship may be with a married or unmarried man and is based on mutual attraction and affection. It is not considered adultery (wat neer, 'stealing the vagina') or wife-stealing and a husband who demurs is considered a selfish man and is accused of "having no shame"...
>
> He has no rights to any children born to the woman, even if he is known to be the genitor. A woman's husband and her lover may even co-operate in trying to get her back if she runs away to another village (Netting, 1969:1042-3)

The common ground of the above arguments is that it is difficult, if not impossible, given the strength of institutional support for husbands, to prove a man's

infertility. Indeed, during my field work, I was told that there was no Yorùbá word to define male infertility. A man may be impotent (òkó bó) but this is not synonymous with infertility.

Among the Kikuyu (of whom I am a member) of Kenya, a woman can be gĩthata (barren) but there is no equivalent term for a man. Indeed, it used to be (and may still be) the case that if a Kikuyu mũthuri (man or elder) suspected that he was 'infertile' he would arrange to go on a journey and then invite a close male friend to take over his thingira (hut). The friend, it was understood, would then proceed to have sexual intercourse with the wife until the husband returned. This practice among the Kikuyu was not only confined to men who thought themselves 'infertile'. My grandmother told me that Kikuyu hospitality required that a man, on occasions, should leave his 'bed' for his best friend to sleep with his wife. My grandmother used to say that in such circumstances it was difficult for a man not to become a father.

Relationship between Sexual Intercourse, Pregnancy, Menstruation, Semen and the Menopause

Among the Yoruba, and many other African peoples, a woman who is menstruating is considered dirty, dangerous and polluting.[1] She must not cook for her husband, or have any contact with him, and must avoid all sacred places.

---

[1] This subject (especially in Indian ethnography) has received a great deal of attention from investigators. However, Douglas's treatment (op. cit.) is perhaps one of the most comprehensive.

On the other hand, menstruation is also considered to have many positive aspects. Besides being central to procreation, menstrual blood is said to 'keep a woman looking young and healthy. Her skin is smooth and beautiful, not only when she is menstruating, but throughout her life, until she reaches the menopause'.

Semen (àtọ or irú ọmọ, where irú means 'seed' and ọmọ 'child' or 'children') too is considered to have dangerous as well as positive effects. One woman said:

> Semen (àtọ) is good because a woman cannot get pregnant unless her husband ejaculates inside her vagina during sexual intercourse. You could even say that God uses semen and menstrual blood to create a baby. That is why some people refer to semen as irú ọmọ. It is like the seed that you plant before you can hope to harvest any crops.

But àtọ also has negative aspects, which can sometimes even be fatal. For instance, I was told that if a woman is breast-feeding a child and has sexual intercourse with her husband, the child will get very ill and may even die. A woman who is pregnant is also advised to abstain from intercourse because àtọ is likely to have adverse effects on the unborn baby. The same symptoms would affect the unborn child as the breastfed child. On the other hand, the Uduk people studied by James (1979:118) believe the semen to have the opposite effect. She has written:

> While the baby is growing in his mother's womb, the father should go on sleeping with his wife, for semen is thought to nourish the baby and make him strong. If the husband is absent or does not have relations with his wife, the baby will become weak (kushakush, literally 'pale').

A woman I call Iya Funso explained:

> When a woman has sexual intercourse, the semen goes down to her womb where it stays for a little while. After some time, the àtọ moves up her body until it reaches her breasts where it stays until it is washed out of her body by menstrual blood. When the baby suckles its mother's milk it is also sucking the semen, and this is what makes the child ill. If the woman continues to breast-feed the baby, then the baby's stomach begins to swell, its eyes and stomach get swollen and the baby gets very thin, and it will usually develop a high fever. If the baby is not treated right away by a native doctor, and if the woman continues to engage in sex, the baby dies. Or it may continue to live but will be very unhealthy and very sickly.

Another woman said:

> If a husband should ask his wife for sex during this period, she is right to refuse. If he should persist, she should report him to his mother or her mother right away but should not succumb to his sexual demands. Such a husband will be reprimanded by all the elders... We teach our daughters that when they get married they should never engage in sexual intercourse until the child has been weaned, usually after two years. In our youth, the child would be walking and talking before we dared to go near our husbands.

Semen must not remain in a woman's body, maintained an old woman I call Iya Kehinde:

> If it does, it causes illness. A woman's stomach and face become swollen, and her eyes water. Her whole complexion changes and she looks sickly and emaciated... That is what happens when a woman who has stopped seeing her monthly blood engages in sex. People will say that she likes sex too much, and lacks self-control.

Thus, a woman who has reached the menopause must abstain from sexual intercourse until she dies, failing which she risks grave illness, and the rapid deterioration of her physical appearance. This was a point emphasised by all the women I interviewed.

I was also told that men do not like sleeping with women who have ceased to menstruate:

> Men prefer young women because the mixture of their sperm and the girl's blood give them youth again... If a man sleeps with a woman who has ceased to see her monthly blood, he ages very quickly ... This is true even of very young men who form a habit of sleeping with women who have no blood to purify their own... You can tell such men by just looking at their faces: they show no youth; you can see they are ageing before their time...

Women's Views on Ìwa pa-n-ṣágà or Ìwa àgbere or Ìṣe (Adultery)

Koso market women accept that men and women can and do commit adultery. However, they insist on what they consider to be an important difference between adultery committed by a man and that committed by a woman. If a man has sexual intercourse with another man's wife, this is said to constitute a serious breach or violation of traditional norms. He is said to be pa-n-ṣágà ọkunrin (that is, an adulterer) or one who is committing adultery (ó ń ṣe). But as we shall see, my informants insisted that if a married man were to have sexual intercourse with an unmarried woman this would not constitute adultery. On the other hand, a married woman is said to be an adulteress (àgbere or pa-n-ṣágà obínrin)[1] if she has sexual intercourse with another man, whether he is married or single. This is not unusual, for as Douglas (op. cit.:126) has pointed out:

> A double moral standard is often applied to sexual offences. In a patrilineal system of descent to which all my informants belonged wives are the door of entry to the group. In this they hold a place analogous to that of sisters in the Hindoo caste. Through the adultery of a wife, impure blood is introduced to the lineage. So the symbolism of the imperfect vessel appropriately weighs more heavily on the women than the men.

---

[1] These words also mean 'prostitute' or 'prostitution'.

All the women emphasised that adultery committed by women was much worse than that committed by men. One woman put it this way:

> Men do not get pregnant; they can sleep with a woman who is not their wife and manage to keep it a secret. But not so with women. Now if a woman is sleeping with her lover and her husband at the same time, how would she be able to tell whose child it is? This is why people think it is worse for a woman to be an adulteress than it is for a man to be an adulterer.

Another woman added:

> There is another reason why female adultery is worse than male adultery: a man can always claim [acknowledge paternity of] a child from any woman if he believes he is the father... This is because such a claim does not depend on whether he is married or not...

One afternoon when I was discussing adultery with some women who sold fish, and who also shared several open stalls, some of their customers joined in the discussion. Before long, the discussion had become so animated that several other women who traded in nearby stalls joined us to voice their opinions. Below, I give an account of what three women customers had to say.

First woman:

> Adultery for men — ha! What are you women talking about?... All men are supposed to do that thing to women... it proves that they are real men [virile] ... men must prove their sexual power [prowess] with as many women as possible. If he has one wife, he proves his sexual power by sleeping with women who are surely not his wives. If he has one hundred wives, well he has to prove to all of them that he is a real man, otherwise there will be trouble [everyone laughs]. So you see, it does not make sense to talk about a man committing adultery... If a man sticks to his one, two or three wives, everybody will begin to wonder whether there is not something the matter with such a man... This will lead everybody to think that he is sexually useless or weak (ailágbára) [Everybody agreed with her].

Second woman:

> There is another thing this woman [pointing to the first speaker] has left out, and that is this: our tradition demands that if a man is successful he should get as many wives as possible; people will then respect him as a rich man (olówo). When men are looking for wives, they are sometimes tempted to inspect the goods they are getting [everybody laughs]. It is like going to the market to shop: if the fruits are ripe, you may ask the trader to taste one of them...

The third woman was obviously of superior status: she had an expensive-looking skirt (ìró) and blouse (bùbá) and head-tie (gèle) made of European lace material, and shoes and a handbag, and she sometimes used English words when speaking. She said:

> Why should men be able to commit adultery when women are supposed to be faithful to them? You talk about sexual power; when a man has been all over town to all those loose women, what sexual power does he have left for his wife at home?... Haven't you heard of women taking their husbands to court because they can no longer perform when they get home, owing to the fact that they have been all over Lagos? [everybody laughs - 'perform' here refers to sexual intercourse]. Take my neighbour for example; her husband thinks he is sexually mighty — he cannot see a woman without taking her to bed ... His poor wife had to report him to his father's brother because he is always tired when he gets home from work late at night... She is not a fool and this is causing a lot of trouble in their marriage...

Here again, all the women agreed with the third speaker except when she concluded by saying: 'And in any case, it is written in the Bible that men and women should not commit adultery'. Here all the women booed and shouted her down, telling her that that was the Òìbó Bible and had nothing to do with Yoruba customs.

The discussion ended with a consensus between traders and customers that the comparison between a married woman having illicit affairs and a married man sleeping with other

women was a false one. Adultery was said to be bad for men only if it interfered with their sexual obligations to their wife or wives, or if it infringed other men's rights.

The women pointed out that the terms pa-n-ṣágà and àgbere literally meant 'prostitute' and were therefore inappropriate when applied to men. One woman asserted, 'Men cannot be prostitutes; they buy, they do not sell. It is only the women who give their bodies to men all over the place that deserve to be called prostitutes...'

Ilobirin pupọ̀ or Ikóbirinjọ (Polygyny): A Necessary Evil

In a recent publication, Helen Ware (1979) reports that women in Ibadan favour polygyny. Christine Obbo's study of migrant women in some East African cities (1980) also shows that some women may not oppose polygyny as long as each wife has an autonomous household unit, while Clignet's (1970) voluminous work tried to make a case for more sympathy for polygyny. In the Nigerian mass media it is frequently said that Nigerian women (except the educated ones) are not opposed to polygyny because it is to their advantage.

In Koso market, I was told by most of the women that polygyny was 'a necessary evil. It is like being born with an ugly scar that you do not like, but there is little you can do about it. You learn to live with it'.

One woman said:

> If I was my husband's only wife, I don't know how I could cope with my trading. As it is now, my husband has three wives, and that means I don't have to worry about his food every day. The three of us share it among ourselves. If I was the only wife, I would have to leave the market early every afternoon so that I could prepare the evening meal before my husband came home... that would affect my trade. But if your co-wives (orogún) are quarrelsome may God help you because that can be another source of daily wàhálà and a lot of worry.

A woman called Ìyá Ronke explained the pros and cons of polygyny thus:

> After a woman has been married for a while, she hopes that her husband will soon get a second wife. When this happens, she then becomes her husband's ìyãlé (senior wife) which means she has somebody to help her with various chores, and she also has a companion. The junior wife (ìyawó kékeré) too, hopes that her husband will get another wife so that she too will have somebody to run her own errands. But after some time there is bound to be trouble among the co-wives. The reason for this is that all the wives begin to compete (dù — jàdu, jàádì) for the husband's favours (ṣe ojúrere fun — which can also mean kindness) and attention. It is this competition (ijadu) that leads to bad blood. The co-wives then become jealous (ijowú) and envious (kún fún ilara) of each other, and they soon begin to quarrel.

Another woman related:

> A man with one wife knows he is a poor man. He prays God to give him wealth so that he can acquire more wives... When one wife misbehaves, the second or the third is there to carry out his wishes... And so, if you quarrel with a husband who has other wives, you have to be careful and settle your differences quickly, otherwise you will be the one to lose when your co-wives start taking over your duties to your husband too often... That is why a man with many wives tells those who are misbehaving that his food will be prepared on time whether there is wàhálà or peace (alãfià)...

In ethnographic literature, the question of jealousy between co-wives is extensively reported, albeit little analysed, to indicate its significance in African social structures. Evans-Pritchard's (1929) pioneering work on witchcraft, and the work edited by Marwick (1970) among others, clearly indicate that witchcraft accusations among close relatives (I would argue especially) and co-wives are a perennial problem. As Dupire (1963:67) shows:

> ... co-wives are rivals not only in so far as sex and emotion are concerned, but also in the economic sense... Moreover, the husband [as we shall see shortly] is not usually greatly concerned to maintain the elementary rules of justice and equity so essential to polygyny and this produces justifiable jealousy between the wives and leads to the breaking of marriage.

In a recent publication, Little reports a case which succinctly spells out what could and does happen between co-wives if, and when, 'elementary rules of justice' are not maintained. He states (1980:45-6) that:

> Mah Mahtoe [the first wife] ... has retained her feelings for Francis [the husband], and so, not surprisingly resents the intrusion of a woman much younger than she is and much more attractive. Her resentment is the greater because Makallay [the latest wife] as a well-born Muslim Susu, is clearly conscious of a cultural superiority over Sowanah [the name of the people being described] animists.
>
> By local standards Makallay is, indeed a very striking figure, especially in the eyes of men...
>
> Not only is she the apple of his eye, but having attended school, Francis is much more broad-minded than the conservatively-minded Chiefdom elders. This, in addition to Makallay's charms, is the basis of the close affinity with his other wives, and it involves her being treated <u>almost</u> as an equal [a sufficient reason for her co-wives to poison her if they could]. For example, when she first entered the harem, Francis had, according to Sowanah custom [and Yoruba custom too] to put her under his first wife's control and authority

> But, born and bred in the metropolis, young Makallay was part of a wider world than the country-bred Mahtoe [a potential source of friction] had even dreamed existed. The upshot was that within another month Francis had had to give Makallay a house of her own and set her on the same footing as Mahtoe.
>
> From then on, Mahtoe took every opportunity of discrediting Makallay in Francis's eyes...
>
> Makallay is naturally conscious of this and the danger that Mahtoe's hatred poses to her position...

As far as the Koso market traders were concerned, one of the worst concomitants of polygyny was the fact that neither the co-wife or her children can ever feel safe. One woman, epxressing the common viewpoint, said:

> You can never sleep in peace or properly if you and your co-wife have had a misunderstanding... people who belong to the same family cannot avoid quarrels, brothers, sisters, anybody... But with co-wives, matters are different. Quarrels lead to them bewitching each other or their children... failing which they may even poison each other...

The children are not exempt, in fact they are always a target. With regard to co-wives poisoning each other and their children, and the aftermath of their altercation, below is a case of co-wives who have quarrelled — albeit fictitious — taken from a novel reported on by Little (ibid.:50-51):

> At first, Ogugua [the second wife] is not unduly provoked. Nwabunor [the first wife], however, begins to destroy her [Ogugua's] sewing machine and clothes. This is too much for Ogugua. The two wives close. There is a desperate struggle which ends only when Nwabunor slumps, half-dead, on the ground.
>
> The upshot is that Nwabunor is sent back to her village, and it is typical of her husband's pusillanimity that the command is given not by him but by his mother [not an uncommon practice in Nigeria]. Before she leaves, however, Nwabunor steals into Ogugua's kitchen, taking with her a phial provided by the soothsayer. This contains a deadly poison, which she pours into the soup that Ogugua and her children are to consume the

> following morning. All of them duly eat and then die in agony. But Nwabunor's own son [she had left him behind, as is customary in many African societies when a wife has left her husband's house] suffers the same fate.

I was told that sometimes a polygynist deliberately sets his wives against each other in order to prevent them from combining against him. One way of doing this, the women told me, was to show undue favouritism towards one or some of the wives, refusing to reconcile feuding wives, taking sides with one wife against another instead of being an impartial judge, prejudicing his relatives (especially his mother and sisters) against a wife, and so on.

One woman put it this way:

> A man with many wives knows he cannot have peace. But what of the quarrels he must settle between his wives? The worry that some of his dissatisfied wives may use bad medicine against him or his relatives weighs on him heavily... The fear that some of his wives may sleep with other men is another source of anxiety for a man with many wives... I have heard many men say that if a man has one wife he has one trouble; if he has five, that is four more troubles, and so the more the wives, the more trouble a man has ...

The Relationship between a Wife and her Husband's Relatives

A good Yoruba wife is, among other things, one who takes great pains to maintain cordial relationships with her husband's relatives. In particular, she must show great deference to her husband's mother and father, and his brothers and sisters, especially those that are older than her husband and herself.

All the children born in her husband's family prior to her marriage are theoretically senior to her. She must, therefore, show respect to them even if, chronologically, she is many years older. She must not, for instance, address

them by their actual names, but rather must find pet names for them. She must also show great respect and humility to her husband's wives who are senior to her — that is, those who were married before her, regardless of their actual age. Ordinarily, junior wives tend to be younger than senior wives.

A wife who establishes a strongly affectionate relationship with her husband's mother, and his sisters, knows she has acquired powerful allies. During marital crises, or family quarrels, they are more likely than any of his other relatives to defend her, and this is usually taken seriously by the other members of her husband's family. But I was told that it was the exception rather than the rule for a wife to succeed in establishing such a relationship.

A woman I call Iya Yemisi explained the nature of the relationship between a wife and her husband's mother and sisters:

> It is difficult to gain the total confidence of your husband's mother and his sisters. Especially his mother. She is always jealous of her son's wife even if she does not show it... Also, although a mother wants her son to get married, at the same time she wants to keep the son to herself because she believes that no woman can be good enough for him.

She continues:

> And the sisters, they too are like the mother, even though some good ones try hard not to show it, or pretend they are not jealous. My husband's mother was like that... when she was alive I had a difficult time pleasing her... She always found fault with everything I did... She complained bitterly that I did not bear her son enough sons and when she died I heard rumours (ìhìn) that my husband's sisters thought I might have killed her. The quarrel had to be settled by the whole family, his and my own... If you accuse somebody of killing your mother, do you suppose you can be true friends? That is why I decided to abandon the marriage because my husband seemed to support his sisters, even after the quarrel was settled...

This woman's fears were shared by others in Koso market, many of them arguing that pleasing a husband's relatives was frequently a losing battle. They said that the stability of any marriage was based to a large extent on the wife's getting on with her husband's people.

As they continually pointed out, marriages are made by relatives who can also unmake them if the relationship proves unsatisfactory to them. A woman loses more than a man when a marriage breaks down. She should therefore try her best to make sure that her husband's relatives are happy with her. If she succeeds, she and her children will have peace.

The Relationship between a Married Woman and her own Relatives

Yoruba marriages are traditionally virilocal. But unlike many other patrilineal societies, a Yoruba woman is never totally incorporated into her husband's lineage, as shown by Lloyd (1955). After marriage, she continues to maintain strong links with her own relatives, especially her own mother, sisters, and brothers. In times of need, the woman is expected to give and usually does give, whatever material support that she can afford to her relatives, who also reciprocate as occasion demands.

At times of crisis and rites of passage, a married woman is expected to participate to the same extent as her unmarried sisters. If she lives in a different village, she pays frequent visits to her natal home, and may at times stay there for several weeks at a time.

One woman told me that:

> It is good that a woman should maintain strong friendship with her own people, because when she really needs help, these are the best and only true friends that a woman has to fall back on. That is why when a woman is about to deliver a baby, she either goes back to her village if she is living in Lagos, or her own mother comes to stay with her until she is well again. Also, if a woman is ill, she may return to her people to seek a cure for her illness, returning only when she is completely well. If she dies in old age, among my people [this woman was from Ijebu province of Yorubaland] she must be buried in her village and some time they must bring her body back to her village for burial if she dies in her husband's village or outside her own village, unless she dies while she is still too young.

At Koso market it was common to find the women's relatives, especially females, visiting in the afternoons when the market activities were less busy. During the school holidays, those women with children who could hold the fort for them at the market, would take this opportunity to visit their female relatives in other Lagos markets whom they had not seen for some time. They would usually leave at mid-morning after helping their children to arrange their wares, and would return in the late afternoon just before their own market was ready to close for the day.

Some women told me that their husbands were not always aware of these visits and added that

> They [the husbands] do not care or mind about the visits as long as the woman is home on time to prepare the evening meal. Some husbands are jealous and would prefer their wives to sit in their stalls all day without moving. They do not want to hear that you were visiting your own people because they will think that perhaps you have been somewhere else. If you know you have such a husband, you do not let him know of your movements. You just tell your children not to tell papa that you have not been in the market all day.

Role of Children in Marriage

As already indicated, a woman's greatest dream — according to my informants — is first to marry and then to have as many children as God gives. Most of these children should preferably be boys 'because boys always remain in the family's compound even after marriage, whereas girls must go to live with their husband and his people'.

But while most women said they preferred male children to female, they also said the latter were more helpful to their mothers, especially in the market. Female children were also said to be more helpful to their parents in their old age, because they could perform the domestic duties that a male child would not. When asked why it was important to have as many children as God gives, the women told me that it was because 'you can never be sure which of the children will live to bury you'. One woman said to me:

> Some children like being àbí kú.[1] They will come, stay a few months, sometimes a few years, and then go away [die]. Take me for example; I have been troubled by àbí kú all my life, that is why I have only three children although I bore nine altogether. Now that I can no longer have any more children, [she had reached menopause] I can only pray God that these three will survive to bury me.

Yoruba people believe that if a woman loses many children in infancy, it is because she is being troubled by àbí kú spirits,[2] which are responsible for the death of such children. They believe that it is the same child who keeps coming back, but is prevented from staying by àbí kú spirits. These are

---

[1] A child that comes back after death and is reborn to the same mother.

[2] The Yoruba believe that it is these spirits which arrange for some unborn children to return to them after birth.

believed to live near or inside a tree called ìrokò (chlorophora excelsa Moraceae) which pregnant women are well-advised to avoid. A woman who has lost many children, or who has an àbí kú child must placate these spirits by offering them frequent sacrifices so that they will allow the child to stay (that is, to live). In addition, I was told that an àbí kú child must be accoutred with charms, which may include rings, armlets, wristlets of beads and jingles (ṣaworo). The sound of the latter is said to frighten away the àbí kú spirits. The women told me that it is not only the àbí kú children who wear charms. Most mothers use such charms to protect their children from all evils.

Ethnographers frequently cite the economic contribution of children, especially in rural subsistence economies, as the primary motive for the desire to have many children. The market women I worked with in Lagos said quite emphatically that their desire to have 'as many children as God gives' was not primarily dictated by a desire to have many helping hands, even though this was said to be an important consideration. Rather, as Iya Elefo put it:

> Women want to have many children because you can never be sure whether it is the first, the second, the third, the fourth, the fifth or the sixth child that will survive to bury you. My own mother (ìyá mi) had thirteen children and only my brother and my sister are alive today. If she had had only two children, she would have died miserable and poor with no-one to bury her. That is the worst thing that can happen to anyone — to know that when you die you will have no child to give you a decent burial. There is also another thing about children. You know they will resemble their parents (ọ̀bi) just as their own children will resemble them. This is why people want to have many children so that when they [the parents] die, there will be people living

> who resemble them. It is almost as if you are not really dead. You continue to live on in your children and their children's children. That is why we also pray God for our children to have children — in them you will be remembered for ever. Whenever people see your children or their children, they will be reminded of you, even long after you have passed away. So you see, it is not only your children that remember you, but other people too...

Another reason frequently cited by the women for wanting to have many children was the fact, already noted, that this endeared them to their husbands, especially if most of the children were male. A woman who has borne her husband many sons is more loved by him and his relatives because male children will have children for their own families, whereas female children, when they marry, produce children for their husband's family.

Women's Perceptions of Ọmọ àle (Bastards)

In Lagos, one frequently hears educated people say, 'There is no such thing as a bastard in Yoruba society'. The closest Yoruba word for bastard is ọmọ àle (ọmọ being a child, àle a concubine). Traditionally, a concubine would be a kept woman — that is, a woman living with a man who has not performed all the marriage rites on her behalf. It would seem to follow from this that any child born to such a woman would have the status of ọmọ àle.

During my field work, I asked the women to define ọmọ àle for me. Without exception all defined ọmọ àle as a child whose paternity could not be established. They would say, 'Ọmọ àle is a child whose mother does not know the father', or 'Ọmọ àle is a child who is not claimed by any man. If a

woman says to a man, "This child I am carrying is yours" and the man says "Oh no, it is not my child" then that child is omọ àle'.

Since these definitions contradict or run counter to the traditional perceptions of bastardy, I decided to ask the women what they would call a child born to an àle but whose paternity is acknowledged by the woman's lover. In reply, the women said that such a child would not be omọ àle even if the woman was not properly married as long as somebody acknowledged that he was the father of such a child. All the women I talked to told me that you can tell a bastard by his/her behaviour. Such a child was said to be badly behaved and difficult to handle. His behaviour will differ radically from children who are not bastards. A child who is omọ àle is also said not to resemble his father or any of his relatives.

In discussing omọ àle, the question of physical resemblance of a child to his father, or to any of his relatives, particularly his agnates, was given pre-eminence by most of the Koso market women. Among the Yoruba, this is a point of great importance. Indeed, some of the women seemed quite happy to define paternity by this criterion. A woman would say: 'if you bear a child for your husband, sure it must resemble him. Children always look like their fathers'. Women said that most people were suspicious of children who did not resemble their fathers. One woman said:

> ... if the face doesn't, at least something should... some part of the father's body, even if it is the toes [she laughs] ... of course it is better if it is the face...

Among the Kikuyu too, a child's physical resemblance is considered important, but among the Yorubá and many other Nigerian peoples, the resemblance of a child to his father seems to be integral to the definition of genitor. James's (op. cit.:128) observation of the Uduk that 'when paternity is uncertain ... it is likely to be decided from the appearance of the child', can be extended to cover many other African peoples.

Attitude towards Divorce

'A woman should try not to divorce her husband, even if he is mistreating her' the women would say. Rather, she should do all she can to seek reconciliation. Her family and her husband's family should try to settle whatever differences may exist between the man and wife. A woman called Mama Taiwo explained:

> You see, if a marriage breaks down, it is the woman who suffers more than the man. She loses more. She cannot take her children with her because the man would say that they are his children and not hers. Now if you leave your children, who will take care of them? Everybody in the compound (agbolé) will abuse and mistreat them at the slightest provocation. It is the children who will suffer. A woman whose heart (ọkàn) is in two places cannot be a happy woman. That is why we say that if a woman is married and has children, she should stay in her husband's house.

However, the women felt that if a man was continually cruel and unkind to his wife she should not hesitate to leave him. Physical beating for little or no reason, failure to protect his wife from hostile people, particularly her co-wives, refusal to have sexual intercourse with her and the like, were cited as good reasons for divorce.

The women told me that men had a better chance of re-marriage than did women. The reason for this was that other men would rather marry a pure woman — that is, one who had not been deflowered. Jealousy was said to prevent men from marrying women who had previously been married. As one woman said, 'If a man can marry a virgin, why should he go for second-hand (atọwọ́-keji wá, àlòkù)? Anyway, I think that is how a man would think of a woman who had been divorced'.

The women maintained that divorce was now more common than it had been during their youth. They put this down to modern women's loose sexual morals and the fact that 'women nowadays are not respectful to their husbands. Some of them even keep lovers and when the husbands find out, trouble starts. Maybe it is book that spoil these women'.

Most women asserted that in their youth it was difficult to say who was responsible when the marriage broke up.

> You would have to know both the husband and wife and you would have to listen to both their stories before deciding who was right or wrong... Usually, both of them were right and wrong, even though one could always say whether the husband or the wife was more to blame. But nowadays, with these educated women refusing to obey their husbands, how can you not have plenty of divorce?

Another important element in the increase in divorce cited by women was the desegregation of roles. They felt that the traditional division of labour was being undermined by the modern developments. A typical remark was:

> In our youth, women traded, cooked and took care of the children, but with this new civilisation (ìlàjú) may God help us! Now you even see men carrying children as they walk down the streets with their wives. Some women are now working in offices with men, sometimes as the superior (ọ̀gá)

> to many men who work under them. Such women cannot be obedient to their husbands when they get home in the evening. They will be thinking to themselves, "Is he not a man like the ones under me in the office? Why should I obey him?" This is what causes palava in many homes.

This woman concluded by asserting that once women start to compete with men at work, there must be tension at home. She likened the male-female competition at work to co-wives competing for a husband — that it was inevitable that there would be malice, contempt and jealousy between them. So would there be between a husband and wife if they had to compete in similar jobs. In the next chapter, I discuss women's perceptions of work.

CHAPTER SIX

KOSO MARKET WOMEN AT WORK

The apparent economic independence of West African women is such a celebrated subject that it needs little further documentation here. Among the Yoruba, practically all adult women — unless they are too old, sickly, or senile — are engaged in market trading. This has been so for as long as people can remember.

Women's Views on Involvement in Work Outside the Home

The women in the market where I carried out my field work, and the other markets I visited in Lagos, found the concept of a non-working woman or a full-time housewife totally incomprehensible. A frequent remark was:

> If a woman is sick, or has just had a baby, she can expect her relatives and friends to help her out with gifts of money and food, but if she is well and able to work and does not, how can she and her children eat? No-one would be ready to help such a woman, not even her own husband and relatives. If she had any shame (itìjú), she would not expect people to come to her assistance.

Circumstances leading to a woman's inability to trade were dreaded by all my informants who argued that:

> ...if you depend on others to feed you and your children, no matter how nice they appear to be, they soon think of you as a burden and will no doubt begin to resent you. That is why every woman prays to God to give her strength and good health. She does not want to rely on others for money and other essentials.

The women also felt that market trading was an ideal occupation for women, along with teaching, nursing or becoming a seamstress. Most other occupations, especially office work, were thought to be really men's work. Most women traders I talked with were disdainful or suspicious of women professionals such as lawyers, doctors, architects and the like, despite the fact that they were well aware that these professions commanded high incomes. Their reservations about women working in what they considered to be male occupations has already been touched on in the last chapter. They have an ambivalent and sometimes contemptuous regard for educated women (pejoratively termed acadas and 'been-tos' — educated women who have been to the United States or Europe) whom they hold responsible for the rapid deterioration of Nigeria's moral fibre. The women, however, do allow and indeed assist their daughters to get some education. Primary or secondary education is thought to be adequate, after which they expect their daughters to establish some form of market trading or, failing this, to become teachers.

It must be clearly stated that the women are not against female education per se. Indeed, most of them toil desperately for many years, saving every penny to give their children a basic education. The women are acutely aware from their own personal experiences that a formal education is now imperative for an expansion of trading and for upward mobility. However, they look askance at what they consider to be the undesirable concomitants of modern education such as European dress, especially the mini-skirt, tight-fitting clothes, shorts and

trousers. The latter are thought to blur the male-female differences, which is thought to be undesirable. They also argue that educated women, by virtue of their station in life, look down on non-educated women and are not always as respectful to elders as custom demands. In short, they have acquired alien ways which are incompatible with Nigerian traditional life-styles.

The apparently contradictory views held by these women on the subject of Western education, particularly for female children, is not hard to understand or explain. The market women traders are not averse to the material gains and 'comforts' associated with high levels of Western education. Indeed, throughout my field work, the theme by the few market women whose relatives (some very distant) had 'made it', was a recurrent one. They spoke, often with pride and uninhibited joy, about the relatives' big cars, fine clothes, magnificent flats or houses (albeit frequently government-owned), of houses built in villages, ability to assist financially less fortunate kin, and the like. These advantages and many others were thought to be the 'pros' of modern education, but did not cancel out or mitigate the 'cons'. Lloyd (1966:29) has explained it thus:

> There is undoubtedly a conflict between the desires of the elite on the one hand to furnish their own homes and to educate their own children, and, on the other, their feelings of obligation towards near kin. But the latter are not denied, and many elite salary earners are giving substantial proportions of their salaries to their close relatives. The benefits of living away from the family compound are that one is freed from persistent demands of all and sundry... solidarity of the family and descent group is hailed by many of the elite... Yet the degree of verbal

> emphasis placed on these traditional values may well be the result of their continually threatened erosion as societies become more urbanized, industrialized, and stratified.
>
> In interpersonal relations it is not difficult to find situations of tension between illiterate or ill-educated parents and their elite children... Problems arise when parents and children visit each other. The illiterate mother is ill at ease — and probably frightened — in the all-electric kitchen of her daughter.

The last point is of singular importance. Besides the contention by the market women traders that educated women tend on the whole to be of easy virtue among other things, they consistently and bitterly regretted what they perceived as the disgraceful treatment of mothers-in-law by daughters-in-law. One woman lamented:

> These educated women do not know their place... They no longer have respect for old people. One of my friends tells me that her son's wife thinks herself too big to kneel down for her when greeting her... and would not even allow her to use the kitchen because she says she would dirty it. The quarrel became so great my friend had to move out of her son's house five years ago and has not returned since. If her son's wife had not been to school, do you think that would happen? Oh no,... these educated women rule the houses of our sons, and have little or no respect for the man's mother... It is a great tragedy indeed...

Another woman who had been listening to the conversation said:

> What you have said is nothing. These book women do worse. What of my friend who says that her son's wife threatened to beat her up, after accusing her of causing bad blood between her and her husband. She even accused her of using witchcraft against her. In our youth, a woman who publicly accuses her mother-in-law of witchcraft would be thoroughly beaten by her husband, but not any more... Instead, my friend, whose husband had died many years ago, was sent back to her village by her son, where she is said to have gone mad...

These are some of the real problems responsible for the opposing views held about modern education for girls. For

most of these women, children — especially male children — are the ultimate manifestation of success. The conflicts that emanate from the 'generation gap' and differing attitudes towards life are all blamed on what is most immediately tangible — modern education is a convenient scapegoat.

What Attracts Women to Market Trading?

The women gave many reasons for their attraction to market trading. The most important were:

(1) Market women can organise collective help when they need it, whereas other women cannot.

(2) Trading is compatible with familial responsibilities and roles, particularly motherhood and being a wife.

(3) Children can assist in a way that would not be possible in other forms of work.

(4) It is not too difficult to raise money for trading activities through esusu contributions, and the only qualifications needed are being a woman and having a good business sense.

(5) If a woman prospers in petty trading, once her children are independent and she has reached the age of the menopause she can engage in long distance trading if she so desires, which is viewed as more lucrative and less strenuous.

(6) Market trading has important social dimensions not found in occupations such as farming or wage-employment in European-type firms.

(7) Trading enables women to have their own resources which they can dispose of as they wish without having to account to their husbands or other relatives.

Supportive Structures for Women in Market Trading

Market women, perhaps for survival, maintain a strong sense of group solidarity and identity. In times of crisis no market woman is ever alone, either spiritually or financially.

Mutual Aid Associations and the rotating credit system (to be discussed later) are ingenious financial arrangements adopted by them to cope with the hazards of trade. Children are also an indispensable asset. From the age of about six they assist in the market, not only with cooking, cleaning, running errands, and so on, but also in selling. Most women are tremendously handicapped without the support of such children. These could be one's own children, but they could also be children of relatives.

Should a market woman fall ill, she is paid home visits by all the women in her market who visit her in turn until she is completely well. On these visits, the sick woman is given gifts of food and sometimes money to tide her over until she is able to return to the market. This routine is kept up until the woman is well or dies.

When a market woman has given birth she is similarly treated. She stays away from her market for weeks, sometimes months. During this period, women from her market rally around until she is completely on her feet again. Gifts of food and clothing for the child are given to her, including a lump sum of money collected from her market. During the naming ceremony of her child, all the women from her section, if it is a big market, will attend, bringing her such small gifts of money and food as they can afford.

During rites de passage, the story is the same. If it is marriage or the death of a close relative, women give moral and financial support, as outlined above. They help with cooking and generally entertain those who come to mourn or to rejoice as the case may be. Weddings and funerals among the Yoruba are perhaps among the most expensive in

relative terms in the world. Both entail vast amounts of money. During such events Yorùbá incur enormous debts which sometimes take several years to repay. The desire to give a relative what is popularly known as a 'decent burial' is uppermost in the minds of most people. A family's standing in the community may be judged by the number of people attending a wedding or funeral, the amount of food and drink available and the number of local dignitaries attending the occasion. This is particularly true if the funeral is for an old person. These occasions are reminiscent of a Kwakiutl potlatch for they call for a display of wealth and influence on which prestige, in turn, is based. During such occasions, a whole street may be blocked off with chairs and tables where guests are seated. The last military regime was forced to declare such 'parties' illegal.

Since most market women can never individually afford the sort of expenditure involved in such occasions, the collective effort makes it possible for each of them. It is a form of credit system without which most of the women would be plunged into untold hardship. In this way, they are able to survive in harsh urban communities, almost as if they were 'back home'.

Women give each other support in other areas too — personal crises such as a turbulent marriage, difficulties with children or one's relatives. It is not unusual, for example, for an Alága to send a delegate to a woman's husband to plead with him to give his wife peace. Since the women are usually elderly, husbands tend to listen to them and promise 'to do their best'. Women, therefore, see



A good example of children's participation in the market

'their' markets as some sort of big family, despite the fierce competition among themselves that is also an integral part of markets. Market organisations resemble a family in that they demand reciprocal obligations that transcend ethnicity, religion, age and background. Discharging responsibility towards one another does not depend on the nature of existing personal relationship or characteristics. If any woman is in need of help, it is understood *a priori* that all will help without reference to such extraneous factors as being on good or bad terms.

Trade Activities and Family Responsibilities

In market trade the role of wife, mother, relative, friend, neighbour and the like is never antithetical to or in conflict with trading. Children, irrespective of age, are brought to markets. Food is cooked on small gasoline stoves or open fires, most of the time for immediate consumption but sometimes to carry home for evening meals. Market places are close enough to the women's homes so that if they need to, they can reach home quickly. For instance, Vagale *et al*. (1974: 1 and 28) found, in a survey of Ibadan City markets that 'Almost all the traders of Dugbe live in Ibadan and its environs; very few live in other towns', and that a majority of traders are within walking distance of their homes. This is also true of the market in which I carried out my field work. In fact, no woman lived outside Lagos, and more than 95 per cent of the women traders live within three miles of the market. This is consistent with other researches on markets in Lagos which show the average distance between market women traders and their homes to be about three miles.

Women cannot venture much further afield because, as a rule, commodities have to be transported to and from the market on their heads. Commercial transportation is so erratic and scarce that women find it rational to trade in the market nearest home.

Their proximity to their homes also means that they can run home to attend to unfinished tasks, such as sweeping the compound, looking after a sick neighbour, preparing a special meal that cannot be cooked in the market, fetching water, washing clothes, and even, sometimes, taking a short rest.

The Role of Children in Market Trade

The role of children in the market trade is critical. Their high level of involvement is evident to the most casual observer. Before primary education became universal, all market women were assisted by their children. It used to be the case that women were only helped by their female children or those of their relatives. Now, however, both male and female children are to be seen selling with, or for, their mothers. Female children, however, still outnumber the male.

Most market women, as already indicated, adhere to the philosophy that education is one of the most effective tools for upward mobility. They are alive to the fact that the élite who dominate polity and economy in the country are predominantly those who are schooled. They are anxious that their children should get an education and they work hard to achieve this goal.



A vegetable section at the market

Again, the evidence of children is apparent

All the women I talked to said it was more important for a child to go to school than to help in the market. However, all said they expected their children to come directly to the market from school so that they could run errands. On Saturdays and Sundays, markets are filled with children of practically all ages beyond three months. Those over seven or eight years assist usually in minding their younger siblings or in hawking around town their wares which they carry on their heads — sometimes over several kilometres.

To most market women, this assistance by children is thought to be doubly advantageous. First and foremost, it is seen as a necessary preparation for the girl's future career — trading. Second, it is said to be a good training for children. As one woman said:

> During the time when the Òyìbó were fighting Hitler, my mother's mother, with whom I lived used to make me hawk plantains all over Ìsàlè Èkó ('old Lagos'). I used to think she was really mean. If I came home without having sold all the plantains, she would flog me mercilessly... She would say, "Eh, you have been playing again, that is why you did not sell well..." I would plead in vain that there were no customers, but she would continue to beat me... I hated her then... I think I was 15 or 17 years old, because I used to see my time [menstruate]. But now, I thank this woman and all our ancestors for this invaluable training. It has been of great help to my market...

This sentiment in one form or another was held by all the women in this market. Some even expressed the opinion that if children do not help in markets they will become difficult children. Hawking wares over long distances in high humidity and temperatures that are seldom below 80-85 degrees Fahrenheit is thought to instil discipline in the

young. Women feel that their long hours of endurance in market places were a proof of this claim.

Besides discipline and training, women felt that their children also aided their trading activities. A woman with children in their 'teens is not under great pressure, whereas those without children have to go to the market even when they are not feeling very well. They are sometimes to be seen lying on a bench in their stalls. When women told me that children are God's greatest gift to a woman, they cited help given by their children in the market to prove their point. One woman said to me:

> We all have to wake up at 5.00 every morning except for my husband... While I cook the morning meal some of my children are sweeping the compound, others see to the water, and the oldest gets the wares for the market ready... Another may wash clothes or help to clean the house. When I get to market they help me to display my goods, and those days when I have to go to Mushin, I do not have to close my stall like some of my friends who do not have children to help them. So, you see, children for a trader are like gold...

Another woman added:

> If a woman cannot come to the market, it is important to have a child who stands in for you. Your mates are always ready to help in times of need, of course, but there is a limit to the amount of help they can give you... You must not ask them too often otherwise they get irritated...

She continued:

> If you close your stall too often it is bad for business. Customers must see you in the market when they come or you will begin to lose them... If your children are there this will not happen... They would know all your customers and would be the first to draw their attention to your stall. There is another thing about leaving your own children in your stall compared to asking another woman, and that is this. She can talk nicely and attract customers to your stall... but since the



Still further evidence of children in market trade

> other woman is your competitor, you cannot in all fairness expect her to go out of her way to attract customers to your stall when she herself needs to sell her goods. And so, you only ask your neighbour in the market to help if you absolutely must...

The structural arrangement of stalls in most markets in Lagos is such that women selling similar or identical commodities sit next to each other. Of course, each woman has a hard core of regular customers who would ordinarily not buy from other women unless the seller does not have what her client wants.

However, since new customers appear in markets every day, all women compete ruthlessly to add to their clientele. These are the customers that no woman can afford to miss too often and cannot expect other women to divert to her stall. It is in this situation that children's help becomes invaluable.

Since the competition for new customers is so fierce, women with children are obviously at an advantage. As already pointed out, drawing the attention of customers to one's stall may literally include physically grabbing the customers - albeit gently and in a friendly manner. It follows therefore that a woman with children can grab more customers than one without.

Men selling meat are also to be seen with their male children assisting. Female children do not assist their fathers in the same way as male children now do their mothers. Perhaps the case for training comes to the fore here, or it may be that meat sellers do not want female children to pollute their male domain. As Vagale et al. (ibid.:22 have pointed out:

The main meat section at Koso market

> While women traders specialise in selling food, beverages, cloth and household goods, they do not normally deal in meat, planks, hardware, building materials and service trade. It is said that dealing in certain commodities by women carries a social stigma and is, therefore, a taboo to them.

Are Koso Market Women Petty Traders or Wealthy Traders?

Many writers, impressed by the pre-eminence of women in West African market places have tended to ignore the fact that, for the generality of the women traders, their life is not an easy one. As already pointed out in chapter four, and as this chapter will attempt to show, the majority of the market women traders toil desperately, many hours a day, for six, sometimes seven days a week, to feed (among other things) themselves and their children. On this point, Ardener (1980:4) has written:

> But in this complex field we must not romanticize working women: the independence, cheerfulness, and vigour of individuals who are young and have their health and strength is only one side of the question. Modern, middle-class writers often similarly describe the working child of the nineteenth century as sturdy and independent, and tend to imply that a serious loss resulted later from their education. Of course the match-selling child was happy, master as he might think of his fate. At the age of fifty as a pauper, broken in health, he would not have thanked you for admiring his independence at eight years of age.
>
> In judging the "happiness" of people with their lot, the whole life must be taken into account. The hardworking independent peasant or industrially-employed woman is likewise precarious and dependent on forces she may not be aware of; of course, the lot of women whose happy independence depends on servants, commoner now in the third world than in the west, is also precarious and we should not forget that also.

The overwhelming majority of market women traders in Lagos, as in the rest of the country, are small-scale traders. This contradicts the mass of literature and popular beliefs which portray market women traders in Nigeria and West Africa generally as wealthy traders. Since Nigeria is a low income country, where the majority of its peoples struggle for mere subsistence, it could not be otherwise.

Trager (1979) who carried out major research work on market women in Ilesha, Nigeria, has advocated a more systematic typology of market women and women traders in general. Presumably such an exercise should yield a more coherent classification indicating the various categories to which market women traders belong. For instance, not all market women in Lagos can be correctly termed 'petty' traders, even though, as Little (1973:45) has noted, 'the great majority of these West African market women are petty traders...'

Market women traders in Lagos could be divided into five major categories: (1) traders who occupy permanent stalls in the various markets and whose annual income is about 500 naira and above but less than ₦720 per annum (the minimum national wage at the time of the field work); (2) traders who are (a) squatters in the various markets, (b) street traders, and (c) hawkers who sell anything from a few oranges to sticks of imported or locally-manufactured cigarettes; (3) traders whose annual income is 720 naira and above but less than 2000 naira; (4) traders who occupy big 'provision' stores in the various markets in Lagos or outside market places; and (5) the really wealthy women traders who deal mainly in textiles.

These categories are obviously not exhaustive. For example, traders in categories 4 and 5 could be classified further to indicate the actual or approximate level of business activities, since we already have a good idea of levels of incomes for traders in categories 1, 2 and 3. The really wealthy female traders, as shown by Bauer (1954) and others, may own businesses worth about 129,000 naira (£100,000) or more.

In the course of my research, I made the acquaintance of three women traders (not at Koso market) who freely admitted making profits of more than ₦20,000 per annum on average. (Personally, I would have thought they made a lot more judging from their style of living.) They were all textile dealers, but also traded in gold jewellery. All three had a secondary-school education or its equivalent. Two were married to extremely wealthy men, while the third had previously been married to a very wealthy trader. This woman also claimed to have rich relatives who had aided her with the initial capital to start trade. She owned a magnificent house, lavishly furnished, in one of the better neighbourhoods of Lagos, and operated two expensive, chauffeur-driven cars. The other two women traders also lived in magnificent houses which were ostentatiously furnished. They said all the furniture had been ordered and designed in Europe, even down to the ash-trays, some of which were gold-plated. All three women owned properties worth hundreds of thousands of naira in Lagos. They said they regularly made business trips to London, Manchester, Liverpool, Paris, Milan, Madrid, Jeddah, and other places.

They spoke of their shopping trips to these cities with a great deal of pride and a profound sense of achievement.

There are no official statistics in Lagos to indicate the numbers of women traders who would be in this category. Such female traders are much more the exception than the rule, and it is of great import that the three women traders reported on here were not only relatively well-educated but also, and more significantly, they had married extremely well.

Textiles and gold jewellery require a vast amount of capital, to which few market women traders would have access. For example, it is not unusual to find a pair of gold earrings being sold for 200 naira (£155) or more.[1] A single yard of expensive lace material (at the time of research) could fetch up to 70 naira (£54), some women thought more. Really good damask fabrics would cost a lot more. These are the kinds of commodities in which the really wealthy traders deal. The initial capital needed and the business turnover is beyond the scope of the average market women traders.

Besides the textile dealers, there is another class consisting of a few women traders (all of them élite) who operate European-type boutiques selling the latest fashions from European capitals. These women are reputed to be making fortunes.

The rest of the traders, somewhere between 80 and 90 per cent of the total, are primarily engaged in the

---

[1] At one christening party I attended during my field work, the hostess (not a trader) said the necklace, earrings and bracelets she wore for the party cost more than ₦6000 (£4650); her attire, made of damask material and lace, cost another several hundred naira.

distribution of foodstuffs. As Boserup (1970:93) says, 'it goes without saying that when such a large majority of adult women are active traders, the average turnover must be very small indeed'. While 'Those who have made it big, have done so against great odds' (Pellow, 1977:129).

My own data from Koso market women traders indicate that profit margins for most of these traders are very slender indeed. Koso is reputed to be one of the most expensive of Lagos markets. With my extensive knowledge of prices in the various markets in Lagos, I can bear this out. To arrive at an approximate level in profit margins in this market, I randomly selected twelve women out of the 85 permanent stallholders and requested them to keep, with the help of my research assistants, records of how much they spent each week replenishing their stocks from the various periodic markets and to keep accounts of how much they sold of what they had bought. Of the 12 women, two refused to co-operate. The other ten agreed to report either to me or to my research assistants. They did this immediately upon returning to Koso market. They were also to report how much they had made after selling the goods bought each week. We then kept a record of how much each of the ten women spent each week and what profits they made. These ten women also agreed to be accompanied occasionally to the periodic markets, either by me or my research assistants. In addition to these ten women, and in order to check the accuracy of the information given, I kept similar records of five other women (not randomly selected) who had kindly agreed to have their personal histories recorded. One of these case histories is reported in chapter nine. The table

below indicates the type of commodities sold by each woman.

Table 11: Commodities Sold by 15 Women Traders at Koso Market

Woman	Commodity sold
1	Tomatoes, pepper, okra, onions, green vegetables
2	Tomatoes
3	Pepper
4	Oranges, pineapples, paw-paw, tangerines, bananas and grapefruit
5	Gari, rice and beans
6	Beans, rice and gari
7	Dried fish and shrimps
8	Dried fish tomatoes and peppers
9	Palm oil and groundnut oil
10	Live chickens
11	Tripe and cows' feet
12	Yams and sweet potatoes
13	Snails, tomatoes, peppers and green vegetables
14	Stockfish, tomatoes and peppers
15	Dried fish, tomatoes and peppers.

At the end of four months, I had discovered that 12 out of the 15 women made on average about ₦1.66 per day profit. Assuming they sold every day, which some of them did not, this would mean ₦49.8 per month or approximately ₦588 per annum. This, as was said earlier, is well below the national minimum wage level for the public sector. Of the 12 women quoted, four made ₦1.45 per day profit (₦43.50 per month; ₦522 per annum) assuming they traded every day, which again, they did not. Of these four women, three sold tomatoes, peppers, okra, onions and green vegetables. The other sold fruit; pineapples, oranges, tangerines, paw-paw and bananas. Of the three women not yet analysed, one said she made profits of ₦3.80 per day (approximately ₦114 per month; ₦1360 per annum). She sold stockfish, one of the most expensive commodities in Lagos; like snails, they are considered by people in Lagos to be a delicacy. This woman

said she had been a trader for twenty years. The other two women, one a snail and vegetable seller and the other a fresh fish and shrimp seller, said they made ₦700 and ₦900 each per annum respectively. These two women had also been trading for an average of twenty years. A market woman's level of business activity is usually closely correlated to the number of years she has been trading. The traders at Koso market who were relatively 'well off', had been traders much longer than the average trader. All the women from whom these data were collected thought they could have made slightly more profit if they had not used some of their stocks to prepare meals for their families.

The above data must be viewed with caution, for, as other researchers have pointed out, there are many reasons why a trader may not give correct information about income. These range from inability to keep the accurate trading records from memory, even though in one case we helped, to attempts to maintain a certain image — not only with the investigator but also with one's peers in the market place. However, since I had come to know a few traders extremely well and had become friends with them, I was able to check the figures given by the sampled traders against those I knew. The latter agreed that the profits reported were slightly on the high side but not significantly so. Accurate calculations were difficult to make when stocks supplemented the family meals. My informants could not always recall how much had been taken home for consumption. I had asked the 15 women to keep accounts of how much they took home but eventually had to abandon the idea for two reasons: (1) the

women seemed to be very reluctant to discuss anything to do with meals eaten in their homes and therefore I could not vouch for the accuracy of the information given; (2) I was hesitant to press them too hard on this point lest I alienated them as informants. The problem of obtaining accurate statistics on incomes from market women traders in Lagos has been discussed by Sada and McNulty among others. Of their efforts, they report:

> In spite of the highly publicized objectives of our research, the traders would not believe that it was not unconnected with taxation; and when they did, they were still haunted by the traditional belief in keeping a secret of one's success lest the enemy be aroused to sabotage one's efforts. Those who are willing, keep very scanty records and can only remember approximate figures of their earnings. Thus, it is not a surprise that ... only about 16 per cent of the traders make less than ₦300 per annum. This figure has probably been inflated in conformity with the local tendency to exaggerate one's responsibilities and contributions (Sada and McNulty, n.d.:4)

How Women Raise Capital to Finance their Trading Activities

In chapter four it was stated that in some Yoruba areas it is customary for the husband, on marriage, to give his wife a small amount of capital with which to start trade.

However, it must be stressed that the women traders I talked with felt that reports about aid from husbands for starting a trade are grossly exaggerated. Unless this custom is now dying out, data from Koso market, and my information from many market women traders in other Lagos markets, certainly indicate that reports of financial aid from husbands are misleading. Husbands do sometimes assist wives to start trade but they are not a major, or even a significant source of raising capital.

The opportunities to expand trading at Koso, as indeed in the whole of Lagos, are very limited. There are only about four women in this market, who, like those from Haiti reported on by Mintz (1964) or by Bauer (1954), can boast of 700-900 naira or more worth of working capital. They are a woefully small minority. During my field work in this market, I became intimately acquainted with two such women. One, a Yoruba, specialised in stockfish. (She was one of the 15 women who kept records on weekly profits.) The other was an Igbo who sold rice and gari. The latter was also the head of the Igbo women's association in this market. At the time, she had a son studying for a doctorate degree in engineering in the United States. She said she had financed most of his education. This, for those familiar with literature on market women in West Africa, is not an extraordinary claim. However, these two cases are atypical.

In local parlance, market women are popularly and aptly called petty traders (a term hardly applicable to the really wealthy) because they have to grapple with problems of inadequate finance similar to those reported in the work edited by Firth and Yamey (1964).

Aid from Relatives

Of the other relatives, a woman's agnates are expected to assist in times of need. But, as the women often emphasised, relatives cannot usually help because they too have very few funds. Poverty at this level of society is so relatively-evenly distributed that only a very few people are in a position to help.

The table below indicates the major sources that are open to women in financing their trade. It must be emphasised, as the women themselves were quick to insist, that the only effective, stable, and sure method of raising capital is firstly through esusu contributions, and secondly, through credit by suppliers, and the latter, as we shall see later, is open mostly to women who have been trading for a substantial period. Even then, these women frequently said that this method was relatively precarious compared to esusu. One woman said: 'You see, the problem with credit given by suppliers is that they may move away, or they may have had a bad market one week, and so they cannot supply you on credit. When this happens, you too will have a bad market week, and I can assure you it happens often'.

Table 12 Sources of Capital for Trade

Sources of Credit	Number of Women
Esusu	85
Credit provided by suppliers	41
A woman's children	3
Husband	2
Brothers	2
Sisters	1
Other relatives	1
Mothers	1
Boyfriends	1
Commercial banks	-
Friends	1
No other sources except esusu	32

It has long been accepted, at least among the Yoruba, that it is a woman's responsibility to feed herself and her children from her trading activities. In a city like Lagos, where the concomitants of so-called 'economic development' have led to unprecedented scarcity of food and shelter, the market woman is in a particularly vulnerable situation.

The women talked of the dread of being dependent on relatives for help. Those who cited relatives, whether close or distant, said they only requested help from such sources when in dire need. Husbands were considered to be even less desirable in providing capital than other relatives such as brothers, sisters, mothers, and so on. The reason for this attitude was summed up by one woman in this way:

> If you ask your husband for money for your trade, the chances are that he will say he does not have the money, the reason being that if he had the money he would rather save it for ìdána and owó ōrí. It pays a man to have many wives, rather than one whose trade is going well. This is because a man with many wives is thought to be rich, and in any case, if he has more than one wife, the problem remains. He cannot give one money for trade without giving the other. That would cause trouble. The house would be divided. He too would be divided. He would be accused of favouritism which causes jealousy and acrimony. If he has many wives, where would he get enough money to finance their trade? Anyway, men would rather have more wives. They can never have too many wives. That is why a man does not give money to his wife or wives for trade.

There is another reason why the woman herself would rather not be indebted to her husband, even if he were willing and able to help. A woman said to me:

> Let your husband give you money for trade too often and the next thing is that he wants to know how your trading is going. You don't mix market with marriage. They do not mix well. Market is a woman's private affair never to be discussed with husbands. It would bore a man to discuss his wife's market. Men prefer not to. It is better to keep it that way. Market is a woman's matter.

Another woman added:

> If your husband has helped your trade too often, that would be the same thing as trading with him. You don't trade with your husband, any more than you trade with your co-wife.

The way in which women raise the initial capital to start trade also bears examination. The popular notion has been that a large proportion (or almost all) Yoruba women are set up by their husbands. A large number of my informants at the market where I worked said their husbands had not provided the initial capital. This was also the information I obtained from a random sample of 100 market traders in five other markets in Lagos. Since there is no reason to believe that Koso market women traders are any different from those in other markets, it would seem that the custom of providing a wife with capital to start trade after marriage is rapidly dying out. The following table indicates the original source of capital with which a woman had started her trade.

Table 13: Sources of Original Capital to Start Trade

Original Source	No. of Women
Husband	10
Mother	44
Father	-
Sister	2
Brother	4
Other relatives	6
Self	19
TOTAL:	85

As can be seen from the above figures, relatives are a very important source of origin of capital for trade. In my study of Koso market, relatives, as the original source of capital account for more than 77 per cent (with the mother at 51.76 per cent featuring as the single most important source) of the permanent stallholders, compared with less than 23 (22.4 per cent) who cited savings from previous

employment as a sourse. The findings are similar to Pala Okeyo's study of Luo market women in Kenya. She reports:

> To the question "Where did you get initial capital to start the trade", 32 of the 54 agricultural produce traders named relatives as the source, 11 said they earned the initial capital from their own wages, and 11 earned the money by selling their own produce. Of the 30 fish traders, 16 named relatives as the source, 10 said they made the money from selling their own produce, and only 4 named their own wages. Thus it seems that the foremost factor enabling a market woman to begin her trade is the capability of her kinsfolk to mobilize the necessary initial capital (1979:339).

It is interesting to note that women do not report receiving the initial capital for trade from their fathers. Indeed, throughout my field work, and during my other encounters with market women, I have never known a woman who was financed by her father. This may be related to the division of tasks whereby, as already stated, it is a woman's responsibility to cater for her children. In addition, mothers will frequently have their daughters assisting them at markets and as the girl gets older, her mother feels obliged to give her a few commodities so that she (the girl) may try her luck.

Practically all the women at this market said they had worked as apprentices to their mothers. Most of the 44 who cite their mother as having provided the initial capital told me that what they actually meant was that they had inherited their mother's business after the latter had become too old to continue trading, or had died.

When a woman says she set herself up, she means that her trading started with capital saved from working as an

Two meat sellers and an apprentice

apprentice to her mother or another female relative. A girl may also save money on her own. There are a few young women who assist the traders in the markets for a small fee because they need to gain experience. It is this fee that enables a girl to set up on her own eventually. Most girls, however, start with their mother's help — unless she is not alive. Also, of the six women who cited relatives as the source, four said their mother's 'sisters' (i.e. female relatives of their mother) had bequeathed their businesses to them; the other two cited their father's sisters, which they said was unusual. It is interesting that most (eight) of the women who said they got the initial capital from their husbands were among the migrant women. The women given initial capital by husbands tended, on average, to be older. They also told me that 'back home', in the olden days, women had to give their husbands money realised from their trading ventures to 'keep for them'. When I asked the other women, they said this was not practised in Lagos but when probed more deeply, they said that some elder relatives had said that it was a custom in the days gone by in their villages. They also added that a woman had to be sure that her husband would not chop (spend) the money given for safe keeping. This indicates an important change, and contradicts the frequent claim that the woman's money from her trading activities was hers to dispose of as she pleased. Indeed, if the initial capital is provided by the husband it seems logical enough that he should have a certain amount of control over the yield.

Credit Given by Suppliers

Another important source of credit is from suppliers. This however requires a long and sustained commercial and social intercourse between a market woman and her source of supply. This was the factor most frequently cited by most women in explaining their long association with a particular periodic market even when alternative cheaper sources of supply were known to exist. Some of the women at Koso would obtain goods from their creditors in the various periodic markets discussed earlier without having to pay until the next market. Then they are expected to pay for last week's purchases before they are supplied again. This process continues until the woman finds that she is better off buying cash (which gives her leeway to explore cheaper sources of supply); or until the client-patron relationship is, for some reason, restrained; or because the creditor finds that she can no longer afford to continue offering such facilities. Women who have not been in trade for long do not, by definition, have such facilities. They mainly rely on the esusu contributions they make in the market.

A minor source of capital available to women is gifts of money from close relatives and, very occasionally, loans from friends or again relatives. A woman who is lucky enough to have better-placed relatives, preferably and particularly her own children, has very few worries. She expects and usually receives gifts of money which she can invest in her trade. I was informed that this is a responsibility imposed by custom that no child can lightly afford to ignore.

The Role of Modern Banks

Women told me that of all the possible sources of raising capital for trade, banks play the most insignificant role; indeed, at Koso market, none at all. Several factors account for this. Until recently, market women in Lagos had no access to modern banks for loans. Now they can, technically, borrow from the various banks but only against a deposit.

The system requires that women from a particular market should open a communal account into which their contributions (esusu) are deposited. For example, if they deposited, say, 2000 naira, they could then borrow double that amount from their bank against their joint account.

But, as some Alága said to me, this scheme is fraught with difficulties. For one thing, it is an extremely poor attempt to combine 'traditional' methods of saving with modern banking systems. For another, it raises basic problems such as who is to receive the money first when it is borrowed from the bank. As we shall see later, this question does not arise when esusu contributions are to be distributed in a market.

Also, in the big markets, where traders may number 2000 or more, the question of who gets the money borrowed from the bank, when and why, is even more complex. The money cannot be shared equally among traders, since what each would receive would be too small a share to make any impact on their trade. Most women are sceptical about the entire venture, which they feel is not worth their while.

A good number of them complained about the scheme and expressed a preference to 'stick to what we already know or are used to'. Some women leaders said they were reluctant to take responsibility for such a scheme. They argued: 'If the banks become the mediators in esusu contributions, women will default. It will no longer be "their" or "our" money, the way market esusu is thought to be. It will be the "bank's money".'

Obviously, the architects of the scheme had not taken into account the importance of personal contact. Consequently, the scheme has not worked. It could not have done so. Most women in 'my' market said they would not participate in such a scheme even if it were operative in Koso market.

In addition, as far as the banks are concerned, the African trader or customer, as Hunter (1962:136) notes 'is apt to be an expensive customer, depositing £20 one day and withdrawing the whole amount by a series of small cheques within a week. In consequence, bank charges are high'. As to the securities regarding loans, this too is a major problem. Hunter continues:

> But when it comes to financing individual entrepreneurs and traders, which may involve quite long-term loans, the banks have fallen back on the strictest orthodoxy -- that this is not, in fact, the banks' business. A period of more daring experiment in Nigeria resulted in so many defaults and malpractices that the banks had to retreat somewhat hastily. The great difficulty has been lack of mortgageable security... Even the trader's own house is often technically in joint ownership with the family (loc. cit.:137).

The majority of traders at Koso are not even joint house or home owners.

The Most Effective Method of Expanding Trade: the Centrality of Esusu

The most important, reliable and constant method of raising substantial capital for expanding trade is through the various contributions made in the markets, and yet, as Ardener, S. (1964:222-3) notes:

> In 1962 it was possible for thirty-three collaborating scholars to publish Markets in Africa (P. Bohannan and G. Dalton, Editors) a volume of nearly 800 pages, without any consideration being given to this important capital-forming institution. One may indeed agree with Firth (1964:p.17) that "the formation and use of capital constitutes one of the least developed aspects of socio-economic study".

In order to raise capital to finance their trading activities, women in all markets in Nigeria contribute money daily or monthly to what are termed mutual aid associations or rotating credit associations.[1] The daily contributions are termed ajọ ójúmọ by the Yoruba and monthly contributions, ajo ososu. These two rank above all others, with the monthly contribution being the most important. The ajọ ososu, as the term implies, and as the Koso market women insist, is the real esusu. Both types however are loosely referred to in Nigeria and West Africa as esusu. The Koso women claim that monthly contributions are different from all other forms of contribution and therefore should not be confused with them. Indeed, the terms for daily and monthly contributions are analytically distinct. Thus, when these women talk about esusu they are usually referring to monthly contributions.

---

[1] See, for example, Bascom (1952); Geertz (1962); Ardener, (loc. cit.); Isong (1958); Van Allen (1972); Firth and Yamey, eds. (1964); Little (1970), et al.

When pressed as to what distinguished esusu from non-esusu I was told 'it is real esusu if the contributions are monthly with everyone paying an identical amount of money, and the money is distributed to members by rotation, based on rules agreed to by all the members'. The women said that the principles on which non-monthly and non-rotary contributions operate are quite different from esusu. They argued that daily and other forms of contributions which do not follow esusu patterns are recent and a 'corruption' of the real esusu.

The women's distinction between monthly contributions which are rotating and other forms of contributions is very similar to S. Ardener's (op. cit.:201)[1] definition of Rotating Credit Associations. In her award-winning essay, she defined these associations as:

> An association formed upon a core of participants who agree to make regular contributions to a fund which is given in whole or in part to each contributor in rotation.

At Koso market, the daily contributions operate in the following way: each woman contributes whatever she can afford every day, but for easy counting the contribution must be the same amount of money each day, even though individual contributors may, at the end of the month in which they are making contributions, reduce or raise the size of these contributions. She then receives back all of her contributions at the end of each month, minus one day's contribution, which the collector automatically retains as a commission.

---

[1] Shirley Ardener's (loc. cit.:224-6) questionnaire proved an immensely helpful guide in investigating how other mutual aid associations operated.

The collector of daily contributions in a particular market is introduced to the market women by one of the traders in that market. The person making the introduction must have known the collector intimately and must attest to that person's honesty and integrity. But since the woman making the introduction is not held responsible in case of default, the market women require that the collector give a passport-size photograph to each trader, and his home address. Cases of default are not rare.

The collector of non-rotating contributions may be either a man or a woman and they collect money from both male and female traders. In Koso market, and in most other markets in Lagos, I was informed that it is usually a man who collects the money. The explanation given for this was that going around the various markets in Lagos collecting and refunding money was incompatible with market trading activities and family responsibilities in general. As one woman said: "How can you carry your children and go around Lagos markets every day? People would think you were mad. They would say it makes more sense to sit in your stall and do proper trading.' I suspect however that the real explanation for the absence of women in this activity is their lack of numeracy. Collecting money from hundreds of traders entails a great deal of accounting. Since those collecting make their money from commission, it stands to reason that the more traders one has contributing, the more money he or she can make. And, of course, the more traders contributing, the more complex the whole business becomes.

Monthly contributions at Koso market, on the other hand, are usually given to each woman in rotation. Payments are always identical and in cash, never in kind, and the members will eventually come to know each other. The contributions are made once a month, usually on the first day of each month, and are given to one woman at the end of the month. This is done in a meeting usually held at the house of the head of a particular esusu group. There are many esusu groups in each market. Like the Igbo cases reported by Okonjo(1979), at Koso market, the esusu clubs are integrated.

For example, a woman (usually, but not always, elderly) may go around her market and propose to other women that they start an esusu association. If she succeeds in interesting enough women, an esusu association is then formed with her as the head of that particular group.

I was informed that the head of an esusu group receives the first contribution. Thus, if twenty women get together and contribute ten naira each at the first meeting, their head receives that money. At the next meeting, one of the other 19 women receives 200 naira, and so on, until each woman has received 200 naira. The decision as to who receives the esusu, after the head, is decided by a consensus during the first meeting. This usually follows the pattern of age seniority.

A woman may change places with another woman, but the woman asking for the change must pay some commission to the head of her esusu, and to the woman who is forfeiting her place. My informants said that the amount of commission

paid in such cases depended on the esusu group one belonged to and the amount of contribution by members. There are no standard commission payments. The head of an esusu group must be informed if two women wish to shift places. However, I was told that it is not unusual for two women to make a private arrangement to change places, especially if they are good friends. This cuts out the commission payment to the esusu head and, in the case of friends, any commission at all.

Daily contributions and other forms of non-rotating contributions are frequently used towards monthly contributions.

Some women belong to different esusu groups in the same market or even different markets. The number of esusu associations that a woman belongs to obviously depends on her ability to pay the stipulated contribution. The more prosperous a trader, the more esusu associations she is likely to belong to. There are no rigid criteria for membership, although women from the same ethnic background tend to form an esusu group. One woman said:

> Since this esusu involves money matters, we find it better for women who understand each other [i.e. from the same home] to form esusu. This way, if a woman defaults, you can trace her to your village. But if she is "different" you cannot trace her if she runs away.

Yoruba women also prefer to form an esusu association with women from the same area, such as Ibadan, Ijebu, Egba, Ondo, and so on.

The two types of contribution discussed here are not the only form of mutual aid association operating at Koso and other markets in Lagos. Here is a shortened description of another form of contribution found in this market. The narration is by the head of the Igbo women's association at

Koso who told me that non-Igbo women also use this form of contribution. The translation is from 'pidgin' English, for even though this woman was fluent in Yoruba (she had lived in Lagos for more than 25 years) she refused throughout my field work to speak Yoruba. Indeed, she insisted that she neither understood nor spoke Yoruba, even though she spoke to the 95 per cent of her customers who were Yoruba in that language. She argued that speaking Yoruba to customers was different from holding conversations with friends!

Mama Chingwa describes a type of mutual aid association

> Before we start to talk about esusu, let's talk about money and the meaning of it. The problem occurs when you cannot lay your hands on money to take care of your problems, or do anything requiring money. About twenty or thirty people will come together to form the esusu. So we may all agree to pay, say, two pounds each, according to the periodic market day. If it is Aku, we do it on Aku market. That is the name of the market on the eighth day. Thus we continue for the 8 days until the next market... We go into the small house to collect the two pounds and choose a boy who can read, and write all the women's names down. From this list of names, the boy will call the first person, the second person, the third person and so on until the thirtieth person. Each will pay two pounds and be ticked off. The first person on the list will take the money... In another eight days, the second person, in another eight days, the third person, until the thirtieth person has been given their share. Then everyone in the market will say, "Look at these people. Their esusu is doing well, and there is no trouble." When that happens, more people will want to come and join. At times the group may have up to 100 members. It is helpful when all that money is collected and given to one woman. It solves your problems.
>
> If a woman starts to pay her esusu dues and finds half-way through that she can no longer continue to pay, we put a mark against her name. She will then have to wait until everyone else has collected their share of esusu after which she is given back all she has contributed. She will not really benefit from esusu. Her name is struck off the list of esusu members...



One of the Koso market women leaders

People in an esusu association cannot be equal. There must be a head and a secretary... Before circulating information publicly about the esusu there will be 10 women who would have started the esusu. It is they who would have to go round recruiting members. They will say to each other: any woman you can get as long as she is a trader, bring her to join our esusu, so that our money will increase. The women you bring to join the esusu are your followers ...

When the money has been collected, the chairlady gets the first lump if she wants it. However, she has an option to take it any time it suits her. After 8 days the second woman to the head will then have her turn. Then the third, and so on, until the tenth woman among the original founders of our esusu has had her turn. It is only after this that the followers will begin to take their turn as dictated by the head...

If a follower has money palava she may go to her leader and say "I need your help". If the leader cannot swap positions with her, since she has already collected her esusu, and used it, she will then ask another of the original ten to let the follower collect her esusu - but for a price. In our esusu, it is £20. If she says that is too much, she will have to wait until it is her turn or go to a moneylender. If what she needs the money for is urgent, she will pay the £20 and collect the esusu... It is this practice that leads people to say that esusu leaders are prosperous, well-dressed and fat...[1]

The head of the group shall be the woman who first suggested the idea. That is how we get our leader. You know I told you that everybody in the esusu cannot be equal. There will be leaders and followers, that is what makes the esusu work smoothly. It wouldn't if we were all equal, would it?...

The women that are recruited by each of the ten leaders are followers of the leader that brought them. But, as I said, they are also under the head. There is only one head for the whole esusu, and that is the head of the ten leaders...

When a person collects their esusu, we do not give receipts. The print or signature is enough. Also there are witnesses when members collect esusu money...

We also have many rules which our members are required to observe. These concern the time and place that the contributions are to be made and who is to receive it. People are also required to attend meetings punctually...

---

[1] In most African societies, for a woman to be fat is considered a supreme manifestation, not only of beauty, but of her husband's wealth. A fat woman is frequently complimented on her husband's generosity in taking such care of her!

If a member wishes to remain in our esusu but is unable to pay on a particular day, that is allowed. However, when it is her turn to collect esusu, her share will be less than that of the member who collected on the day she was unable to pay. In other words, the woman who was doing the collecting, does not contribute when it is the non-paid-up member's turn...

If anyone runs away with the collection we call a meeting in which we collect fifty kobo or one naira from all the members so that we can chase the person who has "eaten" the esusu. If we find her we may give her time to pay. If she refuses, we have no choice but to call in the police. The case then goes to court where it is decided...

When a member takes her share she is made to swear in front of witnesses that she will not leave the esusu group until each member has received her share. The person is made to say: "I swear and promise that as I take my share now, I will continue to pay my esusu dues until all my mates have collected their own share..." Those who know book will put it in writing. They will swear in writing that they will not do anything that will bring palava to esusu. Those who cannot read and write will be made to take an oath. If they are Christian they will swear on a Bible. If pagan, the member will be given a knife and told to swear. Sometimes, we bring a hoe and a matchet to add to the knife and then put salt and pepper on top. To these, a person swears, never to run away when she stills owes esusu. For Muslims, they swear on a Koran...

In our esusu you will not find anybody who will agree to accept yams worth two naira instead of the two naira in cash...

An esusu can be started with any amount of money. Some start by contributing two naira, others five, and the prosperous traders, well, they may even start an esusu where contributions can be up to 50 naira. But those are really the rich ones. Most of us cannot afford more than 5 or 10 naira some even less...

We started the esusu to help one another. It is an association for those of us who do not know where else to borrow money. We cannot go to the bank to borrow like acadas can. The bank people will say, "Eh, you are a market woman, go and make esusu ..."

During my grandmother's time, they used to make esusu with cowrie shells and at times with yams, cassava, or anything of value. But today in Lagos, people only understand cash - they say they want naira and kobo...

> Esusu helps market [trade] to grow bigger. For example, if a woman does not feel like going to the market, she forces herself to because she knows that this is the only way she can make money to contribute to esusu. That is the story of how we make esusu.

How Women Spend their Money

The traditional division of labour among the Yoruba, which left minding of the children to women, seems to have become confused with western values. Today, for example, it is a fairly well accepted fact that a large proportion of market women spend a sizeable part of their savings on their children's education. It seems to me confused because, while most men, illiterate and educated alike, deem western education to be imperative for their children, paying for education is frequently thought to be part of women's responsibilities.

More than a third of all the women in this market said they alone paid for their children's education, and another third said they paid about half the school fees. The rest who had children of school age said they too contributed whenever their husbands could not pay. These reports are consistent with the popular belief that 'mama' pays for her children's education.

In fact, all the women who had children of school age cited school fees as the biggest single expense. Those whose children were now grown, also said that they had paid for most of their children's education.

The next item on which women said they spent their money was clothes and jewellery. Both go together. A Yoruba woman

does not think of herself as properly dressed unless she puts on jewellery. This is normally fashioned from gold and therefore tends to be expensive. Besides jewellery being part of dressing, I was informed that a woman was expected to leave some gold jewellery to her daughter or daughters. For the vast majority of women, saving money for gold jewellery, now simply referred to as 'gold' in local parlance, is a lifetime ambition, not unlike a European's urge for home-ownership and taking out a mortgage.

The third expense is ceremonies. Besides ceremonies marking the various rites de passage, there are ceremonies to mark death anniversaries. For example, relatives who died ten or twenty years earlier may have (figuratively speaking) to be 'turned over'. This entails a big ceremony, and vast sums of money are spent, the amount being determined by one's income. People even go into debt to pay for this. Most women cited ceremonies as a significant drain on their meagre resources.

Women also help with feeding their families as we have already indicated. Most women said that they prepared meals from the stocks that they carried at the market. Thus a woman selling rice, fish, beans, yams, and the like, will — when preparing a meal — take from her stock. If she does not have all the ingredients needed for that meal, she will buy them.

In other words, even though husbands do provide money on occasion for food, it seems — at least in this market — that the women spend a significant proportion of their income

on feeding their families. No account is kept of how much is spent in this way, but all those who sold foodstuffs, regularly cooked daily meals from their stock or bought food with their own money.

It must be emphasised that women did not seem to resent the responsibility of providing for themselves and their children. The notion now prevalent among the élite that it is the man's responsibility to provide most of the domestic expenditure, even when the wife is in full employment, does not seem to have percolated to the women traders. They said that it would be nice if a husband was in a position to provide chop money and other expenses, but if he does not, this does not precipitate the sort of crisis it would among the schooled.

Women' Views of Textile Traders and Long-distance Traders

Women textile traders are revered by most market women I interviewed in Lagos. They pray fervently that their trade may prosper to the level where they can branch out into the textile trade.

My informants in Koso market, none of whom dealt in textiles (which is mostly confined to central Lagos) and other market women in Lagos - including a few textile traders - told me that most of the textile traders had initially started their marketing as petty traders. They said that luck, hard work and business acumen are what had enabled these traders to escape petty trading. The non-textile traders therefore aspired to join the textile trade.

I was told by some informants that some of the really wealthy traders kept young men (gigolos) to whom they gave handsome amounts of money and other expensive gifts. The Peugeot 504 motor-car was said to be a favourite with the 'mamas' and their young lovers.

Most market women with whom I discussed this point, found the idea totally absurd. Also the textile dealers I interviewed in Lagos naturally said this was nonsense and a totally unfounded fabrication intended to discredit textile dealers by people who were envious of their wealth. A woman textile trader said:

> How can an adult woman keep young boys? What would she do that for? If that is what people are saying it is because they are jealous when a trader prospers. They say, "How can an illiterate woman make so much money?" They spread vicious rumours about other people who are successful too. The problem is jealousy and envy...
>
> Most of the Lagos women who have large businesses selling lace, velvet and other expensive materials, and I know most of them, worked harder than most Nigerians to be where they are. And they have worked as traders for a long time — some forty years. Others fifty, and a few longer. As you can see, most of these women are not young. They are about my age [she was 65]. These are the women we are mainly talking about when we refer to wealthy textile dealers... They have stopped engaging in sexual intercourse with their husbands, let alone young men... No Yoruba woman whose head is correct would sleep with a man when she no longer sees blood. That would spoil her health, her trade and her own family. Why would she want to spoil everything she has worked so hard for?

This opinion was entirely consistent with information given by other informants.

Long distance trading was also admired by most market women I interviewed. This category of trader too, is well-off compared to the average market women, although usually not as wealthy as the textile dealers.

A good proportion of these traders, too, had started as petty traders in the various markets in the country, which gives hope to many of the women I interviewed.

In ending this chapter, I feel compelled to refute assertions made by some observers that market women traders are of easy virtue. None of the women I interviewed supported this assertion or thought there was any foundation for it. An overwhelming majority of these women are neither barren nor prostitutes, unlike those reported in Nadel (1942) and later in McCall (1962). In fact, and as indicated in an earlier chapter, market women's suspicions of educated women are partly, but significantly, based on the fact that they feel the latter do not adhere strictly to traditional values of chastity.

PART THREE

CHAPTER SEVEN

WE STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT BY ONE MARKET WOMAN LEADER IN LAGOS[1]

My mother, my brother and my trade

My real mother always called me Yinka, while my father called me Sade. My other mothers and relatives gave me different names. It is common among my people [Yoruba] to have many names, five, six, seven, even more.[2]

I was born here in Lagos. I can't tell exactly when but it must be more than sixty years ago because my mother told me that at the time I was born there was a big war going on in the white-man's country. This was before Hitler's war because I was a big girl already married. I remember this period and the names of those white people like Hitler and Mussolini very well because these were difficult times for poor people, especially the market traders. Everything was rationed and the colonial government had introduced many price controls.

When I was very young, I lived with my mother. She was

---

1 Even though this woman was not among the market traders where I carried out my fieldwork, it seemed to me instructive to record her experiences since she is one of the most prominent market women leaders in Lagos. She is also perhaps the most controversial. Her name is a household word among all market women traders and because of her heavy involvement in Lagos and national politics, most politicians take her very seriously. For the sake of anonymity, her real name and those of her relatives have been withheld.

2 When a Yoruba child is born it is given names by all those close to the family. Each person calls the child by the name they have given and neither the child nor the parents can legitimately object or complain. I once had a non-Nigerian friend who was married to a Yoruba man and when her daughter was born her husband's mother gave the child a different name from the one she had chosen. She objected vehemently and this caused such an uproar that her mother-in-law vowed never to set foot in her house again. That was well over ten years ago, and as far as I know, her mother-in-law has never been back.

a trader who used to go on long business trips.

In those days there were not many vehicles in Lagos and the Carter bridge had not yet been built. Planks arranged horizontally over the Lagoon represented the bridge with the vehicles using the middle of the planks and the pedestrians the narrow sides. This temporary bridge was constructed with iron bars. One side of the bridge was used as a route from Lagos island to Oyingbo and the other side for the return trip, because the narrow sides only allowed one-way traffic. When walking across, it seemed as if one was going to step into the Lagoon.

Then Macauley and others implored the colonial government to construct a stronger bridge and eventually the Carter bridge was built. We were all afraid on the day the construction was started because the workers had to go into the Lagoon to put down the foundation stone.

Before the bridge was constructed, if we went to buy kola-nuts, we had to take canoes to Ijora and Oto and the fare was only one penny. If one wanted to go to Apapa wharf from Ehin-Igbeti, one had to go by canoe. Then, from there, one could get to Ajegunle. Then the land reclamation increased.

Apapa wharf was quickly developed and reclaimed from the Lagoon because it had long been serving as the harbour for overseas ships and cargoes. Later on, our own area was also reclaimed and that enabled us to trek from Ita-Faji to Apapa and Ijora.

My mother used to buy kola-nuts brought from Hausa country by the Hausa traders and would take them to Ghana. Whenever she went on a trip she would prepare bean balls,[1] some to eat on the way and some for sale. At that time, there were no machine grinders like you find in the markets today. The Iseyin people ground the beans as a means of livelihood. We used to take the beans to them at 1 a.m. and would go back to collect them at 3.a.m.

In those days there was no highway robbery. Lagos was just like a big village and people could come and go any time of the night without fearing for their lives.

We used to hawk the cooked bean balls late into the night. My mother would not allow me to sleep until I had hawked a day's worth of bean balls. Many times I wondered whether she was really my own mother.[2] When I asked some elder relatives who lived in my father's compound, they told me that I was spoilt because they too had had to do the same thing when they were young without complaining.

When I could no longer bear the hardship of hawking beans, pepper and tomatoes around Lagos day and night, I ran away to

---

[1] A type of cake made from beans soaked for several hours to facilitate grinding. The beans are ground into a wet mass after the skin has been removed. Pepper and other ingredients are then added and small balls of the mixture are fried in deep oil, usually palm oil.

[2] This is because it is very common, as E. Goody (1957) has shown, for children to be sent to live with relatives. Among the Yoruba, and many other people in Nigeria, when a girl gets married it is common for a young female relative to accompany her to her husband's house, usually to help with a few chores but also to keep her 'sister' company. More recently, children of less well placed relatives are now sent to their 'brothers' or 'sisters', 'uncles', 'aunts' and so on for training, which includes schooling and household tasks.

my mother's sister's son.[1] I think I must have been about eight years old then. My mother's sister's son and his wife welcomed me warmly to their house. He was working at Sabo railway station, even though we lived here in Isale-Eko.[2]

To go by bus to his place of work used to be a half-penny in those days but neither my brother [her mother's sister's son] nor his wife would give me the one penny for the bus fare. They said it was good training for me to walk that distance even if it was several times a day and in the rain. You know where Sabo is and where we are now? I would trek to Sabo twice a day[3] from Monday to Saturday.

If my brother was on the dayshift I would take his lunch to him by mid-morning and by early afternoon, I would start again with his afternoon food. I used to pray to God that he would be on night duty because then he would eat before he left for Sabo and would not eat again until he returned in the morning.

After some time, my mother and my brother said it was about time I started to trade. My mother gave me a few shillings and some of her own commodities and my brother too added a few pennies.

---

[1] In Nigeria, relatives are addressed as brothers, sisters, uncles, etc. depending on the relative age of the person. Thus, it is difficult to know the exact nature of the relationship unless one enquires. If the person seeking information is not close to the family they may not be given the correct degree of filiation. And, in any case, people frequently do not know the exact nature of the kinship to which they refer.

[2] Isale-Eko is the oldest part of Lagos.

[3] This would be roughly a journey of five kms. each way. If she had to take the food twice a day, she would have travelled 20 kms. During the rainy season when most of Lagos is flooded this can be quite a task. And during the hot season, as I have already indicated in an earlier chapter, the temperatures are very high as is the humidity. It becomes agonising to walk long distances in Lagos.

The first trade I ever did was to sell torches and batteries. My sister and I would go as far as Sagamu, Ijebu-Ode and Ejinrin. She was called Alhaja Kehinde, but people nicknamed her Auntie Oshogbo because she later expanded her trade all the way to Oshogbo.[1] She is dead now.

Later on I added Saro mats[2] to my trade. I would buy one for three and a half pence and sell it for six and a half. That was a lot of profit in those days.

I traded this way until I got married. My husband, a native of Ibadan, even though he had lived in Lagos for many years, demanded I stop trading. He argued that none of his wives traded immediately after marriage. I was the sixth wife. He was later to acquire another five.

I protested to my relatives and his. My argument was that he had not married me in normal times. The white people's war[3] was affecting everybody and therefore I could not sit around doing nothing if I hoped to eat. He was not a rich man. I agreed to stop my trade outside Lagos even though it was bringing good money, but insisted on selling in markets near our compound.[4] He had to agree especially after pressure from our elders.

---

1 Oshogbo is almost 200 kms. from Lagos.

2 Saro mats must have been mats made by people of Sierra-Leonian descent.

3 The Second World War.

4 Chapter 3 pointed out that it is not customary for women of child-bearing age to engage in long-distance trade. This is usually done by women whose children are grown or by unmarried women.

With the money saved from earlier trade, I began to sell matches, cigarettes and plates which I would buy from European firms, such as John Holt and United Africa Company (UAC), and would sell at Ehin Igbeti or at Ago Ishofin. At Ehin Igbeti, Dr. Michaels[1] would constantly drive us away saying we were not supposed to sell there. There was another man who was very wicked to market traders. I shall never forget him. He would drive us away regularly because he said we were squatters. Sometimes he demanded bribes. I can't tell you his name because one of his sons is now a top army officer ...

No sooner had they driven us away, than we would return or move to another site. We sent a delegate to the white government - the colonial government - and told them that the traders' struggle would continue until they allocated us stalls on a permanent site. We told them that our women had always been traders. We would sell inside our houses, outside our houses, and on the streets. If they thought we were too noisy and dirty in the streets[2] they should show us where to trade in peace.

---

[1] Dr. Michaels is a fictitious name since his real name is well known in Lagos.

[2] She told me that the local residents in the streets around the market used to complain to the police that the market traders were making too much noise. It is also a fact that market places in Lagos are usually extremely dirty as the local officials fail to provide facilities for garbage collection. Most people would therefore quickly seek official help, or take it upon themselves to drive street traders away. When this happens, conflicts between traders and owners of houses may escalate.

It was around Breadfruit Street where we were later to move that the struggle between us and the officials intensified. We refused to move until they granted us permission to sell at Oke-Arin. That is what they now call Egerton Market ...

The stall fees were initially one shilling but later they reached ten shillings. That was a lot of money in those days, and traders began to protest.

The carpenters used to charge a halfpenny to make one of those stools that market traders sit on in their stalls. The kiosks [stalls] were built for five shillings for a medium one and fifteen shillings for the largest ones. Now, because of the wood shortage in Lagos, market traders can no longer afford them. That is why you see so many stalls that look as if they are about to collapse and, during the rainy season, that is exactly what happens to many of them.

When I was a young trader I used to say to myself that when I grew older I would go to the government and plead with them to have mercy on market women traders.

One thing which I still remember very well and which used to annoy me a great deal was the interference from the clerks in the city council. These officials would come to the market with their papers and pen, write down our names, ask a lot of irrelevant questions and then collect money from us. A few days later they would be back pretending that we had arrears to pay.[1] They knew we were not educated and could not

[1] Conflicts between traders, officials of the former Lagos City Council and politicians are well known. The government, as Baker (1975) writes, was forced to set up the Greville tribunal to investigate the traders' claims that they were being unfairly forced to pay various dues for promises of services that were never rendered. As already noted, these claims were found to be correct and led to some officials of the council being sacked, while some politicians lost credibility with the traders.

refute whatever they wrote down. From that time I resolved that if God spared my life I would do everything within my power to see to it that all my children, male or female, learned how to read and write so that they would not in future be cheated the way we market women and traders were cheated by those educated city council clerks.

I must say though that there were some quite nice officers who did their best to offer whatever help they could. Among them were Bankole and Bayaki, but they were soon to be transferred to another place leaving nobody to assist us in our struggle...

The death of my children

When I started having children, I was much troubled by àbíkú.[1] My first child was Mosudi Isola Ademola. He died when he was sixteen years old. The second one was Rasheed Alade. He died when he was thirteen. The third child died at the age of nine, a girl whom I had named Sakiratu. The fourth child died at the age of seven. After the fourth child had died I named the fifth Sakiratu, hoping that my first daughter would return,[2] but she died at the age of six. The next boy I had died twice.[3] He was born prematurely. After this I was delivered of twins, a boy and a girl who died a few months later. After the twins

---

[1] See chapter V where I have discussed the concept of àbíkú.

[2] Again, integral to the concept of àbíkú is that a child may return. Sometimes when a child dies a mark may be put on his/her body before being buried and the Yorùbá people believe that if that child returns, the mark will actually be there.

[3] That is, the first child who had died had returned as an àbíkú, and hence the concept of dying twice.

I gave birth to a girl and named her Rafatu Ayinke. She is followed by another female child called Sakiratu Asake. Altogether I bore eleven children and only two are alive, for which I thank God. These are Rafatu Ayinke and Sakiratu Asake.

Rafatu has just completed her university education. She studied law and has now gone where the government has sent her to serve the country.[1] Sakiratu completed higher school certificate some years ago. She went to study in the white man's country where they tell me university education is very good. Neither of them are married even though during my youth they would have been married a long time ago. They tell me that they want to make something out of their lives. They say there is no hurry to marry. They feel I suffered greatly and they want me to realize that it was not in vain. All their school fees and maintenance I paid on my own. Their father, who is now dead, never gave me a penny towards their education. He had male children whom he was training, and in any case, here in Lagos, it is a woman's responsibility to train her children, unless she has a special deal with her husband.[2]

---

1 For the past five years the Nigerian government has required that all those graduating from universities and technical colleges must serve the nation in what is called the National Youth Corps. This was initiated by the second military regime.

2 She said that normally among the Yoruba people, a woman pays her children's school fees without expecting her husband to help. If he is very rich and can afford to be generous and send all or some of their children to school, that is good luck for which a woman should thank God. But traditionally, if you go to your husband to tell him that your children need school fees, he will ask you whether your head needs examining and, second, whether you are the first woman to have children for him and if you are, he will point out that many more will soon be in your position.

My daughters assure me not to worry. They say that when they marry they will replace all the children I lost ... That will be good. Why should such tragedies have befallen me? You don't complain when these things happen to you, you suffer in silence for if you complain, people will suspect you of pointing accusing fingers at your co-wives. You know I told you that my husband married eleven of us, In situations like this, don't let anyone tell you lies. One co-wife's misfortune is another's fortune, but you don't say so at the time. You pretend that it is God's wish. But in truth we all know that God is not responsible for wicked things. We say that it is God's wish if something tragic happens, but in our hearts we believe that wicked witches are to blame.

My husband married women from all over the country.[1] I am the oldest of his Lagos wives. Others came from Ijebu, Tapa, Egba, Awe, Ondo ... Three of his wives bore him no children.

My husband's name was Salami Olawole. Before he died seven years ago, he was to see his children's children. Among his male children trained here in Nigeria or abroad are doctors, engineers, army officers and lawyers.

Nobody thought I would survive the agony of my children ' deaths. Mosudi, the first one, was about to finish primary school when he died. One day he came back from school and failed to notice hot oil on the fire. His clothes caught on something

---

[1] By this she means that her husband married women from different Yoruba areas.

he fell on to the boiling oil and his clothes caught fire. He died a few days later of severe burns in a doctor's house. It pained me greatly for this child was, up to that time, very healthy. Every time I went to pay his school fees all his teachers told me how clever he was and that great things lay ahead for him.

A few years later my second child, also in primary school, came home to tell me he was feeling feverish. Like his brother before him, he was doing very well in school and was very clever; everybody said so. Despite all the doctors I consulted in Lagos Rasheed did not recover. You know when you have children that look fine and healthy and your husband has many wives, they will all be saying 'why should this woman have such fine children - especially male?' That is when a woman's troubles begin.

My mother gave me a lot of support and courage during my troubles, not only when my children were dying but also when I was troubled by my husband and his wives, especially the older ones.

She died five years ago and may well have been over one hundred years old. Some of my relatives say she was 108 years old. She had six children. Two did not survive her;[1] of the four who did, one of my older sisters died two years ago.

My mother's first children were twins, a boy and a girl. They were followed by another set of twins. My brother is called Idowu and I am Alaba. The other surviving child is one of the

---

[1] Among African peoples one of the greatest tragedies is for children to die before their parents. It is considered a great curse. Everybody hopes that their children will survive them. In a way it is a wish for a long life.

twins called Taiye.

My mother was born in Lagos but her family came originally from Ibadan. Lagos has many immigrants ...

My father's name was Odulami. The fathers of my father's father belonged to the Oba's lineage[1] in Aramako. My father's father came to Lagos many years ago and some of his children still go back to Aramako to claim their share of the land. Some of my father's relations did not return to Lagos but have become farmers in our village. My own father lived in Ehin Igbeti until he died a few years ago. He was an Islamic teacher who fought hard all his life to see the survival of Islam in Lagos.

I am related to the Oki family. Salami Oki's father's father also fought for the religion of Islam. The Oki family are related to some important families in Araromi, Ife and even Abeokuta because some of their sons married Egba [people from Abeokuta] women.

Many of the Lagos city dwellers have lost touch with the villages or towns where they originally came from. This is especially true of fourth and fifth generations. It is a very sad thing for people to forget their roots.

The Jinadu family which originally came from the North are a prominent Muslim family and because of this they and my family have intermarried. No family in Lagos today can claim to have originated here even though they have been here for many generations.

---

1 The exact word used was ìdílé, which I have translated as 'Lineage'.

My original fathers settled around Popo which used to be called Oko-Faji because this area was originally a farm. Oko-Faji is older than Isale-Eko but those who first settled in Isale-Eko are said to be the true Lagosians because they are blessed with the chieftaincy title...

It is of great importance that children know their origins. Parents must make it a duty to inform their children. I think the recent case of thousands of homeless Nigerians in Ghana[1] should teach everbody an unforgettable lesson ...

As I have told you, nobody can claim Lagos as their original home. Not even those who were brought back as freed slaves from Sierra Leone and the white man's country. They too had come from different places in the interior of Yorùbaland before being captured as slaves.

My father's father and my father's mother and also my father and my mother were very strict muslims. The chief Imams in Lagos in the past have always been from our family.

The first mosque to be built in Nigeria was the Jimoh Mosque. It still remains the central mosque in Lagos. My mother's mother told me that before this mosque was built most people in Lagos were pagan.[2] There were not many Christians at that time.

---

[1] She is referring to the mass expulsion of Nigerians from Ghana during Busia's regime.

[2] When asked what she meant by kèfèrí and abòrisa, which I have translated as pagan, she said that there were people who worshipped only ere or òrisa (idols?) and regularly consulted Ifá and Babaláwo. This seemed to me curious since most people do just that. However she explained that the difference lay in the fact that Christians and Muslims also consult and worship Allah and Jesus Christ in addition to their native idols. This she insisted was a significant difference. Pagans only had idols. The harmony between consulting 'native' diviners and being a Christian has recently been proposed for study by the head of the Religious Studies Department of the University of Ibadan, Rev. Awolalu (1979).

There are no exclusively Christian or Muslim families in Lagos. If you probe deeply, you will find that they are all mixed, because of intermarriage. My daughters too have said they will marry any man they choose as long as the men are well-placed, respectable and will make good husbands ...

When I was growing up, my father and mother would not allow me to attend school, even though everybody thought I was sharp and clever. This was because there were no Muslim schools at that time, only Christian ones. All those who wanted to attend Christian schools had first to convert to Christianity and my family would not hear of it. In addition, the children had to be brought up as Christians and could not even bear Muslim names. My people said we just had to wait until we had our own school. And in any case, education in those days, especially for girls, was not very popular. Only a very few prominent Christian families allowed their daughters to go to school, some of them even to England. They used to say that women should be prepared to be good wives and to bear their husbands many children. My mother used to say, one did not have to go to school to learn that. Things have changed now. If it were today, I would defy all of them. After all, my daughters have attended universities where Islam is not even mentioned. Do you think that worried me? I wanted them to get education and I did not care where they got it....

Market women traders and officials are not friends

I must pay tribute to our great mothers Ejugbaosi, Alhaja Modinatu, Iya Ilorin at Sandgrouse and Safaratu Adejoke at Ita Faji. And one great woman, Mama Pelewura. In the olden days when women in Lagos wanted to establish markets she took it upon herself to

take the initiative. Mama Pelewura was not an educated woman but she was very courageous and sharp and she knew her people's rights.

To give a background to her story, let me tell you what it was like to buy food in those days. At that time there were only two markets in Lagos which were situated at Obun-Eko where dried fish was sold. This area used to be a very small island. As the city grew more civilized,[1] the Ijebu people started bringing gari from Ikorodu to Lagos. During this time we used to buy ten tins of gari for half a penny, the bony side of the meat used to be sold for one penny, the medium-size stockfish were sold at one penny each while the larger ones fetched four pence. Palm oil was sold for one and a half pence per bottle.

Later, food prices began to rise. Palm oil was inflated to three-and-a-half pence a bottle. Gari was sold at fourpence-halfpenny for ten tins. During this time the Ijebu never hawked gari about the streets. They used to stay at Ebute-Ero where the hawkers would meet them. Only the Nana people were associated with hawking gari. They used to travel down to Ejinrin, Oyo, Ikorodu and Epe using bags to carry the gari and singing while they travelled along on foot. Our parents always gave us a halfpenny for breakfast.

When we grew up we took to hawking oranges around the streets of Lagos asking a penny for fifteen to twenty. Pepper was plentiful too.

---

[1] When asked what she meant by 'more civilized' she said she was referring to the modern technology introduced by Europeans.

When I first got married I would get five shillings from my husband any time I wanted to cook a new stew. Fish was sold very cheaply and Ifo used to be the rice centre. The factories were situated in the Awori areas. The Awori too had farms where they planted tomatoes and pepper. After the harvest, the products were brought down to Mushin where we always got our cooking ingredients.

My husband was a butcher and he would reserve liver, kidney, lungs, heart, tripe and the cow's feet and bring them home to be divided among his wives. Today, only the rich can afford these parts of a cow.[1] Cows used to be sold for five pounds each even up to the time I got married. Now a single cow can fetch between six hundred and eight hundred naira. Other staple foods too are expensive because they are brought to Lagos from very far away. Some are even brought from white man's countries [imported].[2] In my youth, we grew our own food here in Lagos. From Mushin, Agege, all the way to Otta and above was one long big farm.

When the first two markets at Obun-Eko could no longer serve all the traders some were forced to move to Ebute-Ero. But this market too soon became badly overcrowded and the traders had to move yet again to what is now called Sandgrouse and which we used to call Araromi. This was soon followed by two other markets, one at Ita-Faji and the other at Ereko. Initially, these were very small markets but were later rapidly expanded by the provisions traders.

---

[1] It is true that these parts of the animal are expensive. The average family can only afford to buy them for special occasions.

[2] Mainly from Europe and the U.S.A.

Until I got married and started having children, meat, fish and cloth traders occupied only a small fraction of Ereko market; the rest of the area was for the provision traders ...

There was a time when each market formed its own association which had little to do with any other market. If market traders at Ereko had a quarrel with traders at Ebute-Ero they would settle it at the police station. This continued until the government introduced the price control system. I have already told you that this was during Hitler's war. The price control favoured the educated since they and the government people could understand each other [that is, they spoke a common language - English]. They could always get palm oil, salt, pepper, gari, rice and other commodities to sell or to eat while the market women could not. This made us realise that we had to present a united front so as to make an effective protest against the government laws which we thought were unfair to the uneducated traders. We asked the government officials whether they were trying to starve market women and their children to death. It had after all, been the women traders who had started the various markets in Lagos. It was certainly not the government ...

Nigeria was still under colonial masters at this time and they had no understanding of the sufferings of market women. It was said that they had no markets in their country, only shops.

The black government officials were more understanding. Mr. Fashola and Mr. Olufemi were particularly helpful. They went out of their way to put our case to the government which agreed to let us alone on condition that we paid a fee of

one penny per month for our stalls in the market. And we all agreed to do this. Then we chose spokesmen from among us to take up our complaints to the government.

Before price control was introduced, the government gave notice that it would be responsible for selling rice to the inhabitants of Lagos. A law was passed prohibiting us from trading. These were harsh times because we had to go to the government suppliers to buy all the rice we needed. It was not unusual to be kept waiting until three or four in the morning before being attended to. The educated market traders had no problem in purchasing their goods from the government, but those of us who were illiterate were greatly affected by the hardship.

Market women's struggle against the government: the case of Mama Pelewura

Mama Pelewura thought it was time she put an end to all this injustice. I can recall different occasions when she waited from two in the morning until four in the afternoon without getting even gari for her child. There used to be nothing left for sale but guinea corn and no one had the courage to refuse anything the government offered even if it was not what you wanted. The children would cry continuously from hunger yet there would be nothing to feed them. Mama Pelewura then initiated a protest against the control system and everybody supported her. The government admitted that there was a total breakdown of law and order among the market women during this protest.

Then a new tax was introduced. This was unacceptable to the market traders because people with larger families found it

impossible to make ends meet.

Again, led by Mama Pelewura, we staged a protest against the payment of tax. She had given us instructions that no market woman should pay any tax. The government realised that she was making things difficult for them and so they decided to arrest her. She would be arrested, then released, only to be arrested again. Altogether, she was in and out of gaol three times. The third time all the market women in Lagos resolved not to sell in any market until she was released and the government promised not to harass her. The colonial government said they would meet our demands only if Mama Pelewura gave us directives to obey government laws and pay tax. Against this Mama Pelewura was totally adamant. She told them she would fight on until the government exempted market women from paying any taxes. Eventually, the government gave in.

Mama Pelewura did not live to enjoy our victory. She died shortly after her third arrest and subsequent release.

After her death we continued our struggle against the government when occasion demanded.

We were lucky at this time to have a black politician who understood poverty, even though he was educated. He would patiently listen to our complaints and promise to do his best. He usually did whatever he could.

Continuing their opposition to the market women, the government planned to demolish a lot of our stalls. Once more we decided to organize a boycott of all the Lagos markets. We argued that the government should provide new stalls for us before destroying the old ones. We pointed out that if

we refused to attend the markets in Lagos, everybody, not just the traders, would suffer. Again, the government had to give in.

In those days we used to pay sixpence a month for our stalls. When this had first been introduced, we had voiced our objections and things would have got out of hand had not Mama Pelewura advised us to accept the new rates.

Later on, this rent rose to two shillings and sixpence, which we felt the government was unable to justify. Selling in markets had been our right from the ancient times. When the owner[1] (Ọlọ́jà) of these markets collected a fee it was easy to see why. He was our protector. He appeased gods for traders and brought us peace and prosperity. But today officials just want to chop[2], and do not have the welfare of the traders at heart. Our chiefs gave us a market if one was needed. Now 'they' [the government] want to pull down stalls without bothering to replace them. They say they will build shops for us. But when a few shops are built they are always allocated to the wives and relations of the officials or to women who have influential relatives. I ask you, where does this leave the poor market women who are illiterate and by-and-large have no relatives in high places? There are a lot of traders in Lagos today who formerly owned stalls in the old markets and who have none today. They can only squat and as you know, these traders are always harassed by the officials...

---

1 She means the chief (i.e. Ọlọ́jà)

2 'Chop' is used metaphorically to refer to people who collect bribes. The term is colloquial enough for some politicians in the 1979 election to have jokingly named their party 'Chop and let us chop'. Everybody in Lagos understood the message. However, in pidgin English, the usual meaning for chop is 'to eat!

The responsibility of giving Mama Pelewura a nice burial after her death fell on me. Everybody in the markets of Lagos bought the same outfit[1] which was especially ordered from the textile mill and 'Pelewura Rest in Peace' was written on the cloth. But before Mama Pelewura was buried I was arrested four times, and charged in court. The court alleged that I was the one who instructed all the market women in Apapa, Obalende, Oshodi, Bariga, Abule-Kuta, Mushin, Epe, Badagry, Agbowa, Imota, Ikosi, Sandgrouse, Ebute-Ero, Egati, Ereko and Ita-Faji to disobey the government. It was also alleged that the government's law was not followed by the markets in Apapa Wharf, Ajeromi, Apapa Road and Sabo. The court was convinced that I was the one who caused all the trouble and they said the market women gave my name here and there as their leader. The white rulers were surprised. They wondered how an illiterate woman could be so brave as to cause disorder in the whole of Lagos and beyond. I then told them that I had not appointed myself as the leader but that the market women regarded me as a brave and responsible person who should be able to spell out their grievances to the government and I was only doing my job by asking all the women not to sell in the market until the government was ready to cater to their needs. I made it clear in court that it was not my intention to go against the government of the day but I had to make sure that I satisfied the needs of the poor market women because they looked up to me.

---

[1] It is customary among the Yoruba women who either belong to the same family or the same club to wear identical dresses or outfits during a ceremonial occasion. This is known as aṣo-ẹbi.

The market women in Lagos ask me to be their leader

It is strange to me how I became the leader of market women in Lagos. I was definitely not the oldest. Even today as you know I have to kneel down for Iya Popo for though she is under my leadership she is also like a mother to me. And she is not the only one among market leaders that I would have to kneel to. There are many others who are much older than I. But they have come to realise that I am their leader and that I have suffered at the hands of the government for them...

Anyway, about my leadership. After Mama Pelewura's death and all the struggles I have been telling you about, the market women called me and said even though I was young they thought I could represent them to the government.

I think this was because when I was arrested I refused to promise the government that market women would stop causing trouble. I had told them that like Mama Pelewura before me I was ready to remain in gaol until our rights were granted. The word got around to other market women who decided to back me. They said I was sharp, courageous, fearless and ready to suffer. They came and said, 'From now on we want you to voice our grievances to the town council officials.' They said they wanted me to be the head of all the markets in Lagos. I would be called on to arbitrate any serious quarrels in the markets. We would no longer take our quarrels to the police, the very people who were harassing us. We would not give them an opportunity to laugh at us and take advantage of our lack of unity. If we were well organised and settled our quarrels without their intervention they would know that they were up against people they could not easily threaten.

When the market women talked to me like this, I saw no alternative but to agree to represent them...

There were some rumours that I was being paid a lot of money to organise the market women. There was no truth in this claim. Mama Pelewura had sacrificed a great deal, including her life, for market women. She had not taken a penny for her labour and she was a great woman. Why should I expect to be paid for the same services? Anyway, I realised that in this life you will always have to cope with malicious people, and so, I ignored the rumours. Today, thank God, I cannot claim to be a poor woman,[1] but I can assure you

---

[1] This woman is actually quite wealthy by many standards. She trades in gold and expensive imported lace. During my interviews with her we almost got into a serious misunderstanding. She wanted to extend hospitality to me and to my assistants by offering us 40 naira (about £30). Her argument was that we had been to her house several times, that she had come to regard us as her own children and therefore she must give us a gift. I had instructed my assistants that we were never to give or receive money in the course of my fieldwork. I felt we could occasionally give and receive small gifts in kind but never in cash. And so we both instantly refused, and knelt down to beg her not to be annoyed. (Later, in an appendix I give more details about my fieldwork experience.) After a long explanation she put the money away gracefully. However, when I finally went to say goodbye to her before leaving Nigeria and brought my son, she gave him twenty naira (about £15), and threatened that if I did not allow him to accept the money she would never again allow me in her house. She told me it would be extremely bad manners for me to prevent my son from accepting a gift from her. My son was delighted and thought I was crazy to have refused the money myself. As he said, 'if she did not have a lot more, you can be sure she would not be giving so much'.

that this has been as a result of extremely hard work and business ingenuity, not a result of payment for my leadership of market women in Lagos.

In the past, when the traders had felt the need to call the police to settle disputes, the real trouble would start. Those who called the police would have to spend money if they did not want to be arrested.[1] But that would not be the end of the matter. They would then resort to bad medicine to harm each other or their children. We stopped all this. Today you will never find a policeman in any Lagos market who has been called by a market trader to settle a quarrel. Such women would be suspended from their stalls. If you see police in the markets, they are there on their own initiative looking for some excuse to collect kola.[2]

The system of cleaning our own house was started by Mama Pelewura and includes settling quarrels between husbands and wives. If the husband of one of the traders should come to the market to ask us to help him discipline his wife, we usually investigate his complaints. If it should turn out that his wife has been behaving wrongly, we may, among other things, suspend her from the market for a period of time.

I have to settle all serious problems in the markets, especially those involving a woman's stall, or trouble with government officials.

---

[1] This means that they would have to bribe the police.

[2] Kola is a popular word for bribe in Lagos.

The government realizes that they need the co-operation of market women; when an important person visits from abroad they know that they can ask the market women to come and line the streets so as to welcome such a visitor.

Also, if the government has trouble such as they have recently had with university students, they know they can call on me as a market woman leader to assist them. Several times I have had to go and plead with university students who were demonstrating and beg them not to take the law into their own hands. Sometimes they do listen.

When the government was having trouble with the doctors, they called on me again and I tried to help, as I did when the school-children demonstrated and rioted and threatened the government. I talked to them and settled them down.

When teachers were threatening to strike, again I was asked to speak to them and they too saw reason.

Surely you must remember the trouble at Tejuoso market[1]. That too I helped to settle.

Our city councillors are always on the lookout for 'something to eat'.[2] They do not stick to the rules. I found that if someone was occupying a place and paying for it and another trader wanted to take it over, the complainant might go to the government and a new place would be allocated. Now

---

[1] In this market, the government had allocated stalls at random without consulting the market leadership. Tejuoso, now possibly one of the biggest and most modern markets in West Africa had just been rebuilt and reopened. The original traders boycotted the market to protest against the government's intervention in allocation of stalls and threatened to beat any trader who dared sell there until all the women's demands had been met. The case eventually went to court and Lagos Local Gov't. lost - another victory for market women traders in Lagos.

[2] Again, this means that they want bribes.

we work out these problems for ourselves. If the government build a block of market stalls a person who formerly had three stalls is only allowed one unless there is no demand for them. But when many people want a stall they do not allow more than one each.

In the past when a market woman died, her child would take over her stall and would sell her own commodities there. Nowadays, when a trader dies the Town Council boys, the present councillors, come and take over the stall. But before, what happened to stalls when a trader died had never been the business of government. It had always been a matter for the market women...

Lagos Market Women's Associations: what do they mean to us?

Market women's associations are very powerful and are thus taken very seriously ...

Our association has even been known to contribute money to help members fight land cases in court.

When the government was about to throw people out of Lagos,[1] our association contributed money to help those members whose houses were to be demolished, since the government was not ready to provide alternative accommodation. I frequently found myself running around day and night trying to solve our members' problems. Their troubles never seem to end and my days do not know night or day. Sometimes I am up until 2 or 3 in the morning trying to sort out one trouble after another. You must by now have a good idea about the

---

[1] This refers to the re-housing scheme discussed in chapter III.

kind of life I am forced to lead. I thank God that my health allows me to be up and doing. People even wake me up at 5 a.m. and I can't refuse. That is why I am their leader.

If a trader has problems I can't remain unconcerned. If I have just come back from settling a case in, say, Obalende market, or in the Town Council, and another report is brought from Jankara market awaiting my attention, I must go. When I return I may find people from Mushin. 'What has happened?' 'My stall has been taken'. I go. I hardly have time to sit down at all throughout the day.

I have very little time to spend selling my own commodities or to go long-distance trading, so I have to leave my business in the hands of others.

Some people have complained that I do not hold a permanent stall in any market.[1] Now, I ask you, how could I when I am all over Lagos settling quarrels or troubles for the traders? I ignore people who talk like that because I realize that they are jealous of my leadership. It is all politics.

---

[1] This woman's leadership of market women has been questioned by other women who aspire to the leadership in Lagos and who argue that she is not a market trader in the true sense of the word. While this may now be true, it is difficult to see how such opponents expect to be taken seriously since this woman has been a trader all her life; that is, until she took on the burden of full-time leadership which, as she says, is totally incompatible with owning a stall.

If I am called to the city council here in Lagos, the officer may say, 'Look Mama, you had better go to Ikeja from here because there is trouble there'. Before I reach Ikeja there is certain to be trouble elsewhere in Lagos.

At times women follow me from market to market begging me to attend to their own particular trouble.

That is not all. As the head of all market women in Lagos,[1] my responsibilities are many. For example, if one of the market women leaders[2] has an important function to be performed at her village, no matter how far away it may be, I am obliged to go with her. Sometimes it may be the marriage of one of her children, or it may be that a relative is being given a chieftaincy title or it may be an important family dispute. Whatever it is, whether it is in Ondo or Oyo,[3] or here in Lagos, I have to leave what I am doing and get ready for the journey. Sometimes the function may last for several days and I am bound to stay there until it is finished. You know, when you are a leader, your time is not really yours.

Each market has a committee of which I am the overall head. This position entails much touring around and I also accompany committee members when they have an important mission in their home towns.

---

[1] Chapter III describes two major rival market women's associations in Lagos. Their membership is politically determined, falling within the national political structure. Thus, members of the rival association would question her claim that she is the leader of all the Lagos market women.

[2] It has already been noted (chapter III) that all markets have one overall leader.

[3] Oyo and Ondo are well over 200 kms. from Lagos.

When I get to a town I always make a point of enquiring from the natives of that town whether they happen to know my family. Recently, when I travelled to Aramoko in Ondo State, I tried to find out if anybody there knew my grandfathers since my father's father was a native of Aramoko. My father's mother was a native of Ijaiye. On one occasion when I got to Orile Ijaiye I heard 'Giwa Oloko' being called and I told one old man that I was familiar with the name he was calling. He asked me how I knew the name and I said that I thought the man was known to, and knew, my father.

I did not know my father's mother, but I was told that my father's mother used to tell a story of how when war broke out they were forced to move to Ijaiye before they came to settle in Lagos. They later lived in Orile-Ijaiye in Abeokuta although that was not their original home-town. As time went on they settled in Oke-Arin which now belongs to the people of Ijaiye. I was told that we were the owners of some land in Oke-Arin, as well as the land where the post office is in Orile-Ijaiye. I asked to be taken to the mosque which had been destroyed when the war which forced my ancestors to move away broke out. I was shown the site of the mosque and part of the red native clay was dug out for me. It was harder than modern building materials.

Lagos has changed

During my lifetime I have witnessed many changes in Lagos. There was a time when traders from up-country [the interior of Yorubaland] and from Hausa country would come to Lagos in

large numbers. They would bring many different things to sell. When they were tired of travelling they would settle in one area where they would cook some of the food they had brought to sell and then buy fish and meat from traders in Lagos. Sometimes they would exchange their food for meat or fish. Some even offered cowrie money to buy things they didn't have. Cowrie and white people's money were both used in those days.

Sometimes Lagos people would poke fun at the up-country traders when they sat under the trees to eat.[1] Occasionally this would lead to real friction and the police would have to intervene.

I remember my sister, the one who died recently, used to be very mischievous at times. She was older than I and a real trouble-maker. She would sing abusive songs to these traders and they started watching out for her.

One day we were walking near Popo Street. Twelve of the country traders started following us. On that particular day she had not abused them. In fact she had not said a word. Nevertheless, they caught up with her and beat her mercilessly. I think they had been looking out specifically for her because they did not touch me. My sister learned her lesson the hard way. She never abused those traders again.

---

[1] Eating is considered a very private affair. Indeed, some people regard it as sacred, something not to be exposed except to those most close to us. I have personally known people to close the curtains of their dining-room windows in broad daylight so that passers-by may not see them eating. In a way, there is nothing strange in this attitude since food is used in so many different and important ways, not the least of which is to get rid of one's enemies.

There is another thing that we used to do when we were young. Girls from the same area would form their own secret society. They would pledge to help each other and to be friendly always. Girls belonging to the same society could not quarrel and had to give each other total support whether in a quarrel with girls from another society, or in various ceremonies, especially when one of them was about to get married.

Girls from my own and other societies used to love dancing. We would go out from Olowogbowo to Popo Street and dance around the town. All the members were required to join in.

We would get permission from the government officials to dance. They would charge a fee of two shillings and sixpence and we would hire people with the talking drums and would dance to that. It used to be a great social occasion and everybody looked forward to it.

Every eight days we would hold a meeting of our society[1], and it was after the meeting that a dance would follow.

At each meeting a member was required to tell the life history of any of her enemies or anyone with whom she may be having a quarrel at that time.

After the member had narrated the life history of her enemy, we would sing abusive songs and make rude body gestures at her enemy while dancing. Everybody would know at whom the insults were directed and the enemy, if she were nearby, would cry and run away. Sometimes we had several life histories of enemies told and this would be very exciting. All the enemies would be put to shame.

---

[1] Society means the association to which the young girls and women belonged. Holding the meetings every eight days is reminiscent of Yoruba cosmology where numbers four and eight have a religious overtone (see Chapter III).

All the members of our society were unmarried. Married women had their own society. They too held their meetings and dances every eight days. Theirs was always a grander affair and more exciting than ours, because they had more money than we did and therefore they could prepare more food and drink. The chief purpose for their meetings and dancing was to abuse co-wives. It used to be a lot of fun listening to members tell intimate stories about their co-wives. Sometimes these stories were about sex. For example, a co-wife is desperately trying to win a husband's affection and would go completely out of her way to do those extra nice things ... You know what I mean ... After the stories had been told we would all vehemently insult and abuse the co-wife in dance and song until dawn. These were memorable events which many of us will never forget. Most members of both my societies are now dead. We were all such great friends ...

What it means to be married

In our youth, before a girl got married, she was told to be ready to suffer. My mother used to say to me, 'If you run away from your husband's house, it is your children who will suffer. If they do, they will grow to resent you and what is a woman without children who love her?' But now that sort of advice would not be heeded by people of the younger generation.

When we were young they used to say boys were more important than girls. You were required to respect your brother even if

he were younger than you. My mother's mother and my mother would say that a brother is like a husband[1] or a father. They said that the head of a boy is always bigger than that of a girl and that boys are always sharper and more intelligent than girls. But you cannot tell women that nowadays. They are not ready to suffer the way we did. They say, 'I will stay as long as the man is good to me and my children, otherwise I have no time for him ...'

I would not have dared to say that when I was younger. You remember I told you that my husband had married five wives before me? Well, if these older wives had functions to be carried out, I could not give the excuse that I had to go to my market. Their work came before all else. I could not complain to relatives even my own mother. If I told my best friend that my husband's wives were wicked, she would have a similar story to tell. If the older co-wives had young babies, the market trade had to be forgotten. You would have to be at their beck and call taking care of them and their babies. And may God help you if anything should happen to either your co-wife or her child, especially if it was a male child. The trouble would be with you for the rest of your days. Her relatives and friends would never let you rest. They would seek revenge and endanger your life and that of your children, no matter whose fault the incident was. In any event, if you were looking after a co-wife and her child, you would hardly be so stupid as to do anything obvious. Nevertheless, when something happens to a co-wife, all co-wives without exemption are prime suspects.

---

[1] It is not unusual for Yoruba mothers to refer to their sons as 'husbands'.

In those days too, the husband did not concern himself with what his wives and children ate. Now, some educated men are beginning to cater for their wives and children. This means they have less money to accumulate wives. Besides, educated women, especially Christians, are saying that it is against their religion for a man to have more than one wife. My daughters tell me that white people in their own country do not marry more than one wife. This is the new civilisation in Lagos ...

Another reason why our daughters are not ready to suffer is because of the kind of work they do when they finish school. Some of them earn the same as their husbands so they say 'Why should the man dominate them?'

In our youth, although some women traders may have had more money than their husbands that did not mean that they thought of themselves as equal partners.

But, as I said, things are channging fast. Nowadays, women sleep in the same bed with their husbands when they are breast-feeding. The result? Pregnancy before the first child has started to crawl. A child should be at least two years old before the mother starts to sleep with her husband ...

Also, a woman should not have intercourse with her husband, no matter her age, if she has either stopped menstruating or any of her children has started to bear children. If she does it will bring bad luck to her children's children and will ruin her own health. That is why some women who are years younger than I am may look like my mother. They have spoilt themselves.

Men benefit from having many wives. It brings them prestige and honour. Many wives mean a man will have many children to help him in old age and to survive him after he is dead. A woman, on the other hand, does not benefit from her husband having many wives. It caused me endless trouble. I have known many women to suffer because their husbands had a string of wives.

If a wife has many children, male and female, and her husband has wives who are not producing children, the situation can be very unpleasant because of the co-wives' jealousy. That is what happened to me. I did not say it then but I tell you now that it was my trouble. The Ifá I consulted said so. I saw one Babaláwo, here in Lagos, who said all my children would die unless I ran away from my husband's compound, but my father would not hear of it. So I stayed and you know what happened to my children. Co-wives may also use medicine against you so that you cannot conceive; so whether you have issue or not there is much trouble among co-wives.

If a co-wife has a male child and another one does not, that too means trouble. One will be laughing at her fortune while the other will go sleepless, travelling from one Babaláwo to another and resorting to harmful medicine to accomplish her ends. If she does not succeed in killing your male child, then she might use the medicine to make him a moron. That is why you thank God when your male children are normal.

A husband finds it difficult to love a woman who does not have male children for him. And he finds it difficult to conceal his joy with those that have.

I think our children are beginning to realize the drawbacks of marrying many wives. Now sons and daughters want to look for their own husbands and wives...

Nowadays, wives co-operate with their husbands even to building houses together. In my youth you would not have done that. Your co-wives would kill you before the house is finished [she laughs]...

The other day you asked me whether women traded with their husbands in the past. You remember I told you no. It is for this same reason that you do not co-operate with your husband.[1] Even if your co-wives did not kill you, your husband would use the money from your joint trade to get himself another wife and you will be the loser yet again.

In the olden days a wife was forced to give her husband money from time to time especially if her trade was doing well. If she refused, the man might make life difficult for her by preventing her own children from assisting her in the market. But a clever woman could always hide her money properly and always pretend to her husband that things in the market were difficult. You never let your husband know exactly how your trade is doing. In fact, the usual thing is to complain all the time that things are really tough in the market,[2] and to

---

[1] Co-operate here means to trade jointly. Roles are usually severely segregated with men and women carrying out their activities separately.

[2] In all the years I have been associated with markets in Lagos, and having come to know some women market traders very well over a period of more than eight years, I have never known a woman to say her market trade is going well. This may be the case even when a woman has prospered to the extent of building a home in her village. This could be because of the general belief that people might spoil your market if they know it is going well. 'If they are jealous and envious, that is a bad omen for your trade', the women used to tell me.

make sure your husband hears you clearly [she laughs]. This way he is unlikely to ask you for money too often and if he does you can remind him that your trade has not been doing well lately. When he asks when things will improve, you say that is a matter for God to decide.

In the olden days, mothers used to send their children away to the compounds of other relatives to prevent the co-wives from harming the children ...

Co-wives can even use charms against each others' wombs so that children may be born deformed ...

If a husband loves one wife much more than others, then that women is lucky. If her co-wives do not 'get' her [that is, if their attempts to bewitch her, including the use of poison, fail] she dominates all the other wives. She is 'the wife most often called' [most frequently asked for sexual intercourse].

Today things are different for people of your generation. When you share your house and your kitchen only with your maids and your children you can rest easy because you know that your husband is not going to harm you...

There is another blessing that our children now have. They can come and go at will.[1] In my young days, a young wife

---

[1] By coming and going she said she meant the freedom of movement enjoyed by children nowadays. I was told that during their youth, the women's physical movements were closely watched. If a woman went to the market she was expected by her husband to be at the market and nowhere else. Market women leaders told me that they often had to settle disputes between traders and their husbands because of the latter's complaints that their wives were not coming straight home from the market. Of course, for market traders the younger generation of women with European dresses and cars is something they find hard to understand.

might spend a whole day running errands for her husband's mother, his father, brothers, sisters and co-wives without a single complaint.

Today I hardly see my own children. They come around and say, 'Mama, I want money for this or that ceremony', and before I put away my wallet they are off until the next time they need money for another ceremony ...

CHAPTER EIGHT

IYA KAREEM: THE TIMES OF MY LIFE[1]

My first childless marriage

The most agonising experience in my life was the struggle to have children. In all my long years this stands out above all else and so I should like to tell you about it first.

Altogether my hand was given in marriage three times, that is to say, three men paid money for my head ['paid bride price']. The Yoruba people call the money given by the boy's family to the girl's family money for head (owó ori). Besides the men who gave owó ori to my family, there were two others with whom I had short but important relationships. You might call them olùfé (lovers or sweethearts) because I did not go through the marriage ceremonies with either of them even though they fathered two of my children. That is Yetunde and Ramatu. My first child Kareem was born during my second marriage. All the men in my life are now dead.

My mother who died seven years ago, that is 1972, told me I was about seventeen when I first got married. For the next sixteen years I could not conceive. Everybody thought I was barren, and so did I but for a long time I did not give up hope. During these sixteen years in which I was childless I was to

---

1 Iyá Kareem is the Alága (head) of the market where I carried out my fieldwork. Since her role and activities as a market woman and as a leader have already been discussed (see Chapter IV) this chapter concentrates largely on her personal life and world view. Also, in the appendix where methodology is discussed, Iya Kareem features prominently. Of course, for obvious reasons, Iya Kareem is not her real name. Also, this case was entirely recorded in Yoruba.

visit countless medicine men over Yorubaland. I went everywhere. If my family heard of a good native doctor in Ife we would go there. If it was in Abeokuta there too we would go. Once my mother's mother even thought of taking me to Dahomey. The amount of money we spent was enough to make a man very rich.

When all else had failed my mother's mother said I ought to go and live with her in her village because their god had answered the prayers of many women like me. My father, being a devout Muslim, refused. But my mother prevailed on him until he agreed.

In the meantime I made a decision to leave my husband. His family hadn't been nice to me especially his mother and his sisters who didn't spare any words in abusing me. I think my husband's mother was very frustrated because after my marriage to her son, she had found him three more wives, none of whom bore her son any children. I had been the first wife.

Sixteen years is a long time to suffer in silence and so when I took the final decision to leave, my mother's mother and my mother thought I had done the right thing. My father thought differently, perhaps because I had defied him in marrying Olufemi. He had argued that Olufemi and his family were not Muslims, that they didn't have a religion and that they were poor. He said I had disgraced the family in marrying him. In fact, my father had put up such a stiff resistance to this marriage that I had threatened to elope. My father thought that would be an even greater embarrassment to our family. As I look back now I think this was the main reason why I had endured this miserable marriage for so long. You don't know my father. He would have said: "What did I tell you...?"

The marriage that gave me a son

In the meantime I had to remarry because I was in a hurry to have a baby. I went back to Lagos to stay with my father's first child, a daughter, who was much older than I was. It was during this period that I met the man who was to become my second husband. He was my elder brother's friend and came from the sort of family that my father would approve of. He came from a prominent Muslim family and was very, very rich. When he asked for my hand in marriage I could not believe my luck. I agreed straight away. He already had three other wives.

The wedding was such a grand affair that we danced in the streets of Lagos from Saturday to Wednesday. Wednesday was the actual wedding day and important people from all over Lagos graced the occasion. Even Oba Adele attended the ceremony. I still remember him dancing a lot. I felt very honoured.

I did not fall pregnant for the next three years but my mother's mother never despaired. She told me she had a feeling that she would live to see my children. My husband too was kind and patient, but not his relatives. When quarrels got out of hand there was nothing they did not call me. They said I had no breasts and must have been a prostitute before I married their son and that is why I was barren ...

The fourth year of this marriage brought fortune to my life but was also to see the beginning of the end of my second marriage. After twenty years of marriage to two husbands I finally got pregnant. When I did not have a period for three months, I thought I had been bewitched. By this time I had given up hope of ever becoming pregnant. When I spoke to my mother

and my mother's mother they advised me to go back to my mother's mother's village right away, which I did.

At about the same time one of my husband's senior wives (he had married three other wives before me) also got pregnant. I think she became pregnant two months before me because she had a boy two or three months before Kareem [her son] was born.

My husband, who was by this time living and working in Abeokuta for Oba Ademola, had said that when the time came for me to deliver I should go to the white people's hospital in Abeokuta. A Catholic mission hospital had just been opened and people said many good things about it. They even said that one of the Alake [king] of Abeokuta's wives, Oba Ademola, had just been delivered of a child there. Since I had had so much trouble getting pregnant I decided to try the white people's method. My mother's mother wanted a native midwife to attend me but I refused. So when I went into labour I went to the maternity hospital and my big healthy baby boy was born. That was this one [pointing to her son who happened to have been present during this particular recording].[1] That was fifty

---

[1] Iya Kareem now lives with her son in a three bedroomed house which also has a living room and a large compound at the back, where meals are prepared and clothes washed. This house was originally given to them in 1961 by what used to be Lagos Executive Development Board (LEDB) as part of the rehousing scheme discussed in Chapter IV. Of the three bedrooms, one is occupied by Iya Kareem, the second by Kareem and his first wife (his other wife and concubines each have a room in different parts of the city), while the third bedroom was, until my last two weeks of fieldwork, occupied by Yetunde and some of her children. She later moved to her flat which she told me took her three years to find. The living room (parlour) is converted into a bedroom at night for some of the children (the first two male children are already married) and Yetunde's seven. There were also the children of some relatives who stayed for brief periods.

three years ago. "Kareem [calling her son] is that not correct?" "Yes, mama." "Go and check where your papa wrote it down so that this madam [referring to me] will see I am correct." [And so she was].

When I left the hospital I brought my son to Lagos. First I lived with my mother for several months as the custom demands. The naming ceremony for the child cost about three hundred and fifty pounds. Today it would be several thousand naira. In those days only the very rich, like my husband's family, could afford that kind of money. We were showered with gifts from all over the country.

After I moved back to my husband's house the senior wife who had delivered two or three months before I did would sometimes leave her baby with me when she went to look after her trade. Then tragedy struck. Her child fell ill and after a few months died. Only God can explain my misfortune. No one who had been childless for as long as I had could possibly harm another woman's child. You come to know that if you do the same thing could be done to you. And in any case I am not a wicked person by nature. My greatest dream was to see my son grow to an adult who would have children in my life time. This is the same thing I wished all other women, even slaves.

Anyway after my co-wife's child died all fingers started pointing at me. My husband's family, who had opposed the marriage because they had said I was old, barren, a whore, and had been married before, now turned all their wicked energies on me. So did my husband's other wives who had not given him children. Only the senior wife and I had.

I believe that everyone should know the battles they can or cannot win. My second husband was kind to me. You may

even say, at one point he loved [if¢] me, which made matters worse for me. Among his family and wives I had become the subject of ridicule, abuse, gossip and the butt of jibes in song and dance ... When I could no longer bear it I decided sooner or later I would have to quit the marriage ... Once again, I went to my mother's mother's house. With all the recriminations I had come to fear not only for my life, but that of the only child I had. When I left, Kareem was barely seven years old. Looking back I do not regret the move.... anyway, this is what brought up the final break.

One day I was selling in my shop across the road from our house. I had a prosperous business which again did not augur well for me with my co-wives and husband's relatives. One day I needed to cross the street to our house so as to ease myself. I left my child in the shop in the care of one of my slaves, since I was going to be gone for only a minute. I noticed that my shop had been invaded by what looked like big flies. People had gathered around and warned me not to go near. One of the passers-by had managed to get into the shop and had brought my child out. He had been severely stung by what turned out to be a colony of deadly bees. The beés were extraordinarily big and were clinging onto every commodity I had in my stall. I had never seen such a sight before, neither had anyone else around except in a hive ... When the diviners were consulted they all said it was the work of my co-wives and my husband's relatives. It was a miracle that my son survived. If I hadn't gone to ease myself at the time I did I would not be here to relate this story. But what was even more remarkable was the fact that Kareem survived the attack because the girl who was

with my son at the time and who had battled so courageously to save Kareem later died from bee stings. The poor girl. I later gave her a fine burial, not like a slave would normally have, more like the kind you give a royal child or relative.

The incident was so amazing that the Alake of Abeokuta, Oba Ademola, sent me a personal message of congratulations and condolences from his palace, and some money as compensation. He said I had exhibited great courage in not accusing my enemies and remaining calm...

When tragedies like this happen, everybody knows that one's husband's wives and relatives must surely have a hand in it ...

My second childless marriage

It was after this incident that I decided to start all over again. This time I would not return to Lagos but would go to Ibadan. In those days, rumours had it that trade in Ibadan was the best. Coming from a family of successful female traders I decided to try my luck there. And in any case, my father had relatives who lived there. By the time I decided to go to Ibadan the relationship between my husband and I had greatly deteriorated. He wouldn't even so much as sleep with me. Years of strain and pressure from his relatives and his wives had left their mark and in any case I had come to terms with the fact that the marriage would ultimately break. I wanted another child desperately and felt that time was not on my side. I was no longer young. Yoruba people say that when you have one child, that child is not yours it is God's. This fact weighed heavily on my mind. I had to have another child and if it meant leaving Kareem's father [that is her second husband], so be it.

At Ibadan I opened a stall at Gbaji. My mother's sister and several of my father's relatives lived in Ibadan. There I met a man who had transferred to Ibadan from Lagos; I had known him for many years. He had been a close friend of my second husband. By the strangest coincidence this man lived in my family's compound in Ibadan. He was later to become my third husband, something that my second husband did not take kindly to ...

At first I had reservations about marrying him but I told myself that my chances of re-marriage, given my history of my supposed barrenness, were not that good.

In the meantime, quite unknown to me, my relatives in Lagos were working day and night to save my second marriage. My husband had reservations about a second trial. He pointed to the bad blood between me and his relatives especially his senior sisters and his mother, to say nothing of his wives who made it known that they would not welcome my return.

As for me, I had made up my mind that there would be no reconciliation and that the marriage was behind me. When I was summoned to Lagos for a family meeting I asked them whether they wished me and the only child I had, dead. That decided the matter ... especially as I had my mother's mother and mother solidly on my side. They were such good allies.

As soon as I returned to Ibadan, the man I spoke to you about had his relatives go to Lagos to seek a union. As usual my mother's mother was on my side and my father gave permission for, I am happy to say, my last marriage ...

We went to Lagos and the Nikah (Muslim) marriage was performed. Soon afterwards my husband transferred to Abeokuta

to work on the railways. I had, reluctantly, to follow him there. Abeokuta though it was the home of many of my ancestors, had come to symbolise wàhá-là for me ...

My third husband had four wives before he married me. When we got to Abeokuta he seemed in a frenzy to marry more wives. Within six months he had got himself another wife and four months later he added yet another. All his wives including the senior ones were having babies. By this time I had become quite used to the idea of not conceiving. Before long, people started telling him that he should not feel sorry for himself since they had warned him about marrying a woman with a history like mine.

As you would expect, this marriage was short-lived ...

After the break-up of my third marriage I decided I had enough of marriages, that I was getting old anyway, and that I should turn all my attention and energies to my son Kareem and my trade ... By this time, I think I was approaching fifty, maybe even more.

The man who fathered my first daughter

Back in Lagos with my mother solidly behind me I was able to establish a trade which soon prospered. At Abeokuta and Ibadan I had been a customer of white people's companies. I had become such a good customer they had given me a pass-book [that is, credit facilities]. When I told them that I was moving to Lagos they recommended me to their people like John Holt and a French company as well as U.A.C. (United African Company).

I had not been in Lagos long before I ran into a childhood friend. This man had wanted to marry me desperately years

before I met my first husband. My father whom I consider to have been a man of rather fixed ideas and very tough, had firmly rejected the deal. He had argued that as chief Imam of the largest mosque in Lagos, and a leading Muslim man, he could not give his daughter in marriage to a Christian family. After all, there were many Muslim men of similar status and standing in the community. To give my mother peace, I had had to yield. After all, it is the mother who bears the brunt of her daughter not marrying properly ...

When I met this man again thirty years later it was as if we had never parted. I used to sit with him and tell him my troubles. He would listen patiently. He was sure that if he proposed marriage my father would no longer refuse. I told him that my father would die a stubborn man and that at his age there was no need to add to his troubles and anxieties but in truth, the fact was, I wanted nothing to do with marriage, and in any case at this point I did not care whether I had children in or out of wedlock. Perhaps I could try to become pregnant without the hassles of co-wives.

In the course of our meetings and to my greatest shock I became pregnant within a few months. Perhaps if I had defied my father and had married him I would have had four plus four children without any effort. That is how my first daughter Yetunde was born ...

My friend insisted I moved into his compound to join his other wives[1]. I told him that as long as I lived I would never

---

[1] It is interesting to note that despite the fact that this man was a Christian, he was also a polygynist. This is not unusual. Christianity and education are not conceived as antithetical to or in contradiction with polygyny. In fact it would be more unusual to meet many Nigerian men who adhered to its opposition both in theory and in practice regardless of educational levels.

again join any man with his wives; that I was through with co-wives and their wàhá là and in any case I had waited for so long for this pregnancy I could not risk anything happening to it ...

He then rented a room for me where I lived with my mother until Yetunde was born. She like her brother was delivered in a white man's hospital. The story about Yetunde is another big event in my life.

My father continued his battles against my association with Mr. George. Once, my mother said, he threatened to curse me if I did not bring the relationship to an end. He was also giving my mother a bad time and felt that my relationship with Mr. George was a constant embarrassment to him as a Muslim leader; that the whole of Lagos knew I lived in sin. He said in his youth they would have stoned me to death which would be better for the family...

As the pressures mounted I told Mr. George that the relationship could not continue. In retaliation he threatened to take Yetunde away from me and send her to his mother. The struggle for Yetunde was to last many years even involving the police at times. As I used my father's connections to get my only daughter so did he use all his Saro[1] connections to fight me. He finally won and Yetunde was taken away from me only for us to be re-united years later when she was seriously ill and almost on the verge of death. If there is time I can tell you about this later. It is a very long story indeed ...

---

[1] Saro, as we have seen in previous chapters, refers to people of Sierra Leonian background who came to Lagos as repatriated slaves.

My next relationship was with Baba [father] Ramatu, the father of my second daughter, my third and last child. Ten months after she was born I stopped menstruating.

Ramatu's father was from a Lagos Muslim family. When my father heard of the relationship and that I was expecting a child he wanted us to get married right away. I told him and our relatives that I would do no such thing, especially as the man already had a string of wives. Instead, I would look after my children and I would trade. I had neither the time nor the energy for the palava of a husband and his wives. My father died shortly after this. My son says it was the twelfth day of the seventh month in 1942. He was already a school boy and he wrote the date down in our book of great family events. He also wrote down Yetunde's birth date. That book reveals much of our family history because my father used to record family events in Arabic. That is how I know when Kareem was born. All families should have a book like that ...

What I know about my family

Now, I would like to tell you about my father's father and my mother's people. My father's father's Yoruba name was Modupe (that means 'We thank God'). He was the chief Imam of Lagos. He built the mosque called Mosalasi Titi at Ita-Akanni here in Lagos. He also built a school for those who wanted to be educated in Islam. Many of the prominent Muslim leaders in Lagos today were taught by my father in his father's school. They concentrated mostly on the Koran in this school.

All my father's male children had to learn how to read the Koran and we, the female children, had to memorise sixty

Verses which we had to recite before we could get married. It enhanced the prestige of any family if their daughter could recite sixty Verses. My father had hired a Koranic teacher for all his children. But in addition, all my brothers had to attend Islamic schools ...

My father's father was born in Lagos. His family had settled at Ita-Akanni but we don't know exactly where our original home was in Lagos. My father's father's father came from Ibaruba. My father's father married into a Lagos family. She, the daughter of Chief Olumuyiwa Adebola, gave birth to my father.

My mother's people were from Ikeku in Abeokuta. My mother's mother was the daughter of Bello Alaran. Because of the close relationship I had with her I still visit her village frequently. She is buried there.

Some of my father's male children went to Christian schools after the Islamic school. Today in my family we have a surveyor, a doctor, an engineer and an army officer. You know the Giwa family? Well, they are all my relations. My father's name was Giwa.

My father's father was a rich man by the standards of his day. He built many houses in Lagos and elsewhere and owned a lot of land in central Lagos. He also later built many Islamic schools. Men like Tapa and Gambori who have gone through his school are no exception ...

At some time my father decided to migrate to the North. He settled in Lokoja. He was such a great Koranic teacher that the Hausa treated him like a Yoruba king. My mother lived in Lokoja with my father for many years. Apart from me, all my

younger brothers and sisters were born in Lokoja.

When we thought that my father was getting too old we pleaded with him to come home. We said that he could not be buried in a foreign land and so eventually he returned.

My father used to send money to some of his relatives and children while he was at Lokoja but he also saved money with which he bought houses there. When he finally left, he sold them at a handsome profit.

While at Lokoja he had become such a famous teacher that when he returned to Lagos the children of King of Bida came to convey their father's greetings. They stayed in one of my father's compounds for eight days. When he died in 1942 his funeral was attended by people from all over Yorubaland and many important people also came from the Hausa country in the North.

Before he died after he returned from Lokoja, Muslim leaders in Lagos wanted him to become the head of the mosque. Because of his advanced age he was reluctant. Instead he presented his oldest son. My father had sent him to one of the greatest Arabic teachers in Hausa country for instruction, the same way people send their children to England for Christian instruction. My brother had even gone to Arabia and was an Alhaji. That is how he became the head of the mosque. He was in charge for thirty-nine years before he died. The person who took over from my brother is still alive. It is the biggest mosque in Lagos and the one that I told you my father's father helped to build.

Most of the houses around that mosque belong to my family. The houses were given mostly to my father's male children and

their families when my father died. Some of the houses, however, were pulled down by the government twenty years ago although we were not even given proper compensation.

The battle to save my eldest daughter

Of all my children I had the greatest anxiety over Yetunde my first daughter[1]. Kareem and Ramatu have been endowed with good health but with Yetunde it was a battle to keep her alive. She has been ill all her life, which accounts for her frail appearance.

As her father was a Christian we sent her to a missionary primary school. Later, she attended the Methodist girls' secondary school. In her last year in this school she got herself pregnant by a Muslim man. Her father was so incensed he threatened to expel her from his house. As far as he was concerned, she had betrayed him by associating with a man whose religion he considered inferior to his. The betrayal, according to him, was all the most infuriating because Yetunde, he said, was trying to defy him by identifying too much with me and my people. You remember my father had fought against my marriage to Yetunde's father many years before and now my own relationship with him (that is, Yetunde's father) to all intents and purposes, had broken down. At any rate her health had been so poor as a result of the pregnancy that her father could no longer cope. He therefore decided to send her away. By the time we got to discussing Yetunde's pregnancy, her health had deteriorated so badly that an emergency admission to the hospital had to

---

1 During the course of my fieldwork I got to know Yetunde very well because her trade in jewellery and expensive lace materials did not take her away from home. She also spent a lot of her time in her room at home with members of her church, or relatives or other friends. Also during this period she was ill for three months and I helped to get a doctor [European trained!] for her.

be arranged.

In the hospital she lost her baby and such an enormous amount of blood that the doctors said she could not possibly recover. She had other complications too. I learned later that she had tried with the help of her boyfriend to abort the baby. The doctors said that this was responsible for the complications. I pleaded with the hospital staff to do all that was within their power to help. I told them that I had only three children, that it had been traumatic to produce them and I had little hope of ever having another one. I said I would sell all my possessions and borrow from everybody I knew to meet their expenses. They agreed to help. For the weeks following I practically lived in the hospital by Yetunde's bedside. I consulted everybody I knew for financial help and borrowed from those who had no reason to give me alms such as my former husband, Kareem's father. We combined European medicine with our own[1] by taking to the hospital the preparations that the native doctors made up for Yetunde. She eventually regained her health, but not before I had spent all my life savings and got myself into heavy debt, which included borrowing from my esusu society. I had left no stone unturned to see Yetunde alive. In the meantime my trade had suffered immeasurably ...

Later Yetunde married this same man and bore him nine children, all female. The first two did not survive. They died at the age of two and three ...

---

[1] It is a widespread practice in Nigeria to supplement European medicine with traditional medicine. Most people, especially those suffering from serious illnesses, would not depend entirely on European medications.

Of all Yetunde's illnesses, the one after her second child brought her closest to death. For years we travelled all over the country looking for somebody who might cure her. We even went to Hausa country on several occasions to meet some prominent Hausa medicine men of whom my husband had spoken highly before he died... This was after hospitals in Lagos, at Orita Meta, Mapo and other hospitals in Ibadan had said they could do nothing for her. These were very trying times indeed. We lived in different villages at Ijebu Ode, Abeokuta, Iwo and many other places for months at a time. We stayed at any village where we had been given hope of finding a cure for her endless troubles. During this period I had to carry her new baby on my back whereever we went. That too wasn't easy.

One day after she had been discharged from one of the hospitals in Ibadan she fainted and for several days she was in a coma. We all thought she was dying. I even sent a message to her father enquiring whether he wished her buried in Ibadan or Lagos ...

However, to everybody's amazement, one afternoon while some of us kept a vigil around her bed and other relatives prepared for her funeral she started to make a few faint movements. Ecstatic and overwhelmed with joy I began to weep uncontrollably. A diviner of considerable repute, who lived near our compound in Ibadan, was immediately summoned to tell us the meaning of what we were witnessing. After prolonged deliberation he repeated what he and other diviners had told us several months previously. Yetunde would not recover until I had sold everything I owned ...

Those who came to buy my best native cloth and jewellery became suspicious because of the haste with which I was selling

and the low prices I accepted for what they knew to be items of high quality and otherwise very expensive ...

The diviner also said that our enemies were determined to see either Yetunde or her daughter, the one that I was looking after, dead. How does a mother choose between her child and her child's child? The thought was extremely painful ...

Anyway, Yetunde regained her consciousness but remained very ill. She had lost so much weight she looked like a skeleton. All her skin had started to peel and looked unhealthy because she had spent so long lying down, sometimes for several months continuously.

The tour around the country had taken its toll. She was barely conscious. Taking her back to Lagos seemed the only sensible thing to do. There at least I would have the support of my relatives while awaiting the worst to happen. By this time it had become clear that either Yetunde or her daughter would die. If Yetunde should die, I reasoned, at least I would not have the burden of either burying her in a strange part of the country or of bringing her body back to Lagos. This was what finally decided me to return Yetunde to Lagos.[1] I got Yetunde and her daughter to Lagos within a week despite the advice of some people who argued that it was my enemies in Lagos who wanted to kill Yetunde and her daughter and that going back to Lagos would just make it easy for them.

On returning to Lagos I decided to seek a meeting with

---

[1] Among some Yoruba people it is the custom that if a young person dies he or she is buried wherever the death takes place.

Yetunde's father's mother, her father and some other important members of her father's family. I felt that they should see her again in case she dies soon.

It was during this meeting that Yetunde's father's elder sister suggested that since all else had failed we might as well consider having Yetunde taken to an Aladura priest. She said she personally knew one Aladura Pastor called Oyatogun who had helped many other people with similar problems to that of Yetunde. He, Pastor Oyatogun, was a member of Pastor Orimolade's church where many miracles were said to have taken place ...

This, as it turned out, was a very interesting coincidence. During the course of our discussions we discovered that Pastor Orimolade had lived in my father's compound many many years before when he had first come to Lagos to spread the gospel.[1]

---

[1] Of Orimolade's stay in Lagos, J.D.Y. Peel (1968: 59-60) has written:

> Moses Orimolade, son of Turolase of an Omobo house at Ikare in Akoko, was born in the 1870s. Christianity came to that area in the late 1890s, and Orimolade was an early convert ... He began to wander about preaching, in the locality and then far afield ... "People were struck by his powerful praying in his own Akoko dialect ... And so he came down to Lagos ... Chief Coker took him about in his car to preach at African churches in the district". It seems that Orimolade ... was ready to pursue his spiritual vocation under the aegis of anyone who would patronise him. These were usually prominent churchmen, but included a leading Muslim, Momo Giwa, who took him in because he was a holy man. All agree that the power of prayer was his constant theme.

This not only confirms Iya Kareem's claim that Pastor Orimolade indeed lived in her father's compound, but also that they were contemporaries.

As the elders of the church talked it was further discovered that my father had been so nice to Pastor Orimolade during his stay in our compound that he had not paid a kobo [the smallest unit of Nigerian currency] during his stay there. They said that that was what Pastor Orimolade had said and that he had even told some of his followers, who promised to make a note of it.

As the story about this great man unfolded, I thought Allah was on my side. He was said to have performed many miracles during his lifetime. Numerous people who could not be cured with European medicine were said to have completely recovered as a result of his prayers. He was said to use ordinary water to cure people who bathed and drank it. It even turned out that he had previously cured one of my relatives for whom everybody had given up hope. In addition to his great ability to cure people Pastor Orimolade was said to possess other extraordinary powers. He was capable of foretelling future events which took place exactly as he predicted. One such occurrence, which many people remembered, was when he had gone around Lagos warning people that in his vision he had been told that people should not go near Oko Faji (one of the oldest sections of Lagos) because a great catastrophe lay ahead. His advice was ignored by many who thought him mad. A few days later some eighteen people suddenly died in the precise area which he had pinpointed, without any obvious cause. The government had had to move in and evacuate people as it was feared many more would die ... After that, we were told that people took Pastor Orimolade's prophecies very seriously. As we discussed Pastor Orimolade and his preaching activities I began

to remember him. Yes indeed, he had lived in our compound and I remembered on occasions I would sneak from my chores of hawking cooked food to listen to him. Once, my father's mother, who was then living with us, caught me and gave me a good flogging. She said I was a Muslim girl and had no business listening to news about Jesus Christ. Subsequently I was more discreet about attending Pastor Orimolade's meetings. I would only attend those that were so crowded that it would be a task to catch me. I would also have some of my friends like Mama Eleja[1] cover up for me, which included hawking my own commodities for the day. It is strange I was not converted. While I knew my father would have turned me out, attending the meetings themselves was such great fun.

Anyway, about Yetunde's case, Pastor Oyatogun was one of the followers of the Aladura church whom Orimolade had personally trained. He had been, according to the tales about him, an outstanding pupil, and at that time one of the greatest healers in Lagos. He undertook to heal Yetunde during prayers at Bar Beach[2], and would not accept any payment because he said hers was a special case since my father had shown such hospitality to Pastor Orimolade even though he was no relation. After this Pastor Oyatogun became a great family friend. Yetunde also became a staunch member of the Aladura church. Since that time

---

1 Mama Eleja, with whom I had extensive interviews over a period of three months, was Iya Kareem's closest friend. They claimed to have known each other for over seventy years.

2 Every Sunday members of the Aladura church, dressed in white robes for men and long white gowns for women, usually meet at Bar Beach for prayers.

her health has improved considerably. Recently Pastor Oyatogun died. His son came to inform us and our family contributed money towards his burial. We even attended and helped with the funeral ...

Yetunde's involvement with the Aladura church has been of tremendous help to her and me. It has relieved me, to a great extent, of the burden of looking after her whenever she is ill. Most of the things I have seen the Aladuras do when they congregate in my house[1] are beyond my understanding but I am not opposed to them. They have brought a new lease of life to my daughter which has meant happiness and peace in her previously unsettled existence. One cannot ask for more. This is not to say that I have been converted to the Christian religion, not at all. I still remain a committed Muslim and will continue to do so in these last few years of my life.[2]

---

[1] Several times during my recorded interviews with Iya Kareem or even when I just called unexpectedly on her I found members of Yetunde's church in her room praying. These were usually women although on a few occasions some men came in to pray. On a number of occasions I requested permission from 'Sister' Yetunde (I always addressed her as Sister Yetunde because she was older than I) to attend the meetings in her room. She always agreed on condition that I removed my shoes and covered my hair during the prayers and meetings. I kept recordings of the meetings I attended.

[2] I estimated Iya Kareem's age to be between the early- and mid-nineties. She said her first husband had recorded their marriage to have taken place around 1904. If she was seventeen (an approximation) as her mother thought this means she would have been born around 1885. Also she says that Mrs. Ransome-Kuti was younger than she was. Mrs. Ransome-Kuti died in 1978, and her age was known to be exactly 87 at the time she died. Whatever the exact date, as can be seen from her picture she is an extremely old woman. One thing I found incredibly amazing about her was her memory. Many of the things she told me happened in her youth are to be found in Nigerian historical records. She related them with amazing accuracy. To test her memory I would ask her a question I had asked some time previously. Her answer would always be: "But we discussed that before, did you not record it?" Sometimes I would have asked her the question months before. And yet she would recall the time and the circumstances under which

I thank Allah for this new turn of events. Yetunde's children are all well. Her trade too is doing well. Now she hopes to extend her trade to white people's countries[1], which will take her to America this month. While there she hopes to take some time off for a much needed rest. This will be the first time she has travelled by aeroplane and she is very excited. She is going to travel with some friends from her church ...

Market women traders in Abeokuta refuse to pay tax

A long time ago the tax collectors in Nigeria were a great menace, especially to market traders. Even women in Igboland had risen against them. I remember the story vividly because everybody in Nigeria talked about it. I was already a trader myself and knew the hardships women experienced. People said in Igboland many women had been killed by officials when they protested against paying taxes. We all felt great sympathy with those women. The story I am about to relate to you concerns a government decision to tax market women traders in Abeokuta. During this period tax collectors frequented the markets to see to it that women paid their taxes. If, in a particular market, it turned out that some women had not paid their taxes the tax collectors would gather the women together not unlike what they used to do during the slave trade and beat them up. Some people said they even tied women together and would then beat them up. It is probably true. I remember many of my colleagues in different markets in Abeokuta who had become so desperate about paying taxes that they would sell personal

---

[1] She means to import jewellery and lace from Europe.

belongings to avoid trouble. Sometimes this included their clothing, and even food which would normally be reserved for children. This invoked deep anger in many of us. We even feared for the safety of our children. My own son Kareem had been a victim. He had been caught at Itoku in Abeokuta and had been threatened with beating and other things unless he told them who his mother was so they could find out whether I had paid my taxes. At this time Kareem lived with his father's mother. On telling them her name they let him go because she was an influential woman in the community.

In Abeokuta there lived a great woman not unlike Mama Pelewura in Lagos who decided that the government harrassment of market women traders had to be stopped. Her name was Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti. Surely you must have heard about her. She died a few months ago after the government had burnt her son's house to the ground[1]. Market women in Abeokuta called her Auntie Funmilayo. I knew her very well and she even used to kneel to me[2] because she was much younger than I.

Madam Ransome-Kuti presented the case of the market women to the government and promised to strive to free those women who had been arrested over tax payments. She objected particularly to the physical harrassment of women in market places and also argued that women could not reasonably be expected to pay tax because they were poor. She told the officials that the responsibility of feeding families in Nigeria fell on women and therefore they could not be expected in addition to be burdened with

---

1 She is referring to the confrontation Madam Ransome-Kuti's son (Fela) had with the last military government in which his house had been burned to the ground by the soldiers. Madam Ransome-Kuti herself, then 87, had been forced to jump from the second floor to safety.

2 Among the Yorubà people it is the custom that a younger person must kneel down to those older than they.

taxes. Men should pay taxes but not women. She promised to fight the government with all her might. And she did. She presented the women's case to the Alake (King) of Abeokuta, Oba Ademola. When he would not acquiesce to her request she organised all the women traders in Abeokuta and told them to get ready for a protest. This was to include, besides boycotting the markets, daily sit-ins of all the market women traders outside the Oba's palace. All the women responded immediately, and from then on there was a real confrontation with the government officials. The whole affair culminated in real strife (elé yìí dìjà), that is, a real war (ìjàgboro). From the early hours of the morning till late into the night hundreds, maybe thousands, of market women traders would sit with their children at the entrance of the Oba's palace and sing abusive songs about the Oba of Abeokuta. The abusive songs were accompanied by dances in which rude bodily gestures were directed towards the Oba. The only thing that saved him from being attacked by the traders who, as the weeks passed, became more and more angry, was that the government had guards posted at his palace.

Despite the support that the Oba received from the government he had eventually to flee his palace. The women's struggle against the payment of taxes had gained momentum and sympathy from many other people who now came to the Oba's palace to express their support. This was particularly true of others who could not pay their taxes. As a result of our protest the Oba had become very unpopular with all and sundry. As the news spread around Abeokuta and beyond women came from villages near Abeokuta to join in the daily sit-ins outside the gate of the palace. They brought their children along. We organised

the protest in such a way that there were always women who sang and danced. As I remember there was no time during the protest that the Oba's palace was deserted. To be effective we made our presence felt day and night. The officials were not allowed to rest. And so, as women took turns to rest, the singing and dancing continued uninterrupted. The crying of children added to the drama. I can't say how many women participated, but there were thousands of them.

Eventually the government exempted market women traders from paying taxes, but not, as I have already told you, before the Oba had fled. When the word got around that the government had yielded to our demands, there were celebrations in which women danced with joy for days, all over Egbaland. The government directed however that those market women traders who were customers of big European firms such as John Holt and United Africa Company (U.A.C.) should continue to pay taxes. We did not protest because the bulk of the market women traders were poor and did not trade with big European firms which required large capital and credit-worthiness. Another group of women who were also not exempted from paying taxes were women who were wholesalers. The government had come to realise that they could not lump all the women traders together and demand that they pay taxes.

After the bulk of the women had been exempted from paying taxes we refused to abandon our protest outside the Oba's palace. We argued that the Oba should first refund the money which had been collected from us. Songs of abuse against the Oba and his government allies continued unrelentlessly until many chiefs and Madam Ransome-Kuti begged the market women to

calm down ... The women had demanded that Oba Ademola should be permanently expelled from Abeokuta. Eventually the women agreed to stop their protest and allow Oba Ademola to return to his palace but not before he and his chiefs had promised to leave market women completely alone. It was during this period that Madam Ransome-Kuti became the heroine of all the women in Egbaland and beyond.

Lagos has changed

In the long years with which Allah has blessed me I have seen a great many changes. Most of them have been very disturbing. To my mind the changes in the funeral ceremonies and the yearly and other festivals have been the most outstanding ...

In days gone by kings and chiefs were never buried in towns. Their bodies had to be returned to their villages for burial. The villagers never forgot their kings and chiefs because each villager was required, during the harvest time, to take to the chief a portion of his produce. The elders said the practice was to remind the people that they, their village and the land on which they grew their crops and kept their animals, as well as their ancestral shrines, belonged to the king or the chief. To give to the chiefs and the kings out of one's possessions was considered a duty which many obeyed without grumbling.

Then the white people came and changed all that including the rules governing the funeral ceremonies of kings, chiefs and ordinary people. They failed to appreciate that the funeral ceremonies and the resting places [graves] of a king, a chief and even of ordinary people are of supreme importance. This

not only to peoples' children and their children's children, but in the case of chiefs and kings to their subjects. That is why many years ago Obanikoro and Oba Eleko directed the citizens of Lagos to disobey the white government's ruling on this matter. Other chiefs too had protested. They warned that it would go down in history that a great tradition had been destroyed during their life time; that future generations would consider this cowardice and derelection of duty to our traditions. They would not forgive us.

When a chief died in Lagos in those days his body, wrapped in beautiful and expensive clothes, would be put into a canoe decorated with chiefly regalia for his last journey to his village. In a separate canoe his body would be accompanied by another body or bodies depending on the standing of the chief in his community. If, for example, a king died, our tradition required that some people be put to death in order to be buried with the king. I am not exactly sure of the number of people who would have to be buried with him but my father's mother and my own mother used to tell me it could be two, three or at times five. I believe this custom is still observed although the govérnment has decreed it should be stopped and the practice would therefore be carried out clandestinely. I believe they practise this same custom in Benin. There too they say that when the Oba dies everybody fears for their life. The Oba cannot be buried until they find people to be buried with him. In Benin, according to my mother, the custom demanded that those who were buried with the king must be alive. In other words, they were buried alive. In my youth slaves were good victims for this ritual

but now that we no longer have slaves people fear for their lives when a king dies because anybody could be killed to be buried with the king. Our elders say that this custom was designed to give the chiefs and kings servants to serve them in afterlife according to our beliefs, the soul is said to live on after death. Maybe the Benin people believe the same thing which is why they bury people alive with the king.

I don't know the details of these rituals since women and children are not let into these secrets. If I had been a boy I would have been taught these customs in detail because a man's first son is considered his heir and must therefore be intimately involved in his father's funeral. He is the first to wash his father's body after death and the first to throw sand into the grave. Also he is present during the various rituals if he is of age and has been initiated.

When the body is borne by the sea [lagoon or river], further rites are performed during the journey. Again, I cannot tell you precisely what they are because women, the uninitiated and children are excluded from the procession. My mother told me however that what was done with the king's body depended on local traditions because the methods of ascending to the throne and burying the kings differed from place to place. The elders used to tell us that in some Yoruba places a king's head would be cut off, cleaned up and that the next heir to the throne would have to drink from it before he was crowned. That too the white government stopped.

The most important people attending the burial would be the medicine men, priests and other chiefs who belonged to the

same society[1] as the dead chief. The chief's subjects meanwhile would make a journey back to the deceased's village before returning to his palace in the city where ceremonies commemorating the death would continue for several days. Later, I think it was during Dosunmu's father's reign, the white government succeeded in changing the funeral ceremonies, even directing that chiefs should be buried in cemeteries.

In my youth only certain categories of people such as common criminals, lepers and pregnant women, were buried in the bush - which is what cemetaries are. Even witches were accorded a decent burial in their family's compound because, naturally, their families did not regard them as evil. Being an alleged witch was of no consequence to the family of the deceased in terms of the kind of funeral and burial ceremonies that took place. These were entirely dependent on the family's ability to accord their relative a fitting burial, providing food, beautiful clothes, cooking utensils, jewellery, money, and so on ...

But now when kings, chiefs and other important personalities are supposed to be buried in the bush like common criminals, relatives can no longer communicate conveniently with their departed ones. Our people believe in consulting those who were close relatives long after they are dead. This is true especially of one's father because in times of crisis we believe he can help us. Graves, consulting our ancestors through diviners, including the frequent pouring of libations

---

[1] Among the Yoruba there are many societies or associations that an individual can join. Ideally the organisational structure of a society is only known to its members who are under strict obligation not to reveal them to non-members. Ogbóni cult is a famous example of one such society. Women and children are excluded from some of these societies.

and other things, symbolise the relationship that continues to exist between us and those who were close to us and have passed on. That is why it was not unusual for a person to be buried inside their own house or within the compound. Despite government attempts to stop this people still do it. Old customs die hard ...

What I think of witchcraft

Now I would like to tell you about witchcraft because that is something that has not changed much in my long years. Men are wizards [ọ̀ṣó] [1], and women are witches [àjẹ́]. These, especially the witches, are responsible for all the miseries that people encounter, such as poor trade; illness; barrenness; accidents; quarrels with one's husband; death and many other misfortunes. It is true that some women inherit the ability to perform witchcraft from their mothers but witchcraft can also be acquired. If it is inherited it can only become effective after the mother's death. I don't know why this is so, but they say that is how it works ...

If you live in the same compound as a witch and you offend her she takes the matter to their night meetings which they

---

[1] Yoruba people make a clear distinction between a wizard and a witch. Iya Kareem was adamant about the analytical distinction between the two concepts. 'A man can never be àjẹ́ [witch]', she insisted, 'any more than you can now change from being a woman to being a man. And conversely, a woman cannot be ọ̀ṣó [wizard]. A witch and a wizard perform different jobs, the same way a man hunts and a woman cooks ...'

call ajọ. Then your troubles will know no bounds. You may suddenly begin to lose weight without any apparent cause or other misfortunes may befall you. Witches operate in many ways. The particular ailment or misfortune inflicted upon a person depends entirely on the type of witch involved. Of course, there are medicines which can be used to counteract the powers of witches but they depend largely on luck. The diviners consulted may not know the particular medicine appropriate to halt the evil machinations of the particular witch responsible for your troubles. That was the problem I had when my daughter was sickly for so many years.

My trade also suffered when certain witches determined to reduce me to a beggar. I would buy a bag of rice from Ibadan to sell in Lagos and before I got here the price would have fallen by half. It used to happen with other commodities too. But fortunately for me I knew a medicine man who gave me charms to counteract the spell used by the witch who was trying to make me bankrupt.

Unfortunately when my daughter was ill this same man could not help. As I said, it all depends on the character of the witch involved. Witches are not equally wicked, so a less wicked witch may give you a break if she feels you have suffered long enough. Also, witches normally harm those with whom they have a close connection. They have nothing to gain by inflicting misery and misfortune upon strangers.

All families pray that none of their members should either inherit or acquire witchcraft, not only because it is terrible to be a witch but also because in any community witches and their families are definitely resented by everybody including

other witches. Of course if a woman is a witch there is always a chance that one of her daughters may involuntarily inherit the power. I was lucky that my mother despite her advanced age when she died had not acquired witchcraft.

Only priests or people who practise native medicine know the proper sacrifices to be offered when one is troubled by witches but they too may not have been in their craft long enough to know the correct combination of medicines that may be required. And in any case some witches have been known to turn their evil attention onto a medicine man who is trying hard to help a victim. And so some medicine men also fear witches for neither are they totally immune. It also happens that some native doctors inherit the powers to deal with witchcraft from their forefathers, but others have neither the skill nor the inheritance of these powers. That is why one may visit so many to no avail. For example specific prayers, sacrifices and charms and incantations must be carried out for specific applications. In differing circumstances they may not work.

Families who are unlucky enough to have a member killed by a witch may never know peace. In such cases what may happen is this. When a person dies relatives who have not yet heard of the death and who live some distance away may meet the dead person as if nothing had happened. This is because the person's soul (orì-inú) has not gone to heaven ...

In my youth, it took little to satisfy a woman. If a woman had many fine male and female children; a husband who was not too unreasonable; co-wives who were at least not trying to kill her; husband's relatives that were not too troublesome; good health; and a good trade with which to feed herself and her children, she would ask for little else ...

CHAPTER NINE

MAMA NKECHI: FROM THE VILLAGE TO THE MARKET[1]

The stories told to me when I was young

My father's name was Ikechuku, but people called him Augustine because he had been baptized. In my youth, if you were a devout Christian you would not let people address you by your Igbo name - at least not the first name. The missionaries forbade it: native names, they said, were pagan. In order to go to heaven when you died you must have been baptized and this of course meant converting to Christianity. This explains why most people from my area have European names. I think this is true of most Igbo people of my generation ... I think we were converted to Christianity much faster than other people in Nigeria. In our market, for instance, there are very few Yoruba women who are Christians - they are mostly Muslims or nothing. The three who are Christians and with whom I'm friendly, don't use Christian names even though they have been baptized. In Igbo country that would be most unusual, but my Yoruba friends tell me that the missionaries in their area didn't care very much what name they used as long as they were converted to Christianity. These women even say that in some areas your baptismal name could be Yoruba ...

---

1 This case history was recorded entirely in English and 'pidgin' English. I understood no Igbo, and while Mama Nkechi spoke impeccable Yoruba her obvious dislike of the Yoruba people would have influenced her against any proposal to record in that language and might have prejudiced our relationship. She spoke excellent 'pidgin' English, however, and it was she herself who suggested that English should be used for the interview. It is considered prestigious for a market woman to speak English since this shows that she is educated.

My mother's mother had five children of whom two were males. These were her first two children. The first son married three wives. My mother said they spent a lot of money with native doctors in an attempt to help these women to conceive but it was no good. At that time the 'money' paid to native doctors was in cowries and manillas ... My grandmother's second son died before he was four years old. People accused my grandmother of killing her own child because she had conceived before four years had elapsed. Among my people it is customary for a woman who has given birth to wait for forty-eight months before having sexual intercourse with her husband. If she doesn't wait and becomes pregnant, it is said she will jeopardize the health and life of her child.

If during the four years the wife needed anything from her husband custom demanded that she should kneel down outside his house and catch his attention. She would not, if she had been properly brought up, dare enter her husband's house before her previous child was four years old... The reason for this custom was that, in my area, a woman had to breast-feed her child for a period of four years. Should she have sexual intercourse with her husband, this (it was believed) would bring numerous illnesses to her child - such as rapid loss of weight, high fever, a swollen stomach and many others. The cause of these complaints was the sperm which a man desposited in the woman's body and which affected the milk of a lactating mother.[1]

I never knew any of my grandparents. My mother's mother

---

[1] This correlation between a child's health and sexual intercourse has been discussed in previous chapters. The reason why I have recorded Mama Nkechi's account (which was supported by all the other market women) is that she is an Igbo, whereas my previous informants were predominantly Yoruba. This point is of particular interest because it applies to most Nigerian peoples, except those from the northern parts of the country about whom I have no information.

died two years after I was born, but her father had died when my mother was still a child. The same was true on my father's side. My father's father ... died when my father was a young boy, while his mother died soon after my father married my mother. However, as I grew up, I came to know many of my grandparents' sisters and brothers, as well as many other relatives. They were all very kind to me and my brother...

My mother was betrothed to my father when she was a child. In those days, according to her, girls were betrothed from the age of twelve and sometimes much earlier. This was especially true if a girl's parents were poor .... The money and/or the animals given to the girl's family were sometimes used to acquire a bride for one of her brothers ... That is what happened to my mother, otherwise her elder brother would have had to remain unmarried for a long time...

Once a girl was betrothed, it was the responsibility of the man and his family to bring her up until she became of age. Even before the girl moved into her husband's house, he still had many responsibilities and obligations concerning her. Similarly, if a girl in such circumstances earned any money, it went to her husband. This is what happened to my mother. My father apparently arranged for her to help some Portuguese traders carry their wares to different places: the money she earned was then handed to my father. Later, when she had moved into my father's house, she continued to carry goods for the Portuguese traders and my father would receive a quantity of raw tobacco in exchange for her services. This work was in addition to her farming activities. There was no motor transport in our village in those days and my father arranged for other boys and girls in addition to my mother to help carry

these goods. He would get a lot of tobacco in exchange and my mother would make some of this into a powder, which people used for snuff. My father would then take it to different parts of our country and would exchange it for whatever he thought he would most need to sell later. My mother said he usually got clothes in exchange for his tobacco. The Portuguese called this trade by 'barter.'

Initially this was not my father's full-time occupation: he was basically a farmer who grew cassava and some yams, and he traded in tobacco and cloth only when his farm didn't need attention. However, as he came to know more Portuguese traders he gave up farming altogether and used to travel to Port Harcourt carrying goods for them, for which he received, in addition to tobacco and clothes, a fair amount of gin ... Sometimes he would be away for months at a time ... In fact, he was away at the time I was born and didn't return for a long time...

My mother sends me to school[1]

I was born at Okpala in the Owerri District of what used to be the old Eastern Region, and which is now Imo State. When I was born, they named me Chinyere, but when I was baptized they named me Cordelia. I must have been born in 1925 because my mother said I was twelve when I started school and that was in 1937...

Some years before I was born the missionaries had come to Owerri from Onitsha to spread the Gospel... Those who were converted to Christianity found European education very helpful... To be a good Christian you had to know the Bible well,

---

[1] In order to indicate the humour and the subtleties that may have been lost in the process of translating these personal histories, I shall conclude this account of Mama Nkechi by quoting verbatim from this section, in Pidgin on page 333 (below)

and this meant you had to learn how to read... Both my parents were illiterate. They would ask others to read the Bible to them and they'd memorize the verses that were said to be most important. They didn't find this easy and, of course, they had to pay a fee for the reading.

Being able to read and write had another advantage - you could read and write your own letters. I think this accounts for my mother's decision to send me to school, even though she needed help on the farm. My father died when I was only six - that is, two years after my brother was born. My mother consulted her elder brother about my schooling and he advised her to stop wasting time and the little money she had. 'Train the girl to be a good and diligent farmer, and a good wife,' he told her. When she consulted my father's relatives, they were of the same opinion... But she went against their judgement to educate my brother and me.

In those days, my mother said, it cost seven shillings to have a letter written, and seven shillings to have the reply read. As you can imagine, in the twenties and thirties that was no small sum... Many of her relatives and some of my father's relatives lived in different towns, some in far-away places like Lagos and Kano. She therefore reasoned that if she sent me to school I would save her a lot of money as well as benefiting myself.

Thus she sent me to a mission school three miles from our village. She sold some of her farm produce in order to buy school books and clothes for me, as well as a kerosene lamp which the Yoruba people call <u>àtùpà</u>...

The mission school I attended didn't go beyond Primary Four, and so, when I had passed that standard, my mother once

again approached her brother, asking him to let me stay with him ... since he lived in a village with a mission school that went up to Standard Six. To this, he objected strongly... That was the end of my education, before I could complete Standard Five...

My encounter with a European nurse

In the olden days the government would send people from the Department of Health to the villages to give villagers medicine. During this period, an English nurse came once a week, on Saturdays, to the village called Egbure near ours, to give people injections. Whenever my mother was unwell, I would accompany her there. Not many people spoke English in those days, and the English woman's Igbo was not at that time very good, even though, years later, she was to speak perfect Igbo...

This is how I came to know that European nurse. She asked me whether I would help her every Saturday by interpreting Igbo, as she was having problems with her patients. She would pay me a few shillings... Later, she asked my mother's permission for me to accompany her to other villages and to town... My mother agreed. Miss Peterson had a house in Aba, and I would sometimes stay there with her. She told me if I could learn more English she could perhaps arrange for me to go back to school so that I could later train as a nurse.

I was doubtful about Miss Peterson's suggestion... Anyway, I broached the subject with my mother, who immediately said "No"... She said she would have to consult my uncle who hadn't been very co-operative in the past. Her father having died some years before, my uncle had become the head of the

family... She said she couldn't go completely against his wishes.

I succeeded in persuading one of my mother's senior relatives to accompany me to my uncle. He thought we were both mad! I should be preparing for marriage, he said - indeed it should have taken place a long time ago. He had neither the time nor the patience to listen to my wild dreams about going to school. He reminded me that he had made this clear on several occasions before. We left without persuading him to change his mind. He had further argued that all my ideas about becoming a nurse, learning to deliver children, and so on, would turn me into a bad woman. If I ended up in town I would shame the whole family, and my mother would live to regret her encouragement of my fancy ideas. "Oh, yes, she would regret and would have but herself to blame."

Back in my mother's village I found an ally, a cousin on my father's side... He too had been educated only up to Class Five and regretted that lack of funds had prevented him from going further... He told me to ignore my uncle and to go ahead with my application which he would help to compose. The application was to be sent to Iyen hospital where I would not only be taught how to deliver babies, but would also be paid. I was delighted... My brother was still at school and he needed help. But when I told my mother this, she was not impressed...

<u>How I helped Mrs. Ado to deliver her child</u>

Towards the end of my first year in Iyen hospital Miss Peterson came to inform me that a certain European living at

Nnewi near Onitsha had requested two intelligent African girls to come to his home. His wife was about to give birth to a child and did not think the hospitals in Nigeria were up to the standard she was used to in Europe. She would prefer to have the baby at home provided they could get nursing assistance, for which they were prepared to pay well...

Anyway, about Mr. Ado; I agreed to accompany him to Nnewi and there we successfully delivered his wife of a handsome baby boy. The woman was so impressed with my skills that she asked me to stay a while longer with her until she found her feet. She would pay twice what I was getting at Iyen, in addition to free meals and uniforms. She was persuasive. At Iyen the salary had been fifteen shillings per month. She would pay me thirty shillings, which may sound meagre by today's standards, but was not then. I immediately accepted the offer on condition that she struck a deal with Miss Peterson so that she did not feel let down in any way...

I stayed with them for several months until the husband was transferred to Jos. They pleaded with me to accompany them. It was a long way from Nnewi to Jos... My mother was still worried about my not being married. I assured her I would do so in due course. In any case, I hadn't found a suitable man and my mother had promised she would not push me into a marriage I didn't want.

I told Mr. and Mrs. Ado I would only stay in Jos for about a year at the most. They agreed. In addition they said they would show their gratitude to me by finding work for me in a hospital in or around Onitsha, or wherever I wanted after I

had left their employment. They had influence, and they were kind people...

After a year they gave me a letter to a European friend of theirs in Enugu, asking him to arrange a job for me at an army hospital. His name was Mr. Millie. But several months after I had returned home, the hospital authorities at Enugu were still dragging their feet. It was depressing. Mr. Millie seemed unable to help, and then he and his wife left Enugu. I don't know where they went but that was the end of my contact with them ...

Doctor and Madam Omotayo give me a job

My mother had a relation in Calabar. During one of his visits home he suggested that I should come and live with him and his wife and children. While I was there he would use his influence and contacts to get me a job. I agreed to go. By this time I was seriously beginning to wonder about my marriage prospects. To be honest, no man had yet proposed to me and I can't deny I was beginning to panic a bit. My mother was becoming visibly perturbed by the fact that no man had seriously approached me...

Looking back, I believe that going to Calabar was the turning point in my life. My mother's cousin got a job for me with Dr. Omotayo[1], a Yoruba physician who was in the government

---

[1] This is not the true name of this man. It turned out by an amazing coincidence that I knew both him and his wife and it was therefore particularly distressing to me to learn that he had caused Mama Nkechi a great deal of misery, especially as I had come to like and respect her. Of all the women from whom I collected case histories, she was one of the most kind and sensitive - a truly nice person. In order not to influence the story, I did not, until the fieldwork was over, tell her that I knew the man who, as the story indicates, had left major dents in her life.

service... My duties included helping with his two children during the mornings and early afternoons, and working in his private clinic in late afternoons. During his medical training in the thirties and early forties he had married a European wife from England. She was a truly nice person and we remained friends until a few years ago, when we lost touch.

I hadn't been in Calabar long before Dr. Omotayo was transferred to a government hospital in Iwo[1], in the old Western Region, now Oyo State. Iwo was and still is a totally Yoruba area and would be as foreign to me as Jos had been. I knew I'd done a good job for Dr. Omotayo, both in his private surgery and at home ... and I feared they might ask me to go to Iwo with them. The pay had been good, thanks to Mrs. Omotayo's generosity - her husband was a truly mean man ... I had doubts about continuing in his employment, but life wasn't easy in those days. As I'd anticipated, Dr. Omotayo did ask me to accompany them to Iwo. I said, untruthfully, that my brother might not like the idea and I couldn't go without his permission. The truth was I needed time to think things over. This was late 1946.

Doctor and Madam Omotayo take me to England

Mrs. Omotayo came home one afternoon with the news that the government had given permission for Dr. Omotayo to go back to Europe for further training... She was overjoyed because

---

[1] Iwo is a fictitious name for the actual town to which Dr. Omotayo was transferred.

she hadn't been home for some years and was longing to see her family and friends ... Would I like to go to England[1] with them? She said she would have to sell the idea to her husband ... The children had come to like me, and it would be a great help to her in England if she could continue to have my assistance... A week later, Dr. Omotayo asked me whether I would prefer to go back home or to accompany them to Europe. His wife had told me to seem surprised when he brought the subject up. I told him I would think about it...

A few days later, I told him that I had thought it over carefully and would like to go with them, that I needed time to go home and inform my mother and relatives. That was fine, he said.

To tell you the truth, I was not completely excited about the prospect of going to England with Dr. Omotayo because, as I have already told you, he was not a very agreeable man - and that's putting it mildly! He didn't really think of servants as human beings - I think you know what I mean. He was harsh, abrupt and unpleasant. On the other hand, his wife was kind and I knew that with her things would be all right... Dr. Omotayo might be prevailed upon to allow me to acquire some skills during our stay in England. I had touched on this point with his wife who said, 'Let's cross the first bridge. When we have reached England I'll approach him but not now. He might think we have some grand designs and might change his mind about your accompanying us. He isn't an easy man to deal with ...' I saw her point, but

---

[1] England was not the actual country in which the Omotayos planned to spend the two years.

wasn't too worried because I knew she would help me if she could...

Back in my village, my mother was hysterically upset. Jos and Iwo had been far enough, but Manchester[1]! She couldn't really comprehend the distance involved. It was a very upsetting meeting - she cried for days. Again, I have no doubt that her fears had more to do with marriage than the distance involved in the journey. All the talk about the possibility of my acquiring skills and the money this would bring did little to allay her fears. 'You must stop thinking about the money you would make, and think more of me and our family,' she said. She even reflected with some regret on her earlier decision to send me to school. 'Farming is just as good as the jobs you have been doing and infinitely better if you are married and have children. As my first child, you have a duty to let me see your children before I die.' She was persuasive, but I was determined to go...

My mother continued to beg me not to go. She even got some of her relatives to put pressure on me. Her brother (the one I told you about before) threatened to beat sense into my head. Other relatives said they could arrange for me to marry a nice man they knew. However, I persisted and three weeks later I left for Lagos without informing my relatives, except my mother, for fear that they might physically stop me. When my mother realized she couldn't stop me, she finally wished me well, hoping I would return to

---

1 Manchester is not the real name of the city to which Dr. and Mrs. Omotayo planned to go.

find her alive... That was in July 1947.

Doctor Omotayo refuses to allow me to acquire any training in England

At Liverpool I was met by Dr. and Mrs. Omotayo. From there we went to spend a few days with some of their friends in Newcastle and then finally to Manchester...

In Manchester I settled down to a routine very much like the one I had with them in Calabar and in Iwo, except that Dr. Omotayo did not have a private clinic.

When the children started nursery school, I thought this would be an opportunity for me to go and learn some trade... If I could not do this during the day (as I also did the housework) perhaps I could do it in the evenings. When I raised this with Mrs. Omotayo, she said she would sound out her husband. She did and, to my amazement and fury, he said 'No'.

I made it quite clear to her before leaving Iwo that I would only accompany them to England on the understanding that she would persuade her husband to let me acquire some skill to show for my stay there... Otherwise I wouldn't go. As I said before, I had misgivings about him granting his permission but I'd convinced myself that his wife would manage him.

When it became clear to me that Mrs. Omotayo had less influence with her husband than she had imagined, I decided to confront him myself... When I brought the subject up with him .... he was furious. He reminded me of my station in life, and said firmly the subject was closed, and that he

was not prepared to discuss it again under any circumstances either then or in future. The purpose of bringing me to England had been to take care of their child and clean the house. This, he said, had been made clear to me before we left Nigeria and had I not consented he would not have brought me; he would have found a nice Yoruba girl from his home town who would have understood the arrangement and would have abided by it without any compulsion. He threatened to send me back to Nigeria if I didn't behave. He said I should count myself lucky that they had brought me to Manchester and that most girls from my humble background would count their fortune in thousands. I should do the job for which they had engaged me...

On my arrival in Manchester I had discovered the local church. There I was to spend most of my free time in prayer - this is what sustained me. At least Dr. Omotayo did not object to that, even though neither he nor his wife were churchgoers, which may explain his lack of humanity.... As for Dr. Omotayo, he had none of the Christian traits that one hears about in church meetings, and in the Bible. All those tenets about loving your neighbours and being kind to them, he had imbibed none of this. He was not what one might call a godly person - more like a devil, I would say [she laughs] ... You know, people who have no God can be very wicked, I think. When you fear God you must have mercy on his creatures...

At the church ... I made friends. Some English people who were curious about who I was and what I had come to do in England went out of their way to be kind and friendly...

Again, in contrast to Dr. Omotayo, they were truly nice people. They even offered to speak to Dr. Omotayo but I knew this would only make things worse. He would accuse me of reporting him to strangers and would be very angry. I pleaded for caution.

For the remainder of my stay in Manchester the nuns, my prayers and the hope that I might after all be able to achieve something, gave me the strength and courage to continue in Dr. Omotayo's employment. Before this, I had on more than one occasion contemplated asking him for my passage home. Even though his wife remained consistently nice, there were many moments when this hadn't been sufficient to sustain me.

By the late summer of 1949 Dr. Omotayo had finished his training and had passed... Now was the time to bring up the subject. First I discussed it again with his wife but she was no less certain of her husband's likely reaction. She still fully supported my plans and was delighted at my enterprise... but she could promise nothing. Well, he refused ... Even when the people from my church tried to persuade him, he was adamant. 'I was to return with them to Nigeria and that was that. If I refused to go back with them ... he would speak to the British authorities and they would see to it that I boarded the ship... When we reached Lagos I could find my way back to Manchester if I wished...

And so I returned to Nigeria without having learned anything beyond what I already knew before leaving. That was late in 1949. Looking back now, with my age and experience, I don't believe Dr. Omotayo denied me the chance of advancing

myself because he was just wicked. I am convinced, rather, that it had something to do with the fact that I was Igbo. Had I been a Yorùbà girl I would have a different story to relate, or if Dr. Omotayo had been an Igbo...

The return to my country and my marriage to Papa Imo

On receiving the news that I was returning from England my mother had come to Lagos and was staying with one of her male relatives. It was this man who suggested to her that he should find me a job at Mathew's Hospital at Itafaji in Lagos (now called Children's Hospital) since farm work back in my village would not suit one who had been to England. To my surprise, my mother readily agreed.

And so began a new chapter in my life, for soon after that I met the man who was to become my husband and the father of my seven children - two boys and five girls. In those days, as happens today, the Igbo in Lagos would attend monthly meetings to discuss village affairs. It was at one of these meetings that I met my husband. He had come to Lagos in 1939 as an employee of the army. Just before the end of the war he had resigned and at the time we met he was working as a cook at the Ambassador Hotel. He later resigned to take up a better job with Leventis, where he still works. After a brief courtship he asked me to marry him. I was delighted. He was nice, very tall - about six feet - and quiet. I said to myself: maybe this is my reward for all the disappointments I have recently been through. If I had remained in England I certainly wouldn't have met such a nice man and one from my village. It was a great stroke of luck.

I told him to speak to my cousin, who would then speak to my family. He did so, and also asked his people back in his village to go and meet my relatives. Among these was my uncle who had been so unco-operative in the past and had said many an unkind thing about me. But he too was delighted and sent me a message of congratulations. My mother, however, was the happiest of all. She said her prayers had been answered...

My brother [her mother's cousin] with whom I lived in Lagos told me that we must go home for a proper marriage according to native law and custom. This we did ... but we returned to Lagos immediately afterwards because we each had only a short leave of absence... Back in Lagos, we prepared for a Christian wedding. My husband (his Christian name is Patrick and his Igbo name Ikemefuna Onyemenam) was also a Christian and wanted a church wedding. We married in his church - an Anglican church in Lagos, also called the C.M.S. I continued with my work at the Matthew Hospital until I became pregnant with my first daughter in 1951. She was born in July 1952. She is now married and works with N.T.V.A. [Nigerian Television Authority] in Enugu. She has three children. She completed her secondary education before she got married...

Why I decided to become a trader and the struggle to get a market near our home

After I started a family my husband and I thought it might be better if I started trading so as to be near home. In this way I could combine my job with looking after my children.

I therefore asked my mother to come and live with us in Lagos since my younger brother was now also there. She was old now and had little strength for farm work. In Lagos we could take care of her while she helped me with my children. She lived with us until 1956, when she died during one of her visits back to our village...

During the many years I had already worked, I had managed to save some money, even after helping my mother and my brother. With this I started my trading venture at Sandgrouse market in Lagos. Here, with the help of some Igbo women from my area, I managed to get myself a stall which I shared with another Igbo woman, to whom I paid a small fee every month, in addition to what I also paid to the City Council. This was because it was she who had the stall first...

Five years after I started market trading, the authorities decided that all the people living in our area in central Lagos should move to Surulere. All those affected would be given houses [see Chapter IV]. To entice people to move without causing too many problems for the officials, the Lagos authorities promised that the houses thus allocated would revert to the tenants after ten years of occupancy and a good record of rent payment. Well, that was more than twenty years ago and we are still paying rent to the government, and as far as I can see there is no possibility that the houses will be handed over to us in the near future. On many occasions the matter has been raised with the government officials, and each time they have had one story or another to tell. What can one do? They have the power and the

houses are theirs... Many of us are convinced that the original story was a ruse to get people out of central Lagos without too much palava...

In Surulere there was no market .... and it is quite a way from Surulere to Lagos [about seven kilometres one way]. At first I continued my trade at Sandgrouse, buying goods at Oyingbo and selling them at Sandgrouse. But it soon became clear that this was not profitable since the trader had to pay her fares to Lagos and back every day, to say nothing of the strain of travelling such distances six, and sometimes seven days a week. To get to the market on time, one had to wake up at 4 a.m., especially if one was married and had small children, as I did, for whom breakfast had to be cooked.

Many women who had moved from Lagos to Surulere began agitating for a market near their homes. I joined them and since I was one of the very few market women with any education, and the only one who had lived in the White Man's country, the other women begged me to become their secretary. During and after our meetings ... I would write down the important points. Even at a much later date, when we had at last got the market, the women made me secretary of all the meetings. They said it was a great help to have a trader who could read and write because they then didn't have to pay for the services of an outsider. I don't get any remuneration for my work, but I don't mind. It is my small contribution to our market association. I know other women are very grateful to me and that in itself is quite enough. Getting this market ... was no small task. It became a real

struggle. There was a lot of politicking in Lagos at that time and this became one of the issues. Those contending for various offices would promise the women a market if they voted for them. Women who refused would not get a stall if an opposite party got into power. Most, if not all, Igbo women voted for the N.C.N.C. It was they who gave us this market and that is why it was an Igbo market until 1966 coup.

Before the market was given to us, several times a week we used to meet the politicians and tell them that if they hoped for the women's vote and support, they had better give us a market... That is how we got our present market. The N.C.N.C. controlled the City Council then, and had many Igbo officers...

When I first started trading at Sandgrouse I specialised in vegetables. That was a lucrative trade because people must use vegetables when cooking their evening meals. However, when the government forced us out of Lagos, I had to abandon that trade. Vegetables don't keep well - they must be sold within two days, especially the greens [that is leafy vegetables], otherwise they easily become rótten and then a trader loses a lot. Also, the best time to sell vegetables is during the early hours of the morning when they still look fresh. When you are living several miles from your market you can never be sure of the exact time you will get to the market. That is why I gave it up... Years later I went back to selling vegetables, as you now see in my stall.

There are several reasons why I decided to go into trading, besides those I have already given you. One of them was the fact that office work paid very little and didn't require much

mental effort. As a trader I might make something out of my life, and would be able to pass on my business to my daughters... Also, when you work in an office, you can never save as much money as a trader can for the simple reason that your monthly salary is usually spent almost as soon as you get paid. A trader, on the other hand, will always have money tied up in her trade - whether in esusu contribution - the subscription fund which all traders belong to - or in the goods she sells. And, sure enough, as I anticipated, one of my daughters decided to become a trader. That's the one who shares the stall with me (you know her). In the market we combine trading with looking after her children, as my mother did with me when I was having my own ...

It's a great help to trade with one's daughter because market women, like other people, have other interests besides trading. Take me, for example: because of my daughter I can do things which other traders may not be able to do. As you know, I am the president of the women's group in our church. We are involved in many different activities - such as bazaars where we raise money for the church, visiting my members who are ill, recruiting members, arranging conferences outside Lagos, arranging outings for our members, and so on. All this entails a great deal of careful planning, which necessitates a lot of time and energy. It is only possible to do this and carry on my trading because of my daughter, whom I trust completely because I know she would not try to cheat me... Having your daughter as a partner is the ideal situation. It used to be the case in the old days, but now, with other job opportunities in industry and in the civil service, girls,

especially the modern ones, look down on market trade as a menial not a prestigious occupation. My daughter is an exception. Look around our market: how many girls of my daughter's age do you see - I mean permanently, not just giving their mothers a hand? I know all the women in our market well and I can assure you there are no more than five out of about 130 or 140 women who trade in our market either as squatters or as permanent stall-holders. I also know that many of the traders have daughters who are working elsewhere and who cannot be persuaded to trade...

It is true that market trade is not necessarily always more rewarding financially than employment elsewhere, but this depends entirely on the girl's educational qualifications. Until the minimum wage decree which gave labourers ₦720 p.a., girls worked as cleaners or messengers in government offices for much less. With transportation costs to and from work, that left them with little to show for their labours. In recent years, young female school-leavers with only primary education have actually chosen to work as housemaids rather than engage in market trade... This is a pity because a girl who is industrious and patient can make money in trading...

I talk from experience because I have done both. I started trading with very little money... Gradually, with hard work and careful management, I have saved for important things of which I am very proud. For example, I have been responsible for my children's education, all seven of them. My husband is not a mean man and so he has helped where he can when the going has been rough for me, but most of the

responsibility has been mine. My husband pays all the rent for our council house and sometimes buys the children's uniforms (though I help with these). He also provides me with money for chop [food] when he can but it is really my entire responsibility, as it is every woman's. You can't expect your husband to feed your children, can you?

Training my children and building a house

But the most important thing I have financed with the savings from my trade, besides the children's education, is the house[1] which I helped my husband to build in his village in Umuahia and which was completed two years ago. Three years before that, I came home one evening and said to my husband that we should never forget that we were strangers in Lagos. In our old age we would have to go back to our village and therefore we needed a shelter there. We should start building a house. He looked at me with amazement and said that

---

1 During my close contact with Mama Nkechi and her family, both at home and at the market, I did not get the impression that she was an unusually successful trader in comparison with the really wealthy market mamas discussed in previous chapters, who build themselves magnificent homes by any standards. She is what Trager (1979) calls a middle range trader - neither a petty trader nor a really wealthy one. When asked, for instance, to describe the house they had built, she said it consisted of three rooms, which did not include a modern bath, kitchen or toilet facilities. It cost them 6,000 (approximately £4,688 by the current exchange rate). This, given the Nigerian rate of inflation, which is thought, unofficially, to be running at more than twenty per cent, and the incredibly high cost of materials, is not an impressive outlay for a house, but is more than what most of the traders in 'my' market could boast of.

was all very well but houses cost money! Did I know where we could get it? Because he did not. He was even more surprised when I went into our bedroom [their current council house has three rooms - two bedrooms and a sitting-room] and came out with a bag full of money![1] He wondered how, with all my other responsibilities, I had managed to save such a large sum of money. It was my esusu contributions, I told him, which over the last twenty years I had made it a strict policy not to dip into unless there was a real emergency ...

Over the years I have belonged to many different esusu contribution clubs. For example, in our market alone, I belong to four esusu groups. This does not include the daily contributions that I make and which I reserve for emergencies and for re-investing into my trade. In our church, which has hundreds of members, we have many esusu groups. I belong to one of the largest which has fifty members, maybe even more. I have been contributing to this group for more than seventeen years, and the monthly contribution is now five naira. So, by the time I spoke to my husband about the house, I had over the past two to three weeks, collected a lot of money from all my esusu clubs...

So when my husband saw that I meant business, he said, 'All right, I'll look into my savings account and let you know.'[2] A few days later he came to say he could match my contributions,

---

1 Even though Mama Nkechi had been exposed to modern banking, she did not have a savings account in any bank, not even the Post Office, and there is one a stone's throw from 'her' market. She much preferred to 'save' her money in esusu clubs in the market and elsewhere.

2 Unlike market women traders, most labourers in Lagos do have savings accounts with the various banks or at least the Post Office. The former is probably more popular than the latter because of the fewer restrictions on withdrawals.

maybe a bit less. And that is how the idea of the house materialized. Now, when we go home, people are proud of us because we have something to show for our labours in Lagos and this makes my husband particularly proud of me, since we built the house with our joint savings... [1]

Childbirth in my country

There are three other things that our elders used to tell us about when I was young and which you might find interesting. The first one is about childbirth in my village - that is, how a child is delivered. The second is about how my people bury different categories of people when they die. And the third is about how women from my area rioted against government's introduction of tax.

When a woman becomes pregnant, she is taken to a native doctor who will look after her until she is about to give birth. He usually gives her medicine which is said to keep her and the child healthy. When the time comes, the woman's family must decide whether she should give birth in the native doctor's home or in her mother's home. If she chooses her mother's house, then a number of old women, led by the most

---

[1] Compared with the other case histories, and the general but consistent statements quoted in other chapters, it is clear that such a joint economic venture with one's spouse is unusual. It was the only case of its kind that I recorded even though the Igbo women I talked to were generally less averse to the idea. When I pointed this out to Mama Nkechi, she, like them, said the whole thing depended on the nature of the relationship between a particular woman and her husband. Like the other Igbo women, she maintained that if her husband had been a polygynist, she would never have contemplated building a house jointly with him. She would have done it alone. It should be pointed out also that Mama Nkechi's husband was totally unaware of his wife's relatively substantial savings.

senior (that is, the one with the greatest experience) will be asked to come to the house.

These women assist the girl when she goes into labour. They help her to push the baby out just as they do in European hospitals, but with an important difference. In my village women are not made to lie flat on their backs, with their legs open, like Europeans do. They have to squat, holding onto a bundle of sticks, tied together and placed in front of her, for support. While she is in this position the old women will instruct her when to push the baby out, if it is her first delivery. Before this happens a clean piece of cloth is placed on the ground in case the baby falls, even though the women are careful to see that this doesn't happen. When the child is out, two or three of the women hold the baby, but do not immediately cut the umbilical cord. This is only done after the woman who has given birth has drunk some medicine which the native doctor will have prepared prior to the delivery. The medicine is meant to make it easier for the native midwives to cut the cord without any mishap and also to make sure that nothing happens to the baby once it has come to the world. Also, some incantations are uttered and rituals are performed, all of which are to ensure the baby's safety...

After this has been done, the baby is rubbed with oil and will not be washed until thirty or forty minutes have passed. The child is then washed with native soap, and then rubbed all over with native chalk, which is like European powder. The chalk is said to cleanse the baby of impurities of its mother's womb and also to prepare it for this world which is different from the mother's womb.

If the woman who is about to deliver is young, inexperienced, or is fretting, then the work of the midwives is made more difficult. In cases like that, after the women have washed their hands with water and soap, one of them holds the girl's legs apart, another puts her knees around the woman's waist, while the third inserts her fingers into the woman's vagina to try and locate the child's head and ears in order to determine its position. If it is all right, then she will gently try to pull the baby out, while one of the other attendants puts more oil around the vagina to facilitate delivery. Meanwhile another woman stands by ready to hold the woman's nose and mouth tightly so as to stop her temporarily from breathing so that, in her struggle for breath, the child will be expelled. Of course the midwives must know the right time to do all this...

If a woman dies during childbirth, the midwives immediately open her stomach to see whether the child is alive, and if it is not, they bury it separately from her.

If the child's hand emerges first, the woman will be made to lie back on the ground with her head tilted backwards and her legs raised. Then one woman puts her hands inside the mother's vagina and pushes the hand back inside. When the hands of the baby are placed in the proper position, another woman vigorously rubs the mother's stomach with an oil. While she is doing that, the child will be turning inside the mother until it gets into the right position for delivery.

If in the course of the delivery it becomes clear that the woman is about to produce twins, triplets, or whatever the case may be, that will be considered a great tragedy by

everybody. It is bad omen in my area for a woman to have multiple children in a single delivery; it is not considered natural. When it does happen, the woman is delivered normally, but the children are immediately killed and thrown into a thick bush or forest far away from home, that is, if the twins are both boys or girls. If, however, the twins are a boy and a girl, it is only the girl that is killed and thrown away ... Her brother is allowed to live just like any other normal child. In this case, the mother is required to observe the four years' sexual abstinence which I have already spoken to you about, just as if her delivery had been normal.

If a woman gives birth to twins, her husband has to wash her hands during various ritual ceremonies which are meant to cleanse her and to drive away the spirits responsible for such tragedies... The ceremonies are expensive because they entail the slaughtering of many different kinds of animals. Every man prays that such a misfortune will not befall his home... I think my people were afraid of twins because women do not normally have more than one child at a time, and when the unusual happens, people are often afraid...

How people are buried in my area

In my village, as soon as a man dies his eldest son takes his place as the head of the family. It is he who must bury his father, unless of course he is not of age, in which case a senior male relative will be called in to help. If the son is able, then he must perform the various funeral ceremonies which include killing several animals, such as goats and fowls, as sacrifices. When all the rites have been performed,

the son prepares his father's body for burial by carefully washing it and laying it on bamboo sticks, where it remains for viewing until it is buried. As the body lies in state, the son must take some fowls and a goat, or goats, depending on his dead father's wealth and standing in the community, to the village market. It is there, at the edge of the market, that the goat is slaughtered... In the mean time a group of women will sing and dance around the same market. They are joined by a group of young men who carry the dead man's oldest daughter shoulder-high, around the fringes of the market four times, while she waves a cow's tail to the sympathizers. The daughter will have had her entire body painted with a local dye...

After the singing and dancing, the goat's entrails are taken to the dead man's homestead by a procession of relatives and many sympathizers from the market and the village. At the house the son, with the assistance of native doctors, ties his father's body with rope, having completely covered it with a locally-made mat. The body is now ready for burial. The native doctors perform the last rites, and the body is put into the grave, which the son, with the help of his kinsmen, would have dug. After the burial, distant and close relatives must remain in the man's house for a period of four to six days to console those who have been bereaved...

When a married woman dies, the process is different. Whether she dies young or in old age the body must be taken back to the village of her birth for burial. In this case, the first child, male or female, is sent to the village to inform her relatives of the death. Neither the children nor the woman's husband nor his relatives may touch the corpse

until her relatives are present. When the woman's relatives arrive, they accuse her children of neglecting their mother in time of need, and thus causing her death. Whether there has been neglect or not, regardless of the mother's age, it is customary for this accusation to be made. The death of a married woman breeds tension between her husband and her relatives. It seems to me that this accusation is a way of expressing the tension... The woman's relatives prepare the body for the last journey back to her village. Her children and her husband or his relatives are required to provide new cloth to wrap the body in. They must also provide a goat, a fowl and a bottle of locally-brewed gin. The other gifts are carried with the woman's body to her village for burial, her children accompanying her... There her male relatives will perform all the rites... They must consult the native doctors, who will offer sacrifices on the behalf of the woman and her children and will ask the oracles who was responsible for her death...

The oldest daughter of the dead woman is the one who features prominently at her mother's burial. That is of course if she is of age. She must, for instance, be present during the various rites and when the mother's body is prepared for burial, at which time she is required to stay with her mother's corpse, holding a fowl, until she is finally buried. Since there is no way of preserving the body, burial takes place soon after death for fear that the body might start to decompose... That is how most people are buried, with the following exceptions: people afflicted with leprosy; mad people; criminals; children who are severely deformed; and people who have been drowned. The latter are usually buried

in a grave dug in the bank of the river in which they drowned.

People who have suffered from leprosy were not buried in the olden days. Their bodies were thrown into the bush and left to rot. Later when the Europeans established a hospital for people with leprosy, my mother said everyone was delighted. When such a person died his or her relatives would not go to collect his or her body for burial but would usually leave it to the hospital authorities. In my youth, people with leprosy were normally driven away from home by their families so that they wouldn't die near the homestead and also for fear that other relatives might contract the disease.

My people have a belief that some people return after death. This is why, when a person dies, the body is carefully stretched so that when he returns, he will not have any physical deformities...

When mad people die they must be operated on before the burial. There are native doctors who specialize in this kind of work and who are called in immediately a mad person dies. The purpose of this is to remové the evil spirit which is said to have been responsible for the madness. The evil spirit may be in any of the internal organs, and it is these that must be removed from the dead person's body. If this is not done, the dead person will not rest in peace, but will continue to worry his living relatives... The native doctor will then replace the organs with those of an animal, usually a goat, which will have been slaughtered for this purpose. After this has been done, the dead person is then buried in

the normal way by his oldest son.

A severely deformed child is said to be a bad child (that is ogbanje[1]). When he dies he is placed in a big pot, to which a medicine known as opka is added. In addition, the child's first finger is always cut off and thrown away to ensure that he will not return to his parents. An ogbanje child is not buried near the family's compound; the pot containing the body is left in a forest... Ogbanje children are not only those who are physically deformed. For example, a child whose complexion is unusually light, or is an albino, would be buried in a similar way.

As I have already told you, if a woman dies during childbirth, or because of a miscarriage, the child must be removed from her body in order to be buried separately. Such children are buried in the normal way - that is, they are not thrown into the bush. However, the mother's internal organs must be removed and replaced with those of a goat which has been sacrificed and which is known to have easy deliveries. She is then buried according to the traditional rites in her father's village...

If a woman commits suicide she is buried in her husband's village... The husband then looks for another wife and demands that the relatives of the dead wife must pay the bride-price for the new wife. Should they refuse ... the husband may sue for damages... A village moot is summoned in which the wife's family are made to pay compensation to the husband... Usually the dead woman will not be buried until her people have, as it were, replaced her - that is paid money for a new

---

[1] Ogbanje is the Igbo equivalent of abiku, discussed in earlier chapters, (but see especially Chapter VII).

wife. Since people have to be buried quickly, the woman's relatives have to find the money without delay. But if a man commits suicide his relatives try to discover the cause by consulting a native doctor. When the cause is established, the relatives get diviners to offer sacrifices, after which the man is buried according to the traditional rites. But again, his internal organs must be replaced by those of a healthy animal...

Native doctors are normally buried by other native doctors who perform the operation on their colleague's body to remove all the medicine. This is done because native doctors are said to store some of their most potent medicines in their bodies. Their internal organs are also very important and powerful because it is there that the secrets of their medicine are stored. My mother used to tell me that whenever native doctors died, especially the very old and prominent ones, other native doctors would drive nails into their heads to draw out some fluids. She did not say what the fluids were used for, but perhaps they [the native doctors] made medicines with it...

Aba women did not like being taxed like men

I was only a small child when the women in Aba rioted but my mother told me that the disturbance was so severe that it spread miles beyond Aba. In fact, she said that all the women in Igboland were furious with the government. According to her, the government had asked the local chiefs to spread the word that from then on women, like men, would be liable to pay tax... My mother told me I was only two years old... This palava must have affected women a great deal because when I was a young girl women used to discuss what happened at Aba as if

the event had taken place only weeks or months before.

I was told there was a woman called Ikube from Umuahia who had been chosen by the officials to tell the women that they were about to be taxed. The women said they would not, under any circumstances, agree... The actual trouble started at Oloko in Umuahia. There the women gathered to demonstrate against the new law. Soon the demonstration spread to many markets around the area - women, some carrying children on their backs, sang and danced from one area to another persuading other women to join in the protest... Then it was agreed that women from different areas should all go together [en masse] to Aba for a demonstration.... As the appeal and the news quickly spread, thousands of women, some walking very long distances, congregated at Aba...

Seeing the large number of women who were singing and dancing wildly, the authorities became afraid and decided to use force to disperse them. The government troops sent to Aba tried to drive the women away by beating them up with koboko [a whip made of very strong leather], sticks, or anything else they could find. The women refused to run away but retaliated by throwing stones and anything they could lay their hands on at the troops and police. Since the women out-numbered the police and soldiers, the government sent more reinforcements to Aba. By this time the women, who were very angry, had turned on whatever government property they could find; the chiefs' and kings' houses were totally destroyed and even property in places as far away as Owerri was destroyed. Above all, the women sought those African officials or chiefs who were in collaboration with the government, and beat them severely, after which they would destroy their property and

burn down their houses. Some were even killed... It was said that the women caused total confusion...

As the demonstrations got out of hand the government troops began to shoot indiscriminately at the women. According to my mother, women were shot dead in their hundreds; but they did not relent. They were determined to continue the struggle until the government revoked the tax law... They had underrated the women's determination to resist... Even after several hundreds of women had died the spirit to fight remained strong. The government had no alternative but to capitulate... The only women who would have to pay tax would be those working in public services, and women who owned big businesses in places like Aba, Umuahia, Owerri... Petty traders, which meant most market women and women primarily engaged in farming, were excluded.

An important factor that sustained the women's revolt was the support they got from their husbands, which was said to have been unanimous. Both the women and their husbands argued that it was not fair to tax women since the husbands already paid taxes, which meant the burden on women was already big. To make the women pay taxes would have increased their hardships... It meant less money for feeding children - a responsibility that belonged entirely to women. The fact that all women were now grouped with men and asked to pay tax helped the revolt... Even the wives of court messengers and chiefs' wives were not exempt.

Mai mama send mi to skul (see P 301, above)

Den bon mi for Owerri Distikt wen bin de for Eastan Region bifor, wich now den dey cal Imo State. Wen den bon mi, den cal mi Chinyere, bot wen den baftize mi den cal mi Cordelia. I tink na 1925 den bon mi bicos mai mama sey I bi twelf wen I bigin go skul an dat be in 1937...

Bot long taim bifor den bon mi, Oyibo pipul don com Owerri from Onitsha to tich Holi Baibol... Pipul whu hier dem bicom Kristian an dem com sey Baibol de help dem wel wel... For persin to be beta Kristian im mos sabi Baibol wel, wich mean sey im tu mos no how to rid... Bot mi papa and mama no sabi buk. Na pipul dey rid Baibol for dem and dem go pey moni for-am.

To sabi buk beta for anoda ting - e dey helep persin rid and rite im own letas. I tink na dis won bi di propa rison wai mama sey I mos go skul efen if she for laik mak I helep-am for fam. Mai papa die wen I bi oney sis - dat is, tu yiers after den bon mi broder. Mi mama bin aks im big broder if im go laik mak I go skul, but im no 'gree, e tel mama sey mak im no weyst di smal moni wen she stil get send mi to skul. "Train di gal to bi beta fama and hous wief", im tel mama. Wen mama go si papa-im pipul, na di same tin dem tel-am... Bot mama no hier, no do, as dem tok, im sen mi and mi broder go skul

As mi mama tok, at dat taim, e dey cos sefen silling to rite one leta, an sefen silling rid one leta. In dos deys, wen moni bi moni, dat one no bi smol moni lai lai... Plenti mama, broder and sista lif for far-far place, som for Kano, odas for Lagos. Mama tot sey if I go skul, e go helep

efribodi; im no go dey pey moni for rid and rite letas, para-xampol.

Na so mama sen mi go skul, tiree mile from owa vilij. As mama no get plenti moni, im sel ting wey im get for fam tak bai buk and clot for mi, un also bai Korosin lamp wich Yoruba pipul dey cal atupa. Dem kost mama plenti moni dat taim. Bot efen dough mama no get moni im tot oney di best bi gud for im pikin... An we laik-um for dat tu...

Di mishin skul wich I go no pas Standard Four, an so, wen I ris dia, mi mama again go si im broder, an beg-am mak I for stey wit-am ... since im lif for villij wey get mishin skul wich ris Standard Sis. Bot, na lai, mi mama broder no 'gree ... So, dia-for, na dia mi edukashin finis, bifor I fit finis Standard Fife...

To-dey I no 'gret tu mos ting for beta if I go skul pas Standard Fife. Bot for di trade wey I go do now, I fit mak moni wey I go tak sen al mi pikin go Kollij. Dat be feri-feri impotant: Kollij. Nobodi go stan' on dia wey, noting go stop-um... I sabi how impotant dat won bi - skul... edukashin ... kollij...

CHAPTER TEN

SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS

Given the present low status of modern African women's views of themselves, there is a sense in which this thesis needs no conclusion since the presentation of the material itself is the main purpose. There is no way in which a true summary or conclusion of the very rich material elicited from the women of Koso market can be made. In fact, it has been with great difficulty and diffidence that I have selected the material presented in this thesis. For example, the auto-biographical accounts in Chapters VII and VIII were recorded entirely in Yoruba and have thus undergone several revisions in translations. Inevitably, a great deal has been lost through this process. This is evident from the concluding paragraph of the case history in Chapter IX which is presented in the original.

In the introductory chapter it was pointed out that African women are virtually absent in the analyses of African social structures; and that male dominant models (whether by male or female ethnographers) are all too frequently reported as though they are representative of the societies studied. This mode of reporting has continued with only a few exceptions. This thesis aims to help rectify this structural imbalance. Following the Ardeners' (1975) theories of muted groups, this thesis seeks to present the women's 'voices' by allowing them, to use Ardener's expression, to 'speak' beyond 'merely uttering or giving tongue' (loc. cit.:2).

Data on African women in urban communities

In the last one and a half decades or so there has been an upsurge of interest[1] in the role of African women, plotting in the main their socio-economic, political and religious activities in the urban milieu. In addition, these works have sought to inform on the '... range of variation in the role and status of African women, as well as to show a radical contrast between their position in towns and in traditional rural life' (Southall, 1937: 46). Thus two major antithetical hypotheses have been made regarding the relative equality of African sex roles in the traditional set-up and in the urban situation. On the one hand women are said to be subordinate to and dominated[2] by their menfolk in practically all spheres of life; on the other hand it has been argued

---

1 See for example the works of: Little (1948, 1951: 163-74, 1970: 118-137, 1973 and 1980), Comhaire-Sylvain (1949 and 1951: 169.87; no.5: 475-502), Beier (1955), Leith-Ross (1956), Holleman (1956), Ottenberg (1959: 205-23), Baker and Bird (1959), Paulme (1963), Remy (1967), Steady (1972), Sudarkasa (1973), Oppong (1974), Harrell-Bond (1975), Hafkin and Bay (1975), Trager (1976), Pellow (1977), Obbo (1980), to mention only a few. And more recently, a Conference on Integrated Rural Development and Women in Development, organised by the University of Benin Centre for Social Sciences and the Ford Foundation presented some seventy papers on the subject.

2 The domination-of-women-by-men thesis has its theoretical underpinnings in the analyses of kinship structures which centres the discussion around the forms of rights and obligations transferred during marriage. (See for example, Radcliffe-Brown's introduction to the symposium on African Systems of Kinship and Marriage, and also the various essays in that volume, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and D. Forde, eds., (1951), Radcliffe-Brown (1952), Levi-Strauss (1969), Fox (1967), et al.) As pointed out in an earlier chapter, patrilineal descent systems are taken for granted by most investigators too numerous to name, as male dominated, while in matriliny too, women are said to come under the control of man. The aetiology of this domination has recently even been explained within the framework of biological determinism (see especially Tiger (1969) and Fox (1972) among others.)

that their position is neither superior nor inferior[1] to that of men but simply different and complementary. With this latter position Little (1973: 6-7) agrees:

> Consequently it is tempting and fairly accurate to describe the role of African women as complementary rather than subordinate to that of men, even though women are, as a rule, under the control of males. This is generally so, both before and after marriage, and is usually the case in matrilineal as well as in patrilineal systems because in matriliny a woman comes under the authority of her mother's brother or her own brother.

Others argue that African women have generally occupied a lower social status both in rural societies and in urban situations. Exceptions to this rule are said to be the preeminence of women in certain (very few) traditional political systems, and, more recently and significantly, in some religious movements. Of the latter Beattie (1969: 169) writes:

> The social status of women in Bunyoro is low, as it is elsewhere in East Africa, and subservience and deference towards men is traditionally expected of them. But as mediums .... they can command attention and respect, as well as providing themselves, if they practice divination, with substantial source of income.

And Horton, writing on Nigeria (1969: 42) reports:

> The fully-developed complex of possession roles typically figures a man: not just an ordinary man, but a man of wealth, power and status. In adopting this complex of roles a woman is enabled, from time to time to 'be' what she has always yearned to be but never can be in ordinary normal life.

---

[1] Many authors have vigorously questioned the subordination-superordination thesis in discussions of the 'position' of African women both in traditional and urban communities. For example, Leith-Ross (1939), Kaberry (1952), Paulme (1963), Evans-Pritchard (1965), Sudarkasa (1973), Minitz (1971), Rousseau (1975), James (1978) and many others. Most of the authors, especially those writing on West Africa have pointed to the dominance of women in market places to prove their case.

Baker and Bird in their long article on (Nigerian) 'Urbanisation and the Position of Women' (pp. 99-121), have summed up their contribution by saying:

> Although the inferior status of women is still generally taken for granted by men it is no longer accepted without question by women who, by their personal achievements and by their new, or potential status as equal partners in the self-regarding domestic family, are coming to expect a parity of status with the men (1959: 120-1).

When we turn to ethnographic evidence together with casual observation it appears that a significant proportion of African women, especially in West Africa, have always enjoyed apparent economic independence and relative freedom of movement and association. And yet, despite the recent proliferation of literature on African women, there still exists a poverty of data on what they themselves think of their status and their 'position'. These have been extrapolated for us by ethnographers who observe (with the assistance of male informants) and then describe women's activities. But surely, the activities performed do not, in and of themselves, tell us what the actors think of the activities in question. In a recent publication, The City is Our Farm, (Aronson, 1978) makes an important contribution by presenting case histories of seven families in Ibadan. But, yet again, the lives of women reported here are analysed within a framework which obscures their particular and separate views. This thesis is my response to the lack of data in this area.

Koso market women's models or views of their lives

Koso market women's perceptions of their lives were elicited under three broad categories, namely: marriage, family and

work. In this section a summary is given (a) of the major findings, and (b) a discussion of these in the light of Ardener's (ibid.) theories of dominant[1] structures summarized in the introduction. By this approach it is hoped to establish the degree of congruence and variance between Koso women's models of their lives and the male dominant models of the same events. Because of the women's pre-occupation with marriage and children, some time is devoted to summarizing their perceptions of these issues relative to, for example, virginity, bridewealth, views of work, and the like.

Koso women's definitions of themselves are closely intertwined with their concepts of marriage and motherhood. Thus marriage is usually, though not always (see for example the case history in Chapter VIII), viewed as a necessary antecedent to the status of womanhood and motherhood. Marriage is seen as an event of great importance, not primarily because of the various rights and obligations that it (marriage) confers or transfers to people (even though these were deemed important, as demonstrated, for instance, in the discussion of 'bride-price'), but rather because it is said to be the first 'legitimate' step towards that all-important state of motherhood. In other words, while marriage is incorporated into the definitions of womanhood and motherhood

---

1 S. Ardener (1975: xxi) points out that one ' ... way of distinguishing a 'dominant from a muted model does not impose upon us an obligation to talk in terms of "domination by men" or "the oppression of women" where this is taken to be a purposeful male activity, although of course such interpretations might well be appropriate in many situations.'

(by Koso women), the latter are not necessarily defined in terms of the former. Thus, while women found it difficult to define womanhood without marriage, they found it impossible to perceive or conceive of womanhood without motherhood. For instance, women would say, 'Marriage to me means living with a man [husband] and having children ...' Or, 'Without marriage and children a woman is nothing ...' '... She is not a real woman if she does not have children because she would not be addressed as the mother of so and so', and so on. It is interesting to note that the most commonly used term for wife, in Yoruba language, is prefixed by iyá, which means mother. Probably Yoruba would not consider that to be a mere coincidence. Among the Ijaw people of Rivers State, (although hundreds of kilometres from Yorubaland) there is a parallel saying that a woman is not a woman (contradiction?) until she has borne a child.

Again, in defining what makes a girl a woman, Koso market women would say, 'If a girl is of age, she is sure to marry and then have children ... When that happens she becomes a woman (obìrin) ... that is to say, she becomes the mother of so and so ... She will no longer be a girl (ọmọbirin)'. ... 'Yoruba people would say she has reached womanhood (ìwà obirin), or more literally she has womanhood. A closer look at the various Yoruba words for girl or female child reveals that most of them (such as ọmọbirin, omonge, ọmọdebirin, and so on) are prefixed by ọmọ (child), the most commonly used being ọmọbirin (child-woman).

When asked what they would call a middle-aged woman who did not have a child the answer given was: 'With all the

children in the compound, she would be addressed as iyá mi (my mother) by some of them ... She would be called mother of so and so ...' In other words, with the Yoruba (and most other African communities) system of co-resident relatives, some of whom may have been there since infancy it is easy to confer sociological motherhood and, to that extent, womanhood on most adult women.

Of course such a woman would be less fulfilled, but 'at least everybody would not know that she is not the mother of so and so ... only those close to her would.'[1] Since in most African societies those close to us tend to be related, either consanguineally or affinally, it means that the woman is shielded from the general public. Her misfortune, the women said, 'is more of a family affair. It is not as painful as with a woman who has no child and everybody knows that to be the case ... that is why we don't like strangers to know about family secrets ...'

There is a close parallel between Koso (Yoruba) women's perceptions of womanhood and motherhood, and those of the Kikuyu. In Kikuyu society a girl has to pass through various stages before she is seen as a person. Only after the states of pre-puberty, circumcision[2], marriage and ultimately

---

1 E. Goody (1966 and 1969), and J. Goody and E. Goody (1967) have reported on the institution of child fostering among the Gonja of Ghana. In Nigeria too , the practice is widespread (see, for example; Baker and Bird (1959), Marris (1961), Lloyd (1966) and many others). I myself have had more than one colleague at the University of Lagos who told me years later that a woman I had known as their mother because they addressed her as iya mi (my mother) was not their actual mother. For an African to have many 'mothers', as the early colonial administrators discovered, is not at all unusual.

2 Recently Babatunde (1980) has provided a detailed account of Yoruba female circumcision with specific reference to Egbado Yoruba.

motherhood does the definition of her state include the prefix common to many African languages designating her as a person. The word mtu (Swahili), mũndũ(Kikuyu), umuntu (Zulu) etc. means 'man' or 'person' and only when a woman bears a child among the Kikuyu is she accorded the title 'mutumia' (woman, wife and mother).

Given the forceful emphasis on marriage and family, it came as no surprise to discover the weight carried by a woman's own family, especially her lineage[1] (idilé); the woman's mother is the most crucial link to continued associations. These ties, among the Yoruba, are considered to be of far greater significance than a woman's relationship with her husband's family and in several instances the bond was said to be more important than between a husband and wife. One woman felt:

> It is not possible to be closer to your husband's family than your own ... in your husband's family you are always a stranger no matter how nice your husband is ... in his family and among his wives there are many who have bad blood. They are always looking at you with an evil eye and bad heart ... Would your own mother do that? That is why we always go back to our village when it is time to deliver ... There you are safe.

In a polygynous arrangement, competition between co-wives, the man's mother and his sisters are said to combine to make

---

[1] It is this that has led some investigators to argue that the Yoruba descent structure should be re-examined and then re-classified as cognatic rather than patrilineal and unilinear. This because it is now generally accepted that a Yoruba woman, by and large, is never totally incorporated into her husband's lineage. Indeed, as we have shown, she continues to maintain strong links with her natal compound (agbolé), paying frequent and sometimes extended visits to it. These strong ties are usually only severed by death. (For a more detailed discussion of Yoruba kinship structure, see for example, the works of Lloyd 1954, 1955, 1962 and 1966c); Schwab (1955, 1958 and 1962); Fadipe (1970), et al.)

it difficult for a relationship of complete trust to endure. And it is said too that a man has an interest in seeing to it that the relations between co-wives are not too affable. As one woman said:

> Even though no husband wants his wives quarrelling and beating each other all the time ... it would worry a man a bit if his wives were very friendly ... he would say to himself, what next? ... A husband must feel that if one of his wives misbehaves, then the others are ready to take her place ... he knows that the wives, too, think of that ... and that is why they are not too troublesome.

In terms of rights and obligations between husbands and wives, Koso women felt that a wife is more obligated to her husband and his kinsmen than a husband is to his wife. This, the women said, is because of the institution of bridewealth. 'It is a man who marries a woman ... because he pays money for her head.' For instance, Koso women expressed disbelief when told that in some societies a man was responsible for his wife's and children's maintenance. They felt that while a good husband ought to help if he can, the primary responsibility for the children and the woman's upkeep is hers. As one said,

> If a woman is ill she expects help from her own family and her mates [that is, co-sellers] or her children, if they are able. If she is too old, then her children will take care of her ... No, a husband can't take care of his wife, that is not his job ... it is her family or her children ... that is why we say, a woman's children and her family are our best allies.

Another woman explaining why women have more duties towards their husband than the other way round, said, 'A woman can never marry a man ... That would not be possible because it's the man's relatives that ask for a girl's hand in marriage ...' However, the women said that a husband had an obligation to give his wife protection against any attacks from his family

(that is, if the wife is unfairly treated) and his other wives. He must also at all times fulfil his sexual obligations to her and be kind and show deference towards his wife's relatives.

On adultery the women were of the opinion that a husband could not be guilty of this offence unless committed with another man's wife. A wife on the other hand must at all times be faithful to her husband except in the following cases: (a) where he has too many wives and cannot satisfactorily sleep with all of them; (b) is impotent (in which case a wife should eventually leave him); (c) is unable to impregnate his wife, regardless of where the fault lies; and (d) refuses to sleep with his wife because of strains in the relationship. (But even in such eventualities, the wife still has strong obligations to hide her illicit liaisons lest she falls into disrepute with the community at large. As long as she does that successfully, 'it is almost as if she did nothing').

A woman should divorce a husband who is cruel to her, as defined above. Koso women, while placing a great deal of emphasis on the role of marriage and family in a woman's life did not seem to think divorce such a tragedy. Even though where there are children a woman should do all she can 'because it is the children who will suffer if they are left with co-wives'. However, the women said that there is a limit to what a wife can endure. By many other standards, in African societies the Yoruba limit would be deemed lax. As the women said, 'A woman doesn't have to stay in a bad marriage. If there are many quarrels with her co-wives or a troublesome mother-in-law, she should go ... nobody wants to die ... and troubles kill

quickly'. Indeed Koso women's rather cavalier attitude towards divorce is supported by the finding that 12 out of the 85 permanent stall holders interviewed at the time of fieldwork, reported being divorced. They had left their husbands several years previously and the marriage prestation had been returned to their husbands. They had no intention of returning to their former husband's lineage.

Added to this list, another 8 women said they were separated from their husbands and did not envisage any possibility of a reconciliation. So a total of 20 (24 per cent) out of the 85 women were divorced or separated. These data from Koso women, are consistent with other research findings which show the rate of divorce among the Yoruba to be high. The women were quick to point out that if a marriage proved unsatisfactory the woman's mother and her female relatives were always among the first to counsel exit.

However, the women abhorred what they considered to be too rapid changes[1] in traditional definitions of marriage, as outlined in Chapter V. For instance, the European-type marriages of 'church and the ring' (to quote them), are deemed inherently more unstable because they are devoid of traditional control. Educated women are more to blame than men for what women consider frequent breakdowns of conjugal relationships.

---

[1] Fadipe (1970: 66) writing on the subject of married women having extramarital affairs (about women in Lagos) more than forty years ago asserts:

> These girls, without being professional prostitutes, consider themselves in the height of fashion if they enjoy extramarital association with men, especially men of fashion and means. At the same time they turn their association to good account for themselves by demanding money of their paramours with which to bedeck themselves with fineries on festive occasions so that they can stand out from the run of the other girls.

Their (educated women) propensity for conspicuous consumption, such as fancy clothes and jewellery, is said to be inimical to marital stability. One woman who had been a primary school teacher before becoming a trader, summed it up thus:

> Today marriage in Lagos is in trouble and if you ask me it is because of this acada madams... They are the ones to blame because they like money too much. The money which they get from their jobs is not enough to buy them all the things they want. Some want to own cars, other jewellery [gold] and expensive lace... If their husbands do not give them money to buy these things they will go and find men outside who can give them money... And of course, when their husbands discover their ways, the marriage will be in trouble... I know a lot of married women who have got into trouble with their husbands because they keep sugar-daddies... No man wants to think his wife is a prostitute...

What have we learned?

From the outset it was stated that one impetus for undertaking this study was to discern the extent to which women's perceptions and views of their lives differed from or were in congruence with male views. We are not surprised to find that Koso women's models of their lives are heavily influenced by the dominant models of male Yoruba (Nigerian) society.

Perhaps because of the lesser degree of structural differentiation in African and other less technologically developed communities, marriage and family are viewed as the life itself. This is particularly true of societies where socio-economic organisation and political and religious life are coterminous

---

1. As for example in acephalous or segmentary societies described in volumes by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (eds.) (1940) and Middleton and Tait (eds.) (1958).

with or imbedded[1] in kinship structure. Thus, Koso women's perceptions of their lives in terms of marriage and family follow the male dominant models where an individual's life and existence are defined in terms of these institutions.

But while it is true that Koso market women traders perceive their lives in terms of male dominant models, there were certain variations that emerged. Here, I shall only, and then briefly, examine three: Koso women's views of (a) polygyny, (b) what having children means to a woman's life, and (c) the women's perceptions of the husband's financial role in a woman's trade.

A great many writers have tended to glamourise African polygyny, adding that even African women themselves are generally in favour of polygyny; that in many instances the wife will be among the first to pressurize her husband to get an additional wife. While this is largely true it reveals only a small fraction of a much more complex issue. For example, most ethnographers and their African male informants have not consistently exposed the degree of tension, animosity and divisiveness that underlies this institution. Koso women cannot afford to be oblivious of what to them are issues that shape their destinies.

The advantages and disadvantages of polygyny are extensively discussed by Koso women in Chapter V. However, it is in the

---

[1] This is not to underplay the importance of these matters in more industrially advanced societies, but rather to underline the greater degree of permeation or inter-connectedness between the kinship system on the one hand and other aspects of social organisation in African communities on the other.

personal histories reported in Chapters VII and VIII that the full implications of polygyny on African family systems are profoundly underlined. Here, we are left in no doubt that most accusations of witchcraft[1] have their roots in the inherent tensions that exist between co-wives. Competition for the husband's affection and favours and, by definition, those of his family, leads to constant manoeuvring, machinations, manipulations and the like. An example of this is shown by the case quoted from Little in Chapter V, in which some family members died.

When the pros and cons of polygyny are summed up, Koso women are of the view that they would be much better off without it: but they feel they are not the architects of this social system and can do little to alter things, so they have 'learnt to live with it'. 'Men, not women', I was told, 'are the ones that benefit from having many wives'. Such advantages as having a junior wife at your beck and call are constantly viewed in the light of the perennial and to them very real worries about the safety of a woman's life and that of her children. And the position of the junior wife, as the woman in Chapter VII says, can be likened to that of a slave (eru). If ethnographers had derived their models of African polygyny from the women a less romantic and more

---

[1] After Evans-Pritchard's (1937) pioneering work on Azande witchcraft there has been a great deal of literature on witchcraft (accusations) in African societies. For example, Bascom (1941 and 1942), Fortes (1945 and 1949), Gluckman (1954, 1955, 1956: Chapter IV, and 1964), Nadel (1952), Turner (1957), Middleton (1960, 1963 and 1967), Lienhardt (1961), Ardener (1962), Mair (1969), Marwick (1970), to mention only a few.

realistic picture would have emerged. As the Koso women have shown, there are two sides to the coin. One, that co-wives share domestic responsibilities towards a husband, that they can sometimes provide companionship for each other and that junior wives can be an important source of labour to the senior. The other, that they would not hesitate, if need be, to use witchcraft against one another and their children, including the ultimate weapon of poisoning. The latter point is seen as outweighing all the advantages accruing from polygyny.

All the women I interviewed who had lost a number of children harboured no doubts that their loss was as a result of the evil work of co-wives. It is significant that no Koso woman reported trading with a co-wife and they told me it rarely happens in Nigeria. Data from other West African societies generally support the Koso market women's creed that 'you don't trade with an enemy', which is what co-wives are perceived to be. It is of further interest that in many African languages the word for co-wife often has negative connotations such as bad temper, fierceness, competition, jealousy, and the like. This is true of the Yoruba words ìpàkó (sometimes used to refer to co-wives) and orogún. The former is interpreted by Yoruba etymology as 'back of the head' (the face that is not seen) while the latter is popularly divided into oro, 'fierceness', and gún, 'pricked'. (Compare the Kikuyu word for co-wife, mũiru, derived from ũiru, which specifically means 'jealousy').

The role of children in African social systems has been extensively examined by many investigators. The emphasis has been on the economic role that children play - such as helping

parents in the fields or in the market-places, or minding younger offspring and other such domestic chores. These have been cited as the main reasons for wanting to have as many children as God gives.

While Koso women consider these aspects of having children important they are not central to a woman's desire to have many children. First, they feel the probability of only some children surviving after nature has taken its course is a reason for producing as many as they are able. Of course demographers and other investigators have deduced this. But this is only one of the explanations of why African women desire many children. My researches in Lagos, among the élite women, corroborated by others, show that there is no significant difference between the number of children desired by illiterate women and élite women.

The attempt to ensure that some children survive, given the high levels of infant mortality, cannot be an explanatory factor among both the illiterate and the highly educated; the latter have access to modern medical care and the survival rate of their children is similar to that found in more advanced countries.

Koso women gave two other important reasons for wanting many children. One pertained to a desire by the women to consolidate their positions in their husband's lineage (idilẹ́). As they often said, 'A woman with plenty of children, especially boys, is much admired by her husband and his relatives ... They [the relatives] always tell the man, "Be careful with that woman because she has given you wealth" ... Since the women are aware that a man's standing in the community is

related to the size of his household they capitalize on the point. Having many children therefore means that a wife stands out among her co-wives.

The second point has more to do with the desire for continuity of the essence of the self than with security in old age as some ethnographers and their informants would have us believe. Since in the extended family system people are not usually neglected in old age, it must be so. This is not to argue that the women did not think of children as security in old age but this was not as important as 'having someone like you survive your death'.

As the women always said,

> 'When you have children, some will resemble you, others their father .... When you die, it is as if you have not died. Those who knew you during your lifetime will continue to remember you whenever they see your children.... Sometimes even your children's children. This is why people like to have many children so that after death it is as if they are still alive.'

To the women the desire for immortality in this sense stood above all else. Indeed, among the Yoruba the question of whom a child resembles is so central that it is usually the first remark made about a baby. This is not to argue that men may not have similar motivations for wanting children but merely to emphasize that for the women other considerations were secondary and that investigators, perhaps because of their theoretical predilections, frequently under-played this point or neglected it altogether.

In Chapters IV and VI the problem of raising capital to expand trading activities was brought up. This is one of the biggest problems that market women traders continually have

to face. And yet most researchers have placed emphasis on the fact that 'women are set up in trade by their husbands and after that the yield is theirs to dispose of as they please'. My Koso data revealed two interrelated factors which I consider important. Firstly, that husbands are not an important source of capital for the traders and secondly that in the past women traders did not have complete control over the money realized from their trading ventures.

The older women at Koso said that in their villages in their youth some forty years ago or in one case seventy (see Chapter VIII where Ìyá Kareem says this also applied to Lagos, Abeokuta and Ibadan), a woman trader would give her husband the profits from her trade 'for safe keeping'. I was unable to ascertain whether this was required or whether it was left to the individual woman's discretion. However, since the woman said that most did this except in cases of delinquent husbands 'who chopped the money', it seems reasonable to deduce that it was expected. Indeed, since it is well documented that among the Yoruba the husband was expected to set his wife up in trade it would be most unusual if he did not have any say whatsoever in his wife's labours.

Fadipe, whose work on Yoruba social organisation is one of the most comprehensive, says:

> The wife was free to follow her own trade independently of her husband, and it was an obligation on the part of the husband to supply her with the means of doing this. Her earnings were her own exclusive property...

But he continues:

> Although a man was not entitled to the earnings of his wife, he was, according to customary usage, held responsible ... for her debts. Cases of shiftless wives who could make no success of their trade and

> had to be re-started more than once with fresh capital were not uncommon. (1970: 88-9).

From this it seems clear that the husband could not altogether ignore his wife's trading ventures especially if he had to set her up and then be held responsible for her debts.

If Fadipe had collected his data on women's trading activities from women his interpretations might well have been different. He would have discovered among other things that the wife's 'earnings were not her own exclusive property' since the wife had to give it to her husband for 'safe keeping' with all the attendant ramifications of this.

In Chapter VI Koso women make it quite clear that one of the reasons why women prefer not 'to mix trade with marriage and husband' is because

> If you do that, then your husband will want to know the secrets of your trade ... You do not trade with your co-wife any more than you trade with your husband.

Thus Koso women feel that if a woman trader desires complete control of her trading ventures, she does well to minimize her husband's financial contribution.

If an investigator is to unravel the subtle differences between men's models and women's models of the same events, it seems imperative that she (I argue for a woman investigator) should sit in the market-place and in women's homes listening while they 'speak', as I did. It is in such circumstances that woman's separate models of society or of a particular reality are able to come to the surface. In African societies in which the segregation of sex-roles is the rule, a woman seeking a woman's viewpoint probably has a better chance of encapsulating it than a man.

APPENDIX

A Word on Personal History and a further note on Methodology

How it all began

In terms of language and culture (except for the medium of English) I am relatively foreign in Lagos and Nigerian communities in general, having been born and brought up in a small Kikuyu village about 35 kilometres northwest of Nairobi in Kenya. In 1961, still in my 'teens, I went to the United States of America, thanks to the good-will of some missionaries near my village who came to my assistance after it had become clear that my father (among the Kikuyu it is the father who pays school fees) could not afford the school fees required for me to acquire a secondary education at home. To add to my good fortune, this coincided with a period of great courtship between the Kennedy administration and the nascent republic of Kenya. (It became fully independent in December 1963). Thus with partial assistance of the President Kennedy-Tom Mboya airlift of Kenyan students to the United States, I found myself in a secondary (high) school in Massachusetts where I completed my secondary education.

In 1964 I entered Boston University on a scholarship from that University and also with financial assistance from the Phelps-Stokes Fund of New York. During this undergraduate period I met and married my husband who is a Nigerian. In May 1968 I completed my Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology, graduating in June.

I arrived in Lagos in August 1968 and was immediately struck by the pre-eminence of women in Lagos trade, particularly in the market places. This was unlike anything I had ever seen before, for at home women spend most of their lives working in the fields with the assistance of their female children. Only occasionally do they go to the markets, which are periodic and usually miles away from home. As a young girl, going to the market (ndŭnyŭ) a few times in a year used to be a great treat as it interrupted the monotony of tending the fields.

My experience with market women traders in Lagos then began some twelve years ago when I was teaching in a co-educational secondary school with over five hundred pupils. This school was located in a community whose residents constitute the more 'traditional' elements of the Lagos population. For three years I acted as the headmistress of this school and this provided intimate contact with a large number of market women, who, it turned out, were totally responsible for paying their children's school fees. It was during this period that my interest in marriage, family and market women was born.

Soon after I arrived in Lagos I was told and heard people say: 'Children are solely a woman's responsibility'. However, the degree of truth in this assertion was not sufficiently impressed on me until I started teaching at the secondary school which I shall call Suru[1] Academy.

Considering the income levels of the pupils' families and the standards of the day, the fees at Suru Academy were very high indeed, as were similar schools where parents of the same

---

[1] For obvious reasons, Suru Academy is not the actual name of the school.

socio-economic background sent their children. They were much higher than the government-run schools which were (and still are) almost free. The few Government secondary schools there are in Nigeria tend to cater for children from elite families. Consequently most parents have no choice but to send their children to private schools, where education tends to be much poorer than in government-run schools.

At Suru Academy the parents would normally have up to two weeks' grace, by which time they must have paid the school fees. These were due at the beginning of each term. If parents were unable to pay by the end of the grace period the children were sent away or, in local parlance, 'driven out' of school. Of course these pupils did not always stay away when asked to but would return to school and hope they would not be found out. The parents too frequented my office pleading for more time and patience.

Since most of the parents could not pay, at least not all at once, I spent most of my time at Suru Academy discussing the problems of paying school fees with the parents. And whenever they came to discuss this they would inevitably discuss other matters of a personal nature. These would include, among others, problems of negligent husbands 'who refuse to help with the children's maintenance, especially regarding school fees'. The problem that these market women faced maintaining their children, and the lack of assistance from husbands or other relatives was brought home to me with such force and frequency that I began to develop an 'academic' interest in this subject and its ramifications.

I assumed that since Suru Academy was not a special case (there was no reason to believe it was) that most market women

traders in Lagos confronted similar problems. What then did they think of their lives in Lagos?

To probe deeper into this all-embracing question I realised I needed to acquire additional skills, hence my further study at the London School of Economics and Political Science (L.S.E.) and Cambridge University. On returning to Lagos I took a lectureship post at the University of Lagos during which time I conducted a number of surveys into marriage, family and work. One of these included the problems some of the market women traders had with their children, especially those that had been sent to 'corrective' institutions.

However, these were surveys with all the attendant drawbacks inherent in the methodological approach of structured questionnaires and interviews, discussed in the introductory chapter. Intensive investigations into the lives of market women were not carried out until after my advent in Oxford during a study leave from the University of Lagos. It was at this time that my supervisor, Mr. Edwin Ardener, advised me to carry out a more intensive investigation in order to acquire a deeper knowledge and understanding of the women I had earlier begun to study.

Thus, the fieldwork on which this thesis is based was 'formally' and 'effectively' carried out during the thirteen and one half months period between September 1978 and October 1979, and again in February 1980. I say 'formally' and 'effectively' because the actual interest and field 'observation' had begun ten years previously when I first went to Lagos.

After I started work in the field I returned to Oxford in

May 1979 (thanks to the generosity of the Ford Foundation who bore my travelling expenses) for two weeks, firstly to get away from the 'data' and secondly to report and consult with my supervisor. And later, during the course of writing I returned to the field (thanks to financial support from the University of Lagos, which met my travelling expenses), to check on some of the information and to get additional help with transcriptions.

Advantages and disadvantages of being a foreigner in conducting fieldwork

For fieldwork, not being a Nigerian had a number of advantages. First, as an 'outsider' one takes less for granted, and has less 'givens'.

Second, being an 'alien' African woman trying to understand another African's way of life afforded me privileges ordinarily not extended to an indigene of my age and social status.

Third, the women I worked with were mostly Yoruba, who have an established reputation for extending 'friendliness' to foreigners who take pains to understand their language and culture. When in the market I spoke as much Yoruba as I could, observed Yoruba etiquette, especially kneeling down for all the women that I thought or knew to be older than myself, and always wore clothes similar to Yoruba traditional dress. This consists of iro (skirt), buba (blouse) and gele (head tie).

The disadvantages of being an outsider also exist. For example, not being completely fluent in a language has serious

drawbacks: inevitably, one depends on others' interpretations. But this, and other disadvantages are probably less than those of an indigenous Nigerian woman of similar background would suffer in attempting this study. To be sure, it was easier for me to defend my curiosity about Yoruba customs, and it was readily accepted.

In addition, the neighbourhood in which I and my family lived, when I first went to Lagos (1968-1973) was only a few minutes' walk from the market where I subsequently carried out my fieldwork. This was our neighbourhood market. By 1978, when it was chosen for this study, it was already a very familiar site even though I did not know any of the women in the market personally. These, briefly, were the antecedents to my encounter with Koso market women.

How the data were obtained

I have mentioned earlier, in the introduction, the necessity of knowing and understanding the existing leadership structure and, as far as possible, developing a rapport with it. This is an absolute prerequisite for any investigator carrying out fieldwork in an African setting, be it a small village community or an urban environment. This understanding does not in itself guarantee plain sailing but it does help to weather the storms.

At Koso market it took me several weeks to understand the leadership hierarchy and several very frustrating and trying months to develop a rapport. During my previous investigations I had made the acquaintance of an important chief not far from Koso market. This proved invaluable in my attempts to establish a relationship with the Alága of Koso market. I solicited

his help because I knew that to go directly to Koso and introduce myself to the Alága would prove futile. Since Yorùbá society is one of the most highly stratified in the world I knew that an introduction to the Alága from one so eminent would stand me in good stead. The chief arranged for me to meet the Alága by sending me to her house (he could not go himself - that would be against protocol) with one of his subordinates.

He was to put my case to the Alága and plead co-operation. I knew I could not go straight to the market and interview the women because, as shown in Chapter IV, they would not have talked to me without orders from the Alága. It is against market rules to divulge any information to strangers without the permission of the Alága. Had I made that error, any subsequent attempts to get information would have been difficult.

The initial meeting between the Alága of Koso market and myself took place in the first week of October 1978. After the introduction and an explanation of my intentions, she politely said: 'Come tomorrow to discuss the matter further'. For the next few weeks I went tó the Alága's house practically every day without being given an interview with her, let alone securing an introduction to the Koso market women. As time went by I began to despair, for if I tried another market it would probably take another three to four weeks, maybe even longer. I persisted.

Towards the beginning of November, early one Friday morning, I was awakened by the Alága of Koso market, who had come to my house with, as I discovered later, her best friend

and her oldest son. This was strange indeed, especially as I had only the day before been to her home and she had asked me to see her in a week's time, to say nothing of the fact that a visit to my house for a woman of her status was most unusual. After the preliminary greetings she simply said that she happened to have been passing by as her son was driving her to her sister's house and she thought she would greet me. Her son, whom I had not met until then, had business connections with the University of Lagos (see Chapter VIII). He asked many questions in very good English about my intended project and the meeting lasted for almost two hours. When they left Iya Kareem said: 'You can come to my house tomorrow and I will take you to meet my women at Koso market and we can also talk.'

Later, the purpose of the early morning call came to light. It was to establish further that I was who I had said I was - a lecturer living at the University. I discovered a few days later that Iya Kareem's son had tried to find out more about me from several of my colleagues at the University. So only after Iya Kareem, her son and her best friend were satisfied that they would be 'safe' did I have an opportunity to meet Koso market women. Iya Kareem had investigated me before I was able to investigate her world!

The following day Iya Kareem took me to Koso market. She had said: 'Don't come too early in the morning, our people don't like meeting a stranger first thing in the morning ... my women [Koso traders] would not be at ease. They will say that will spoil their market..!'

When I arrived at her stall Iya Kareem rang the bell and

all the women gathered in one section of the market. There she explained to them who I was, what I wanted and solicited their help. She told them that she had investigated me and that there was nothing to fear. After this and when all the women had returned to their stalls she took me to each woman's stall for individual greetings and introduction. She pleaded with each woman to co-operate, 'because these questions she wants us to answer might be of help to our children in future ... she might write a book which our children can read, and our children's children too might benefit ... My son says they call it history (iwé itàn, literally somebody who tells stories or òpitan or akòwé itàn ijọba tábí ti ènia, that is, a person who tells or keeps records, in memory, for the government). It is good that we should answer any questions ... ' To each woman she would say: 'If we help this woman get the information she seeks, God will help us ... God will help you ... God will help you to sell well... God will give you peace ...' and the like.

I was elated. As I have said, only a few days earlier I had begun to feel despondent. Now all seemed under control. I was mistaken.

When I returned to the market the following day to try to get to know as many women as I could, the reception was cool. Some of the women I approached said 'Come tomorrow', others next week', still others, 'Next month', and a few bluntly said that 'There is nothing, nothing at all, that we can tell you that Mama [referring to the Alága] cannot tell you... She is older than everybody in this market... She would know everything you would want to know and more ...' When I

explained that I wanted their opinions too not just Mama's, they thought this was strange. 'Mama's opinions are the same as ours', was a general response.

Even though I understood and spoke some Yoruba, I relied heavily on my research assistants. Three of them were recruited from the University of Lagos, thanks to the generous financial support of my sponsors. Together we went to Koso market each day and tried to persuade the women to co-operate. As I mentioned in the introduction, many of them said they would if I paid them since they did not believe it possible that I would want to spend so many months in Koso market seeking their opinions unless 'you are being paid a lot of money and should give us some ...' I explained that I received no remuneration, and that university lecturers are not allowed to pay for information, and that in any case, I had none with which to pay them.

In the interim I began my interviews with Iya Kareem. She did not attend the market regularly and so most of the interviews were carried out at her home. After several weeks of impasse with the other women, I suggested that we might do some of the recordings of our conversations in the market in her stall. This proved to be an immensely wise move. After several such interviews Iya Kareem persuaded other leaders (except for the Igbo women, who said they would later), to agree to talk with me, and also to have their interviews recorded. Market women are generally suspicious of cassette recorders, especially when their own voices are to be recorded. However, with the co-operation of the leaders who sometimes asked for the cassettes to be played back so they could hear what they had said, the work became progressively easier.

Women now wanted to be interviewed and if I did not use my cassette recorder they would sometimes ask that I do so 'so that we can hear our own voices'. In the end, I interviewed all the female permanent stall holders at Koso market, except for three who were away ill while I carried out the fieldwork. Two died while I was still there and the other soon after I left.

But problems yet remained. Even after the ice had been broken, thanks to recording the interviews with Iya Kareem in the market, it still entailed Iya Kareem and some of the leaders to plead with the women to co-operate. I reckoned that it took well over three months of daily attendance in the market, including Sundays, to establish complete confidence and friendship with Koso market women. Naturally the degree of friendship and knowledge varied but by the end of my fieldwork I had come to know all the women fairly well.

In return for this friendship, or rather to clinch it, and since I had made it clear that I could not and would not exchange money for any information, I was frequently asked many favours. These included finding schools for some of the women's children, obtaining medical help at the teaching hospital, going to the homes to talk to recalcitrant children, finding jobs for school leavers, helping 'my son to go to England' - in one case helping to obtain a visa for a daughter who wanted to go to a number of European capitals and to the U.S.A. - and the like. It goes without saying that I never agreed or promised to help unless I was absolutely certain that it was possible for me to do so.

I have said that at first all the women at Koso market

agreed to co-operate except the Igbo women. These later also agreed to be interviewed. In fact, with the passage of time, two of the Igbo women leaders became my staunchest supporters: as demonstrated by the case history in Chapter IX, I developed what will be a lasting friendship. Initially I did not understand the underlying animosity that existed between the Yoruba women and the Igbo women (see Chapter IV). Since I had been told that there was only one head in each market, I would not have known how to establish a relationship with the Igbo line of authority. Later on I learned that the Igbo women, infuriated with the co-operation given me by the Yoruba leadership, had vowed not to co-operate, and in fact insisted that I gathered all my information 'only from our enemies'. Again, it took weeks of persistent persuasion and cajoling to get the Igbo leaders on my side.

The fact that I was not a Nigerian, particularly not a Yoruba, was of supreme importance in gaining the confidence of the Igbo. In the end their co-operation and enthusiasm equalled that of the Yoruba and in the two instances above was greater than most of the Koso market women.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adams, Captain John.
1823 Remarks on the Country Extending from Cape Palmas to River Congo (Whittaker: London)

Aderibigbe, A.B. (ed.),
1975 Lagos: The Development of An African City (Longman: Nigeria)

Ajayi, J.F.
1961 'The British Occupation of Lagos, 1851-1861, a Critical Review', Nigerian Magazine, 69, 95-105.

Ajayi, J.F. and Smith, R.
1964 Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge)

Ajayi, J.F.
1965 Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891 (Longman: London)

Alao, N.
1972 'Some Theoretical Issues in the Geographical Dimensions of Markets' Periodicity', Nigerian Geographical Journal

Alao, N.
1968 'Periodic Markets in Western Nigeria: Theory and Empirical Evidences' (Evanston: Northwestern Univ., Dept. of Geography, Research Report No. 42.)

Ajisafe, A.K.
1924a History of Abeokuta (R. Clay: Bungay, Suffolk)

Ajisafe, A.K.
1924b The Laws and Customs of the Yoruba People (Routledge: London)

Akinola, R.A. and Alao, N.O.
1975 'Some Geographical Aspects of Industries in Greater Lagos' in Lagos: The Development of an African City

Ardener, E.W. et al.
1960 Plantation and Village in The Cameroons: Some Economic and Social Studies (Oxford University Press: London)

Ardener, E.W.
1962 Divorce and Fertility: An African Study (Oxford University Press: London)

Ardener, E.W.
1972 'Belief and the Problem of Women' in La Fontaine, J.S. (ed.) The Interpretation of Ritual: Essays in Honour of A.I. Richards (Tavistock: London)

Ardener, E.W.
1975 'The "Problem" Revisited' in Ardener, S. (ed.) Perceiving Women (Malaby Press: London)

Ardener, E.W.
1980 'Problem of Dominance', in L. Dube (ed.) New Delhi Symposium (forthcoming)

Ardener, S.
1964 'The Comparative Study of Rotating Credit Associations', J.R.A.I., Vol. XCIV, No. 2, 201-29

Ardener, S. (ed.)
1975 Perceiving Women (Malaby Press: London)

Ardener, S. (ed.)
1978 Defining Female: The Nature of Women in Society (Croom Helm: London)

Aremo, O.
1963 'Yoruba Markets', B.A. Hons. thesis, University of London (unpub.)

Aronson, D.
1978 The City is our Form: Seven Migrant Ijebu Yoruba Families (G.K. Hall: Boston)

Awolalu, J.O.
1979 Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites (Longman: London)

Babatunde, E.
1980 'Some Aspects of Yoruba Girls' Fertility Rites with Particular Reference to the Ketu Yoruba', M.Litt. thesis, University of Oxford (unpub.)

Baker, P.H.
1974 Urbanization and Political Change: The Politics of Lagos, 1917-1967 (University of California Press: Berkeley)

Baker, T. and Bird, M.
1959 'Urbanization and the Position of Women', Soc. Rev. n.s., Vol. VII, No. 1, 99-122.

Banton, M.
1957 West African City: A Study of Tribal Life in Freetown (Oxford University Press: London)

Bascom, W.R.
1951 'Social Status, Wealth and Individual Differences Among the Yoruba', American Anthropologist, LIII, 4, Oct.-Dec., 490-505

Bascom, W.R.
1952 'The Esusu: A Credit Institution of the Yoruba' J.R.A.I., 82, 63-9

Bauer, P. and Yamey, B.
1954 West African Trade (Oxford University Press: London)

Bauer, P. and Yamey, B.
1968 Markets, Market Control and Marketing Reform (Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London)

Beier, H.U.
1955 'The Position of Yoruba Women', Presence Africaine, n.s. 1-11, 39-46.

Belshaw, C.
1965 Traditional Exchange and Modern Markets (Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs)

Bledsoe, C.H.
1980 Women and Marriage in Kpelle Society (Stanford University Press: Stanford)

Bohannan, L.
1949 'Dahomean Marriage: A Revolution', Africa, Vol. XIX, 273-87

Bohannan, P. and L.
1968 Tiv Economy (Longman, Green and Co.: London)

Bohannan, P. and Dalton, G. (eds.)
1962 Markets in Africa (Northwestern University Press: Evanston)

Boserup, E.
1970 Woman's Role in Economic Development (George Allen and Unwin: London)

Burns, A.C.
1942 History of Nigeria (4th edition), George Allen and Unwin: London)

Burton, R.
1863 Wanderings in West Africa (2 vols.) (Tinsley: London)

Callaway, H.
1978 'The Most Essentially Female Function of All: Giving Birth' in Ardener, S. (ed.) Defining Females: The Nature of Women in Society

Clapperton, H.
1929 Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa from the Bight of Benin to Soccatoo (Lea and Carey: Philadelphia)

Clapperton (Hugh) & Lander,(Richard) 1829
Journal of a second expedition into ... Africa to which is added the journal of R. Lander from Kano to the sea-coast.(London)

Clignet, R.
1970 Many Wives, Many Powers (Northwestern University Press: Evanston)

Cohen, A.
1969 Custom and Conflict in Urban Africa: A Study of Hausa Migrants in Yoruba Towns (Routledge and Kegan Paul: London)

Coker, G.B.A.
1958 Family Property among the Yorubas (Sweet and Maxwell: London)

Cole, P.
1975 Modern and Traditional Elites in the Politics of Lagos (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge)

Cole, P.
1975 'Lagos Society in the Nineteenth Century' in Aderibigbe, A. (ed.) The Development of an African City

Comhaire-Sylvain, S.
1949 'The Status of Women in Lagos', Pi Lamba Theta Journal, XXVII, March, No. 2, 158-63

Comhaire-Sylvain, S.
1951 'Le travail des femmes a Lagos', Zaire, Vol. 5. Nos. 2 and 5, Feb. and May, 169-87 and 475-505.

Crowder, M.
1962 The Story of Nigeria (Faber and Faber: London)

Daaku, K.
1971 'Trade and Trading Patterns of the Akan in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries' in Meillassoux, C. (ed.) The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa (O.U.P.: London)

Daniel, S.O.
1975 'Health and Social Welfare' in Aderibigbe, A. (ed.) Lagos: The Development of an African City

Diejomaoh, V. and Anusionwu, E.
1980 'The Structure of Income Inequalities in Nigeria' in Bienen, H. and Diejomaoh, V. (eds.) Political Economy of Income Distribution in Nigeria (Holmes and Meyer: New York) (forthcoming)

Dike, K.O.
1956 Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885: An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria (Oxford University Press: Oxford)

Douglas, M.
1966 Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo (Routledge and Kegan Paul: London)

Ellis, A.B.
1894 The Yoruba Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa (Chapman and Hall: London)

Evans-Pritchard, E.E.
1940 The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People (Oxford University Press: Oxford)

Evans-Pritchard, E.E.
1951 Kinship and Marriage Among the Nuer (Oxford University Press: London)

Evans-Pritchard, E.E.
1965 The Position of Women in Primitive Societies and Other Essays in Social Anthropology (Faber and Faber: London)

Fadipe, N.A.
1970 The Sociology of the Yoruba (Ibadan University Press: Ibadan)

Firth, R. and Yamey, B.S. (eds.)
1964 Capital Saving and Credit in Peasant Societies: Studies from Asia, Oceania, The Caribbean and Middle America (George Allen and Unwin: London)

Fox, R.
1967 Kinship and Marriage: An Anthropological Perspective Penguin Books: Harmondsworth)

Fox, R.
1972 'Alliance and Constraint: Sexual Selection in the Evolution of Human Kinship Systems' in Campbell, B. (ed.) Sexual Selection and the Descent of Man 1871-1971 (Aldine Publishers: Chicago)

Fortes, M. and Evans-Pritchard, E.E. (eds.)
1940 African Political Systems (Oxford University Press: London)

Fortes, M.
1945 The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi (Oxford University Press: London)

Fortes, M.
1949 The Web of Kinship among the Tallensi (Oxford University Press: London)

Fortes, M. (ed.)
1962 Marriage in Tribal Societies (Cambridge Papers in Social Anthropology No. 3: Cambridge University Press)

Galletti, R. et al.
1956 Nigerian Cocoa Farmers (Oxford University Press: London)

Garlick, P.C.
1971 African Traders and Economic Development in Ghana Oxford University Press: London)

Geertz, C.
1962 'The Rotating Credit Association: A "Middle Rung" in Development, Economic Development and Cultural Change, 1, No. 3.

Geertz, C.
1963 Peddlars and Princes: Social Change and Economic Modernization in Two Indonesian Towns (University of Chicago Press)

Gluckman, M.
1950 'Kinship and Marriage among the Lozi of Northern Rhodesia and the Zulu of Natal', in Radcliffe-Brown, A. and Forde, D. (eds.) African Systems of Kinship and Marriage (Oxford University Press: London)

Gluckman, M.
1956 Custom and Conflict in Africa (Blackwell:Oxford)

Goody, E.
1966 'Fostering in Ghana: A Preliminary Report', Ghana Journal of Sociology, 3, 26-33

Goody, E.
1969 'Kinship Fostering in Gonja', in Mayer, P. (ed.) Socialization: The Approach from Social Anthropology A.S.A.8. (Tavistock Pubs.: London)

Goody, E.
1972 '"Greeting", "Begging" and the Presentation of Respect' in La Fontaine, J. (ed.) Interpretation of Ritual: Essays in Honour of A.I. Richards

Goody, J.
1969 Comparative Studies in Kinship (Routledge and Kegan Paul: London)

Gray, R.F.
1967 'Sonjo Bride-Price and the Question of African "Wife-Purchase"', American Anthropologist, 62, 34-57

Green, M.
1948 Ibo Village Affairs (Sidgwick and Jackson: London)

Gugler, J. and Flanagan, W.
1978 Urbanization and Social Change in West Africa (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge)

Hafkin, N. and Bay, E. (eds.)
1976 Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change (Stanford University Press: Stanford)

Harrell-Bond, B.E.
1975 Modern Marriage in Sierra Leone: A Study of the Professional Group (Mouton and Co.: The Hague)

Harrell-Bond, B.E.
1980 'Women and the 1979 Ghana Revolution', American Universities Field Staff Report, No. 4, Africa.

Hastrup, K.
1978 'The Semantics of Biology: Virginity' in Ardener, S. (ed.) Defining Females: The Nature of Women in Society

Hill, P.
1963 'Markets in Africa', Journal of Modern African Studies, 1, 4, 441-53.

Hill, P.
1966a 'Landlords and Brokers: A West African Trading System', Cah. et. Africaine, Vol. 23(3), 349-66.

Hill, P.
1966b 'Notes on Traditional Market Authority and Market Periodicity in West Africa', Journal of Modern African History, 7.

Hill, P.
1969 'Hidden Trade in Hausaland', Man, IV, 3, 392-409

Hill, P.
1970 Studies in Rural Capitalism in West Africa (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge)

Hill, P.
1971 'Two Types of West African House Trade' in Meillassoux, C. (ed.) The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa

Hodder, B.
1961 'Rural Periodic Markets in Part of Yorubaland, Western Nigeria', Trans. Inst. Brit. Geographers 29, 149-59.

Hodder, B.
1962 'The Yoruba Rural Markets', in Bohannan, P. and Dalton, G. (eds.) Markets in Africa

Hodder, B.
1965a 'Distribution of Markets in Yorubaland', Scottish Geographical Magazine, 81, 48-58

Hodder, B.
1965b 'Some Comments on the Origins of Traditional Markets in Africa South of the Sahara', Trans. Inst. Brit. Geographers, 36, 97-106.

Hodder, B.
1967 'The Markets of Ibadan', in Lloyd, P. et al. (eds.) The City of Ibadan (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge)

Hodder, B. and Ukwu, I.
1969 Markets in West Africa (Ibadan University Press: Ibadan)

Hodder, B.
1971 'Periodic and Daily Markets in West Africa' in Meillassoux, C. (ed.) The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa

Holleman, J.F.
1956 'The African Woman in Town and Tribe', The Listener, No. 1, 436, 496-7 and 509.

Horton, R.
1969 'Types of Spirit Possession', in Beattie, J. and Middleton, I. (eds.) Spirit Mediumship and Society in Africa (Routledge and Kegan Paul: London)

Huff, D.
1954 How to Lie with Statistics (Gollancz: London)

Hunter, G.
1962 The New Societies of Tropical Africa (Oxford University Press: London)

Ifeka-Moller, C.
1975 'Female Militancy and Colonial Revolt: The Women's War of 1929 Eastern Nigeria' in Ardener, S. (ed.) Perceiving Women

Isong, C.
1958 'Modernization of the Esusu Credit Society', Niger Proceedings, 111-120.

James, W.
1978 'Matrifocus on African Women' in Ardener, S. (ed.) Defining Females: The Nature of Women in Society

James, W.
1979 'Kwanim Pa: The Making of the Uduk People (Oxford University Press: London)

Johnson, S.
1921 A History of the Yorubas (S.M.S. Bookshop: Lagos)

Kaberry, P.
1939 Aboriginal Women: Sacred and Profane (George Routledge and Sons: London)

Kaberry, P.
1952 Women of the Grassfields: A Study of the Economic Position of Women in Bamenda, British Cameroons (H.M.S.O.: London)

Kamau, L.J.
1976 'Conceptual Patterns in Yoruba Culture', in Rapoport, A. The Mutual Interaction of People and Their Built Environment: A Cross-Cultural Perspective (Mouton: The Hague)

Kataria, L.D.
n.d. 'Market Places and Trading Streets in Yoruba Towns, Nigeria: Analytical Study and Planning Proposals', Inst. of Town Planners, New Delhi, India.(unpub.)

Kopytoff, J.H.
1965 A Preface to Modern Nigeria: The "Sierra Leoneans" in Yoruba, 1830-1890 (University of Wisconsin Press: Madison)

Krapf-Askari, E.
1969 Yoruba Towns and Cities: An Enquiry into the Nature of Urban Social Phenomena (Oxford University Press: London)

Lazarsfeld, P.F.
1935 'The Art of Asking Why', National Marketing Review, 1, 26-38.

Lazarsfeld, P.F.
1944 'The Controversy over Detailed Interviews: An Offer for Negotiation', Public Opinion, qtrly. 8, 38-66.

Lazarsfeld, P.F.
1958 'Evidence and Inference in Social Research', Daedalus, 87, 99-130.

Leach, E.R.
1961 Rethinking Anthropology (Athlone Press: London)

Leith-Ross, S.
1949 African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria (Faber and Faber: London)

Levi-Strauss, C.
1969 The Elementary Structures of Kinship (Eyre and Spottiswoode; London)

Little, K.
1948 'The Changing Position of Women in the Sierra Leone Protectorate', Africa, XVIII, 1, 1-17.

Little, K.
1951 'The Position of Women in the Mende of Sierra Leone' (Routledge and Kegan Paul: London) pp. 163-74.

Little, K.
1970 West African Urbanization: A Study of Voluntary Associations in Social Change (Cambridge University Press:(Cambridge)

Little, K.
1973 African Women in Towns: An Aspect of Africa's Social Revolution (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge)

Little, K.
1980 The Sociology of Urban Women's Image in African Literature (Macmillan: London)

Lloyd, P.C.
1954 'The Traditional Political System of the Yoruba' Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, Vol. X, No. 4, 366-84.

Lloyd, P.C.
1962 Yoruba Land Law (Oxford University Press/N.I.S.E.R.: London)

Lloyd, P.C.
1963a 'Divorce Among the Yoruba' American Anthropologist LXX, 67-81

Lloyd, P.C.
1963b 'The Status of the Yoruba Wife', Sudan Society, 11, 35-42

Lloyd, P.C. (ed.)
1966a The New Elites of Tropical Africa (Oxford University Press/I.A.I.: London)

Lloyd, P.C.
1966b 'Agnatic and Cognatic Descent Among the Yoruba', Man, n.s., Vol. 1, No. 4, 484-500.

Losi, J.B.
1914 History of Lagos (Lagos)

Mabogunjé, A.
1962a Yoruba Towns (Ibadan University Press: Ibadan)

Mabogunje, A.
1962b 'Lagos: A Study in Urban Geography', Ph.D. thesis, University of London (unpub.)

Mabogunje, A.
1967 'The Problems of a Metropolis' in Lloyd, P.C. et. al. (eds.) The City of Ibadan (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge)

Mabogunje, A.
1968 Urbanization in Nigeria (University of London Press: London)

Mair, L.
1969 Witchcraft (Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London)

Mair, L.
1969 African Marriage and Social Change (Frank Cass: London)

McCall, D.
1961 'Trade and the Role of a Wife in a Modern West African Town', in Southall, A. (ed.) Social Change in Modern Africa (Oxford University Press: London)

McCall, D.
1962 'The Koforidua Market' in Bohannan, P. and Dalton, G. (eds.) Markets in Africa

Marris, P.
1961 Family and Social Change in an African City: A Study of Rehousing in Lagos (Routledge and Kegan Paul: London)

Marshall, G.
'The Marketing of Farm Produce: Some Patterns of Trade Among Women in Western Nigeria', Proceedings of 1962 Conference of Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, Ibadan

Marshall, G.
1963 'Yoruba Periodic Markets', a paper presented at the Conference of the African Studies Association, San Francisco.

Marshall, G.
1970 'In a World of Women: Field Work in a Yoruba Community', in Golde, P. (ed.), Women in the Field (Aldine: Chicago)

McNulty, M. and Sada, P.
1972 'Periodic Markets in a Metropolitan Environment', paper presented at the Association of American Geographers Annual General Meeting, Kansas City, Mo. 23-26 April, 1972.

Meillassoux, C. (ed.)
1971 The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa (Oxford University Press/I.A.I.: London)

Miller, S.M.
1952 'The Participant Observer and "over-rapport"', Am. Soc. Review, 17, 97-9.

Mintz, S.
1964 'The Employment of Capital by Market Women in Haiti', in Firth, R. and Yamey, B. (eds.) Capital, Saving and Credit in Peasant Societies (George Allen and Unwin: London)

Mintz, S.
1971 'Men, Women and Trade', Comparative Studies in Society and History, XIII, 247-69.

Miracle, M.
1971 'Capitalism, Capital Markets and Competition in West African Trade' in Meillassoux, C. (ed.) The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa

Mitchell, J. Clyde
1961 'Social Change and the Stability of African Marriage in Northern Rhodesia' in Southall, A. (ed.), Social Change in Modern Africa

Moser, C.A. and Kalton, G.
1971 Survey Methods in Social Investigation (Heinemann Educ. Books: London)

Nadel, S.F.
1942 A Black Byzantium: The Kingdom of Nupe in Nigeria (Oxford University Press: London)

Nadel, S.F.
1952 'Witchcraft in Four African Societies: An Essay in Comparison', American Anthropologist, 54, 1, 18-29.

Netting, R.
1969 'Marital Relations in the Jos Plateau of Nigeria', American Anthropologist, 71, 1037-45.

Newbury, C.
1961 The Western Slave Coast and Its Rulers (Oxford University Press: London)

Newbury, C.W.
1972 'Credit in Early Nineteenth Century West African Trade', Journal of African History, XIII, 1, 81-95

Nypan, A.
1960 'Market Trade: A Sample Survey of Market Traders in Accra', African Business Series, No. 2, Economic Research Division, Univ. College of Ghana.

Obbo, C.
African Women: The Struggle for Economic Independence (Zed Press: London)

Okely, K.
1975 'The Self and Scientism', Journal of the Oxford Anthropology Society, Michaelmas.

Okeyo, A.P.
1979 'Women in the Household Economy: Managing Multiple Roles', Studies in Family Planning, Vol. 10., No. 11/12.

Okonjo, K.
1979 'Rural Women's Credit Systems: A Nigerian Example', Studies in Family Planning, Vol. 10, No. 11/12.

Oppong, C.
1974 Marriage Among a Matrilineal Elite: A Family Study of Ghanaian Civil Servants (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge)

Ottenberg, P.V.
1959 'The Changing Economic Position of Women among Afikpo Ibo' in Bascom, W. and Herskovits, M.J. Continuity and Change in African Cultures (University of Chicago Press)

Ottenberg, S. and P.
1962 'Afikpo Markets: 1900-1960' in Bohannan, P. and Dalton, G. (eds.) Markets in Africa

Paulme, D. (ed.)
1960 Women of Tropical Africa (University of California Press)

Paulme, D.
1948 'The Social Condition of Women in Two West African Societies', Man, XLVIII, 44.

Peel, J.D.Y.
1968 Aladura: A Religious Movement Among the Yoruba Oxford University Press: London)

Pellow, D.
1977 Women in Accra: Options for Autonomy (Michigan Reference Pubs. Inc.: Algonio)

Polanyi, K. et al.
1957 Trade and Market in the Early Empires: Economies in History and Theory (The Free Press: Glencoe)

Polanyi, K. and Rostein, A.
1966 Dahomey and the Slave Trade (Washington University Press: Washington, D.C.)

Pyne, John
1893 Table of Principal Events in Yoruba History (Andrew H. Thomas: Lagos)

Radcliffe-Brown, A.R. and Forde, D. (eds.)
1950 African Systems of Kinship and Marriage (Oxford University Press: London)

Radcliffe-Brown, A.R.
1952 Structure and Function in Primitive Society (Cohen and West: London)

Remy, D.
1973 'Adaptive Strategies of Men and Women in Zaria: Industrial Workers and Their Wives', Ph.D. thesis, University of Michigan.

Remy, D.
1975 'Underdevelopment and the Experience of Women: A Nigerian Case Study' in Reiter, R. (ed.) Toward an Anthropology of Women (New York Monthly Review Press)

Richards, A.
1956 Chisungu: A Girl's Initiation Ceremony Among the Bemba of Northern Rhodesia (Faber and Faber: London)

Rapson, R.
1959 Report on Irregularities by the Lagos Town Council (Government Printer: Lagos)

Sada, P. and McNulty, M.
1974a 'Traditional Markets in Lagos: A Study of the Changing Administrative Process and Marketing Transformations', Quarterly Journal of Administration, Vol. VIII, No. 2, Jan., 149-65.

Sada, P. and McNulty, M.
1974b 'Traditional Markets in Lagos: A Note on Consumer Behaviour', Journal of Geographical Association of Nigeria, Vol. 17, No. 1, June, 1974

Sada, P.O. and Adefolalu, O.O.
1975 'Urbanization and Problems of Urban Development' in Aderibigbe, A. (ed.) Lagos: The Development of an African City

Sada, P.O. et al.
1978 'Periodic Markets in a Metropolitan Environment: The Example of Lagos, Nigeria', in Market-Place Trade: Periodic Markets, Hawkers and Traders in Africa, Asia and Latin America (University of British Columbia)

Sada, P.O.
1980 'Urbanization and Income Distribution in Nigeria' in Bienen, H. and Diejomaoh, V.P. (eds.), Political Economy of Income Distribution in Nigeria

Schapera, I.
1939 Married Life in an African Tribe (Faber and Faber: London)

Skinner, E.
1962 'Trade and Markets among the Mossi People' in Bohannan, P. and Dalton, G. (eds.) Markets in Africa

Smith, M.F.
1954 Baba of Karo: A Woman of the Muslim Hausa (Faber and Faber: London)

Smith, R.H.T.
1971 'West African Market Places: Temporal Periodicity and Locational Spacing' in Meillassoux, C. (ed.) Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa

Southall, A. (ed.)
1961 Social Change in Modern Africa: Studies Presented and Discussed at the First International African Seminar, Makerere College, Kampala, January, 1959 (Oxford University Press: London)

Steady, F.
1973 'The Structure and Function of Women's Voluntary Associations in an African City: A Study of Associative Process among Women of Freetown', D.Phil thesis, University of Oxford (unpub.)

Stine,
1962 'Temporal Aspects of Tertiary Production Elements in Korea', in Pitts, F. (ed.) Urban Systems and Economic Development (Eugene: University of Orgegon School of Business Administration)

Sudarkasa, G.
1973 Where Women Work: A Study of Yoruba Women in the Marketplace and in the Home (University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor)

Schwab, W.B.
1955 'Kinship and Lineage Among the Yoruba', Africa, Vol. XXV, No. 4, 352-74

Schwab, W.B.
1958 'The Terminology of Kinship and Marriage among the Yoruba', Africa, Vol. XXVIII, No. 4, 301-13

Schwab, W.B.
1962 'Continuity and Change in the Yoruba Lineage System', Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences XCVI

Talbot, P.
1926 The People of Southern Nigeria (vol. 4) (Oxford University Press: London)

Tardits, C. and C.
1962 'Traditional Market Economy in South Dahomey' in Bohannan, P. and Dalton, G. (eds.) Markets in Africa

Tiger, L.
1969 Men in Groups (New York: Random House)

Townsend, H.
1856 Church Missionary Society, Journals, June, (Ca2/085)

Trager, L.
1976 'Yoruba Markets and Trade: Analysis of Spatial Structure and Social Organization in the Ijesaland Marketing System', Ph.D. thesis, University of Washington (unpub.)

Trager, L.
1979 'Urban Market Women: Hoarders, Hagglers, Economic Heroines?', paper presented at the 22nd Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, Los Angeles, 31 Oct.-3 Nov. 1979

Trager, L.
1980 'Customer Relationships in Nigeria: Yoruba Onibara and Explanations of Economic Personalism' Ethnology (forthcoming)

Turner, V.
1957 Schism and Continuity in an African Society (Manchester University Press)

Ukwu, I. and Hodder, B.
1969 Markets in West Africa (Ibadan University Press: Ibadan)

Vagale, L.R. (ed.)
1974 Anatomy of Traditional Markets in Nigeria: Focus on Ibadan City (The Polytechnic: Ibadan)

Van Allen, J.
1972 'Sitting on a Man: Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of the Igbo Women', Canadian Journal of African Studies, 6, No. 2, 165-81.

Ware, H.
1979 'Polygyny: Women's Views in a Transitional Society: Nigeria', Journal of Marriage and Family, Feb. 185-95.

Wood, J.B.
1878 Historical Notices of Lagos, West Africa (Lagos)

Wood, L.I.
1978 'Rural Markets in Kenya', in R.H.T. Smith (ed.) Market-Place Trade: Periodic Markets, Hawkers and Traders in Africa, Asia and Latin America