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Palm Oil & Power:  
Women in an Era of Economic and Social Transition in 19th  
Century Yorubaland (South-western Nigeria)

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## ABSTRACT

**Palm Oil and Power:  
Women in an Era of Economic and Social Transition  
in 19th Century Yorubaland (South-western Nigeria).**

**Francine Shields.**

This study looks at the economic, political and social history of women in the Yoruba area of south-western Nigeria in the 19th century using contemporary sources which have remained previously largely untapped for historical studies of women. The century encompassed many key historical developments which affected women; in particular, the decline of the Atlantic slave trade and the growth of an export trade in locally produced palm oil and kernels. Whereas the slave trade had been dominated by men, the processing, transport and trade of palm produce was dominated by women. The extent, nature and effects of women's role in this and other industries such as pottery manufacture, dyeing and food vending, which also expanded and developed during this period, are examined.

As demand for palm produce and other goods increased, the labour of both free-born and slave women became more valuable since it was vital for industry at all stages. The study looks at changing labour demands and sources and alterations in the established pattern of the sexual and generational division of labour. Important changes in gender relations are evident and the study illuminates how tensions between men and women and between women themselves were manifest and how both men and women expressed and dealt with these problems. Economic changes were accompanied by largely internal political developments which

favoured a few wealthy women. Overall, many men perceived and/or experienced that increasing female autonomy posed a threat to the established patriarchal order. The evidence represented in the thesis clearly shows how men attempted to subordinate women in general, tap into their income and limit their political involvement, mainly through the development of exploitative and restrictive aspects of male-dominated politico-religious cults, which were directed specifically at women.

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I would also like to thank the staff at the many institutions I visited to consult material for their expert help, namely those at the libraries of Stirling and Edinburgh Universities; the National Library in Edinburgh; the School of Oriental and African Studies Library and the Public Record Office in London; and finally, the Heslop Rooms at Birmingham University Library. Many thanks to all of the institutions who kindly provided vital and appreciated financial help, without which most of my research would not have been possible; the Bank of Scotland at Stirling University, The Altrusa Careers Trust, The British Federation of Graduate Women, The Carnegie Trust, The President's Fund: Edinburgh Association of University Women and The Royal Historical Society. I would like to extend special thanks to the staff of the Department of History at Stirling University for the many times they helped me with both material and moral support.

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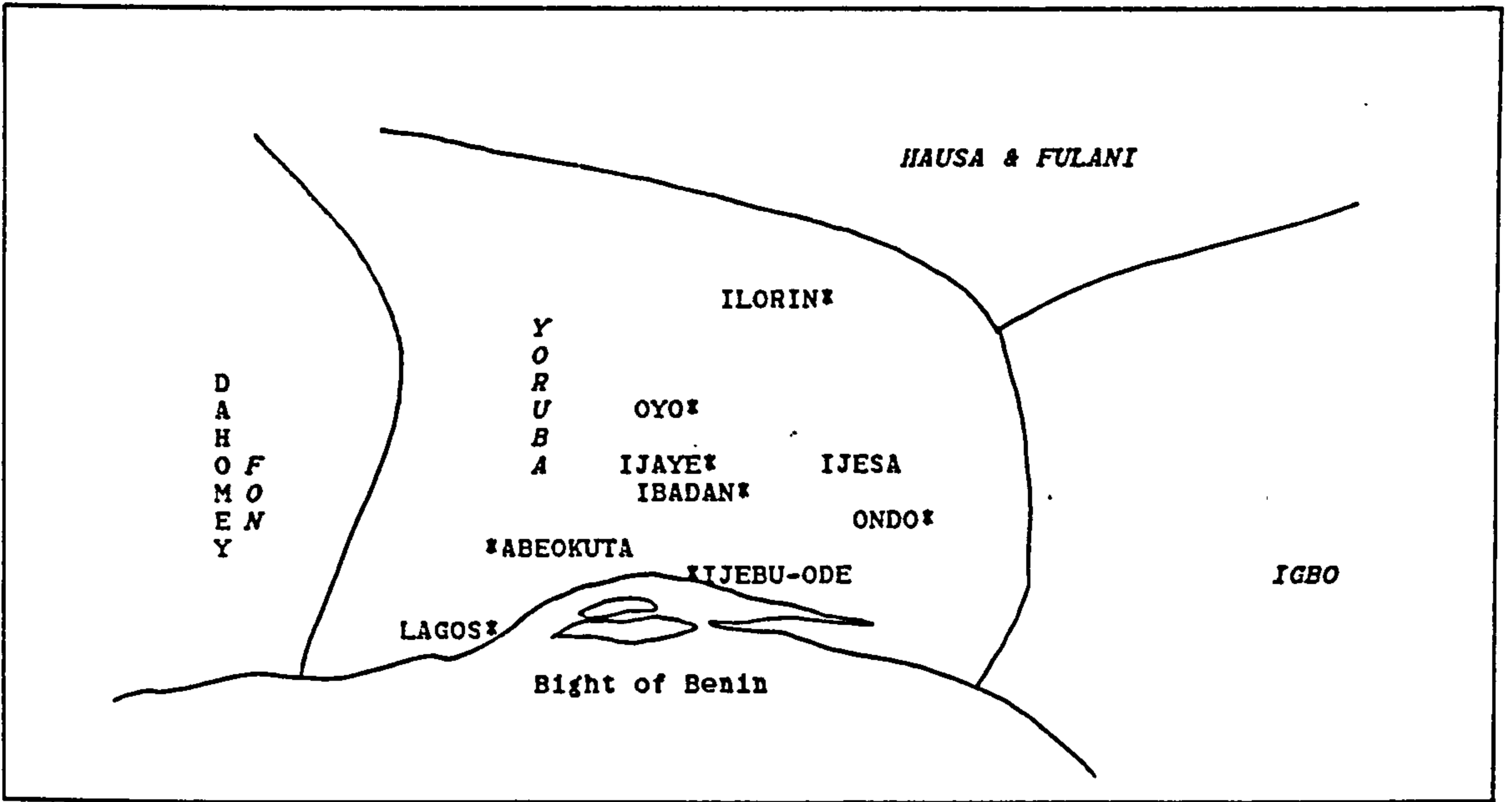
## ABBREVIATIONS

ASA	- African Studies Association
AEH	- African Economic History
AHS	- African Historical Studies
CJAS	- Canadian Journal of African Studies
CMS	- Church Missionary Society
CSSH	- Comparative Studies in Society and History
EHR	- Economic History Review
HIA	- History in Africa
IJAHS	- International Journal of African Historical Studies
JAH	- Journal of African History
JAS	- Journal of the African Society
JHSN	- Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria
JAI	- Journal of the Anthropological Institute
JICH	- Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History
JIH	- Journal of Interdisciplinary History
JRA	- Journal of Religion in Africa
JRAS	- Journal of the Royal Anthropological Society
JRGS	- Journal of the Royal Geographical Society
NNAI	- National Archives Ibadan
PP	- Parliamentary Papers
PRGS	- Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society
PRO	- Public Records Office
WAISER	- West African Institute of Economic & Social Research
WMMS	- Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society

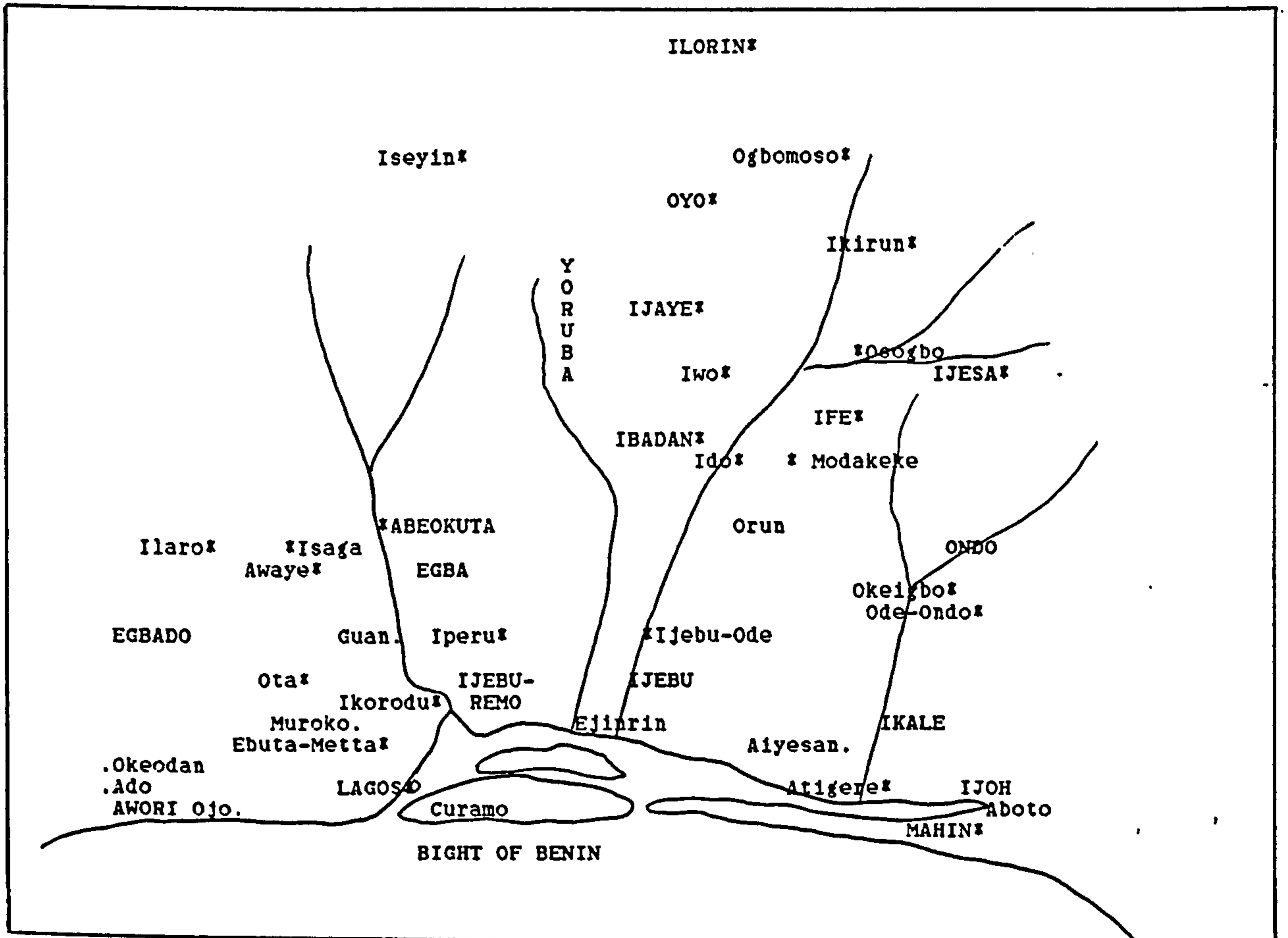
## GLOSSARY

<i>adire</i>	hand-dyed, patterned cloth
<i>agidi</i>	corn-flour blancmange
<i>Aje</i>	deity of wealth
<i>akara</i>	bean cake or bread
<i>Aku</i>	term denoting 'Yoruba'
<i>Alafin</i>	ruler of Oyo
<i>Alake</i>	ruler of Ake, Abeokuta
<i>alaru</i>	porter
<i>Aremo</i>	Crown Prince, heir apparent
<i>Are-Ona-Kakanfo</i>	title of war chief, akin to Generalissimo
<i>Awujale</i>	ruler of Ijebu area
<i>ayaba</i>	Alafin's wives
<i>Babalawo</i>	Ifa diviner, priest
<i>bale</i>	head, father of a compound
<i>Balogun</i>	title of war chief
<i>Egungun</i>	ancestor masquerade, secret cult society
<i>Elegbara/Esu</i>	'trickster' deity
<i>Eluku/Elukun</i>	ancestor cult
<i>epo</i>	palm-oil
<i>Erelu</i>	female chieftaincy title, member of Ogboni
<i>esusu</i>	savings club, credit union
<i>ibeji</i>	carved image of a dead twin or child
<i>Ifa</i>	divination oracle or deity
<i>ilari</i>	slave, messenger of the Alafin
<i>iwofa</i>	pawn, person working to pay debt
<i>iyale</i>	widow
<i>Iyalode</i>	female chieftaincy title
<i>Lobun</i>	Ondo female chieftaincy title
<i>Oba</i>	monarch, King
<i>Ogboni</i>	council of chiefs and secret society
<i>Ogun</i>	deity of iron and war
<i>Oko</i>	farm deity
<i>orisa</i>	deity
<i>Oro</i>	'bull-roarer', secret cult
<i>Osun</i>	river goddess
<i>Oya</i>	wife of Sango, goddess of River Niger
<i>Parakoyi</i>	trader's guild
<i>Sango</i>	deity of thunder & lightning
<i>Saro</i>	Yoruba repatriates from Sierra Leone
<i>Seriki</i>	title of war chief





MAP I: Yoruba & Neighbours in the 19th century.



MAP II: Yoruba area in the 19th century.

## &gt;&gt;&gt;::&lt;&lt;&lt; INTRODUCTION &gt;&gt;&gt;::&lt;&lt;&lt;

Much has been written on the 19th century history of the Yoruba people<sup>1</sup> of south-western Nigeria (see Map 1).<sup>2</sup> However, in general the majority of these studies present an overall picture of a history in which men were the major actors, both initiating and experiencing events, while the female population were passively swept along by developments.<sup>3</sup> This general non-recognition is especially glaring when one considers that the 19th century was a particularly dynamic period in Yoruba history, encompassing many key historical developments including the spread of Islam and Christianity; the fall of the Oyo Empire and

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<sup>1</sup> The name 'Yoruba' originated from the Hausa term for their southern neighbours and mainly referred to the Oyo. It was only from the early 19th century that the name developed to include other sub-groups such as the Ijebu and Ketu. Samuel Johnson, the Yoruba historian distinguishes between what he considers the 'Yoruba proper', or the Oyo, and the other 'affiliated' groups such as the Egba, Ijebu and Ekiti. S. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, (1921) pp.16-25. Also see, R. Law, 'Local Amateur Scholarship and the Construction of Yoruba Ethnicity, 1880-1914', in L. de la Gorgendiere, K. King & S. Vaughan (eds), *Ethnicity in Africa: Roots, Meanings and Interpretations*, (1996)...

<sup>2</sup> Among the most accessible are J.F.A. Ajayi and R. Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the 19th Century* (Cambridge University Press, 1964); S.A. Akintoye, *Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland, 1840-1893: Ibadan Expansion and the Rise of the Ekitiparapo* (London, 1971); S.O. Biobaku, *The Egba and their Neighbours, 1842-1962* (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1957); J.H. Kopytoff, *A Preface to Modern Nigeria: The 'Sierra Leonians' in Yoruba, 1830-1890* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1965); R. Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba* (Methuen, 1976); and S. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas* (CMS Lagos, 1921).

<sup>3</sup> In 1974 Prof. Bolanle Awe produced the first historical study specifically devoted to women's position in Yorubaland. See B. Awe, 'The Iyalode in the Traditional Yoruba Political System', paper presented to the 18th Annual Congress of the Historical Society of Nigeria, and also in A. Schlegel (ed), *Sexual Stratification: A Cross Cultural View* (University of Columbia Press, 1977). For the development of research and writing on women in Yorubaland see LeRay Denzer, 'Yoruba Women: A Historiographical Study' in *IJAHS*, Vol.27, No.1, 1994. On Nigeria see, B. Awe, & N. Mba, 'Women's Research & Documentation Centre (Nigeria)' in *Signs*, Vol.16, No.4, Summer 1991. LeRay Denzer informed me that no major historical studies on Yoruba women in the 19th century have been undertaken in Nigeria itself in the last few years (personal communication 16.5.96).

the subsequent Yoruba wars; the increasing involvement of foreign agents, principally the British, in coastal and interior affairs; and last but not least, the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade and the eventual transition to and growth of trade in a range of vegetable products for export to Europe. Undoubtedly these events both affected and involved women as well as men.

This study will begin to explore both the impact of the above events on women and women's role in these events in 19th century Yorubaland. I hope to present a picture of the development of women's economic, political and social roles over the century and give some insight into women's changing position and relationships with each other, with men and with society in general.<sup>4</sup> On first impression this may seem rather an ambitious aim; however, as anyone who has even a limited knowledge of Yoruba institutions will know, and anyone who begins to study them will find out, they are all inextricably linked. Any study of one area necessarily demands some inclusion of the others and this equally applies to any study which aims fully to understand and explore the changing position of women in an era which saw many important changes in all areas.

Chapter I briefly outlines Yoruba society and gives a description of the family and household, the organisation of society and polity and what women's position and role was in

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<sup>4</sup> I have not devoted any particular chapter to the significant role of women in religion, however, various aspects of the topic are discussed throughout the study.

relation to each. The chapter is based heavily on early 20th century ethnographic and sociological accounts. The choice of source is deliberate: although much of the information is accurate, many generalisations about women in the 19th century have been perpetuated by the over-use of these sources which essentially deal with women's 20th century position. It is intended to use the information provided by the 19th century sources throughout the following chapters to shed clearer light on women's 19th century position. Chapter II looks at women's changing position in the economy at a time when the Atlantic slave trade diminished and European demand for various West African vegetable products significantly increased. Palm oil and kernels were the two main vegetable exports from the Yoruba area. These products were used as industrial lubricants and base ingredients in the manufacture of soap, candles and margarine and considerably aided the industrialisation and modernisation of Britain. Chapter III develops the economic theme more fully to explore women's income, spending patterns and financial habits. The chapter also discusses how women's income was controlled and distributed and illuminates changes in this area. Chapter IV explores the history of women's political position, beginning with an overview of the pre-19th century and then a discussion of 19th century developments. In particular, the role of male-dominated politico-religious cults in seriously limiting women's political involvement is highlighted, as is women's role in the many wars occurring in the area over the century. The final chapter explores the way in which many of the changes in women's economic, political and social position affected relationships

within the family and in society; in particular the focus is on changing gender relations, the ways in which societal and gender tensions were manifest (such as witchcraft accusations) and the ways in which women tried to improve their lot and/or escape and counter attempts to subordinate them.

Detailed studies of women in pre-colonial Yorubaland are still relatively few and far between.<sup>1</sup> Historical information on women in Yorubaland is, however, often included in essentially non-historical studies. Of those that I have been able to obtain, the majority are not adequately based on 19th century evidence. As mentioned above, most are largely based on a number of 20th century sources, such as early ethnographic and sociological accounts of the Yoruba,<sup>2</sup> intelligence reports compiled by agents of the colonial government of Nigeria in the early 20th century, and, even more remotely, on material culled from various secondary texts and articles that were not based on 19th century sources in the first place! Basically, there has been a tendency to extrapolate from information and evidence which is relevant to the 20th century, applying it to the 19th.

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<sup>1</sup> Recent research on women in the Yoruba area in the 19th century has focused mainly on the Adire cloth industry. See Caroline Keyes, *Adire: Cloth, Gender and Social Change in South-western Nigeria, 1841-1991*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin Madison, 1993; and Judith A. Byfield, *Women, Economy & The State: A Study of the Adire Industry in Abeokuta (Western Nigeria), 1890-1939*, Ph.D. Thesis, Columbia University, 1993. Additionally Prof. Kristin Mann has produced several detailed studies on both Christian Yoruba and slave women in early colonial Lagos (cited where appropriate).

<sup>2</sup> Such as Isaac Delano, *The Soul of Nigeria*, (London, 1978) written in 1937; N.A. Fadipe, *The Sociology of the Yoruba* (Ibadan University Press, 1970); D. Forde, *The Yoruba-speaking Peoples of South-western Nigeria* (1951); P.A. Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, Vols. II & III, (Oxford University Press, 1926); and A.B. Ellis, *The Yoruba-speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa* (London, 1894).

Consequently, statements about 'customary' laws and practices, and the 'traditional' female role are often presented as statements of women's pre-colonial position in Yorubaland. It has been assumed that what is 'traditional' is somehow timeless, and has been more or less preserved, unchanged over the years. Consequently it has been wrongly assumed that what was considered as 'customary' or 'traditional' in the early 20th century, accurately reflects the 19th century situation. Moreover, colonial/pre-colonial and modern/traditional dichotomies perpetuate the commonly expounded view that the main watershed, in terms of an alteration in women's role and status, was the establishment of the colonial administration from the early 1890's.<sup>1</sup> Using these words in historical studies of African societies is clearly problematic not least because they are descriptive words which often still carry many of the negative, generalising connotations typical of the colonial vocabulary from which they arose. Thus, they often mask the dynamic, progressive aspects of indigenous systems which makes the task of documenting historical change all the harder.<sup>2</sup>

### The Sources.

Overall, surprisingly little use has been made of some of the most important primary sources for historical studies on

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<sup>1</sup> See I. Amaduime, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* (Zed Books, 1987); E. Boserup, *Women's Role in Economic Development* (Earthscan, 1989); and N. Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilised: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965* (University of California Press, 1982).

<sup>2</sup> M. Etienne and E. Leacock (eds), *Women and Colonisation: Anthropological Perspectives*, p.5. (Praeger, 1980).

women in Yorubaland.<sup>1</sup> The reasons for this may be many, however it seems that in the past there has been a general tendency to be content to assume that there is a lack of material dating from the 19th century itself on which to base historical studies on women's economic and labour history in Africa.<sup>2</sup> Clearly these are problems that arise from taking an unsystematic and ahistorical approach to research and study on women's history.

This study is based as far as possible on various primary sources that have remained largely untapped for historical studies on women in Yorubaland. The Anglican Church Missionary Society 'Yoruba Mission' archives (hereafter CMS) are undoubtedly one of the most important yet under-used sources of material on Yoruba women.<sup>3</sup> Dating from 1844 onwards, the archive chiefly

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<sup>1</sup> I have noticed that this also applies to many studies on women in Yorubaland that deal with development and related issues. Although these studies are not essentially historical, for the purpose of providing background information or a starting point, they often devote some space to explaining women's pre-colonial position. However, information is not based on well researched material and consequently many myths, generalisations and misconceptions about women's pre-colonial history are perpetuated. This obviously hinders a true understanding of the nature and extent of developments and changes in women's lives over the centuries.

<sup>2</sup> For example, one author erroneously suggests that it is inevitable that there is a relative paucity of literature on slavery and the slave trade in Africa since information on the transmission of an individual African from an earlier non-slave situation, through the hands of Africans, to the point where he or she was handed over to non-Africans, is almost non-existent". See, P.E.H. Hair, 'Antera Duke of Old Calabar: A Little More About an African Entrepreneur', in *History in Africa*, No.17, 1990. Both Robin Law and Paul Lovejoy have recently initiated an international research programme titled 'The Development of An African Diaspora: The Slave Trade of the Nigerian Hinterland, 1650-1900', which aims, among other things, to bridge the gap between historical understanding of slavery in the African diaspora and the history of enslavement and slavery in Africa itself. As part of this project a number of scholars are involved in research tracing the history of both individual and groups of slaves from capture within Africa and, as far as possible, thereafter. Even at this early stage it is clear that much evidence on enslavement and slave trading within Africa does in fact exist.

<sup>3</sup> I would like to express my thanks to John Peel who shared his extensive knowledge of the Yoruba Mission journals with me and gave me valuable and time-saving advice prior to my research trip to the CMS archives. J.D.Y. Peel, *Problems and Opportunities in An Anthropologists Use of A Missionary Archive* (Unpublished paper, 1994). As far as I am aware E. Adeniyi Oroge and Toyin  
(continued...)

consists of correspondence from various church agents directed to the CMS Secretary. Each missionary or church agent maintained an almost daily, quarterly or bi-annual journal, of which extracts were taken to be sent back to CMS headquarters.<sup>1</sup> The archives also contain the reports of fact-finding or proselytising missions to other towns and areas, petitions, treaties and letters from Yoruba authorities and individuals, foreigners, and colonial and CMS affiliates. Not surprisingly, the journals are full of information on matters relating to religion, however there is a fair amount of material on political and social affairs in various towns, cultural practices and political relations between both Yoruba towns and their neighbours and the colonial administration at Lagos.

Another valuable source of material on the Yoruba is the Foreign and Colonial Office correspondence of the Consul and consular officials and their agents operating mainly at the coast of Yorubaland from the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Additionally

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<sup>3</sup> (...continued)

Falola are the only people to have used Yoruba Mission journals for studies on slavery in Yorubaland. See Oroge, *The Institution Of Slavery in Yorubaland with particular reference to the 19th century*, PhD. Thesis, University of Birmingham, 1971, and 'The Fugitive Slave Question In Anglo-Yoruba Relations, 1861-1886', in *JHSN*, Vol.8, No.1, 1975; T. Falola, 'Missionaries and Domestic Slavery in Yorubaland in the 19th Century', in *JRH*, Vol.14, 1986, pp.181-192. Additionally, both J.F.A. Ajayi and E.A. Ayandele have used the mission documents for extensive studies of the Christian missions in Nigeria, details of which can be found in the bibliography.

<sup>1</sup> Earlier documents concerning the Yoruba are in the Sierra Leone Mission series, classified CA1. The Yoruba Mission journals written before 1880 are ordered according to the name of the agent (classified CA2 O), after 1880 they are ordered consecutively, by year (G3 A2).

<sup>2</sup> The main categories that contain information on the Yoruba area in the 19th century are, CO2/13,15 and 16: Reports of Clapperton's various journey's into the interior 1821-30; CO69: Gold Coast, Despatches including Lagos; CO147: Lagos, Confidential Print; CO879: Africa, Confidential Print; FO84: Slave Trade Series, West Africa, Bight of Benin, Lagos; FO541: Slave Trade, Confidential Print; FO881: Africa, Confidential Print. All incoming correspondence was recorded in registers which are also available.



these documents include correspondence between private individuals and the consulate.<sup>1</sup> Correspondence specifically on the Yoruba area grew after 1849 when the British Government appointed John Beecroft as Consul for the Bights of Benin and Biafra, established the Lagos Consulate in 1852 and made Lagos a colony in 1861.<sup>2</sup> Kristin Mann has utilised these sources for detailed historical studies on women, labour and slavery in early colonial Lagos on the coast of Yorubaland; however, the documents have remained largely untapped as sources for studies on women in the interior.<sup>3</sup>

An additional category of source material consulted is the numerous articles and accounts written by various individuals and groups residing in, and travelling through Yorubaland, dating from the early years of the century onwards. Included in this category are three accounts produced by American Baptist missionaries of journeys through and residence in the western area of Yorubaland in the mid-19th century.<sup>4</sup> Accounts from agents

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<sup>1</sup> Selected documents from this source are reproduced in the Parliamentary Papers (hereafter PP) re-published by the Irish Universities Press, more specifically the Slave Trade Series and various reports and correspondence on Lagos and the Yoruba Wars in Colonies, Africa Series.

<sup>2</sup> R. Smith, 'The Lagos Consulate, 1851-61: An Outline', in *JAH*, Vol.15, No.3, 1974.

<sup>3</sup> See K. Mann, 'Owners, Slaves and the Struggle for Labour in the Commercial Transition at Lagos', in R. Law (ed), *From Slave Trade to Legitimate Commerce* (1995); *Abolition and the Organisation of Labour in Early Colonial Lagos*, Paper presented at the Symposium on The End of the Atlantic Slave Trade at the University of Stirling, 1993; *The Emancipation of Female Slaves in Colonial Lagos*, unpublished paper, 1991.

<sup>4</sup> W. H. Clarke, *Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland 1854-1858*, J.A. Atanda (ed), (Ibadan University Press, 1972); T. J. Bowen, *Adventures and Missionary Labours in Several Countries in the Interior of Africa from 1849 to 1856* (Frank Cass & Co., 1968); R.H. Stone, *In Africa's Forest and Jungle* (Edinburgh, 1900).

of journeys and missions in Lagos and Yorubaland were also consulted such as those by Captain John Adams (1823), Captain Hugh Clapperton (1825-26), the Lander brothers (1830) and Richard Burton (1860).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, short reports were also published containing information on the Yoruba such as Robert Campbell's account of his journey through the Egbado and Egba area in the west as part of a Niger Valley exploration team in 1859-60.<sup>2</sup> Finally, numerous articles were produced by various experts and academics affiliated to institutions and societies of various fields of discipline. However, it is not always clear whether or not the authors of such papers actually lived or travelled in Yorubaland so these papers must be used with caution.

Among the main sources that I have not been able to use are the numerous records and archives held in Yoruba towns and data collected from oral informants. Limited resources ruled out a research trip to Nigeria itself. However, the established work of Kristin Mann on women in 19th century Lagos, some of which is based on Lagos court records, indicates that local interior court records might also be useful as sources for information pertaining to women.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Judith Byfield has fruitfully used

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<sup>1</sup> J. Adams, *Remarks on the Country Extending from Cape Palmas to the River Congo*, 1823 (Frank Cass & Co, 1966); Hugh Clapperton, *Journal of A Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa from the Bight of Benin to Soccatoo*, 1825 (Frank Cass & Co, 1966); R. Hallet (ed), *The Niger Journal of Richard and John Lander*, 1830 (Routledge and Keegan Paul, London, 1965); Richard F. Burton, *Abeokuta and The Cameroons Mountain*, Vols I & II (London 1863)..

<sup>2</sup> R. Campbell, *A Pilgrimage to My Motherland: Journey Among the Egbas and Yorubas of Central Africa* (London, 1861); M.R. Delaney, *Official report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party 1859-60*, (University of Michigan Press, 1969).

<sup>3</sup> See K. Mann, 'Women, Landed Property, and The accumulation of Wealth in Early Colonial Lagos', in *Signs*, Vol.16, No.4, 1991, and 'Women's Rights in law (continued...)

the District Commissioners', Local Court and Council records for her detailed work on the Adire industry in late 19th and early 20th century Abeokuta. Much more untapped information on women is also contained in private papers held by the National Archives at Ibadan.<sup>1</sup>

Although I have not undertaken a research trip to the Yoruba area in order to gather oral evidence, I have thought about the possible limitations and potential of oral evidence for my work and gained a limited idea of the character and scope of oral data by looking at the work of those who have used it to collect information for various studies on women in the Yoruba area.<sup>2</sup> Oral evidence can be collected from a number of sources, such as official historians, those who recite *oriki*, or praise poems associated with an individual, and from private individuals willing to recount the history of their family. Although oral and written sources differ in distinct ways, they have many similar limitations; just as a historian would record (in writing or on tape) the spoken word of an informant, and later transcribe it as oral testimony, many of the missionaries and translators used

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<sup>3</sup>(...continued)

and Practice: Marriage and Dispute Settlement in Colonial Lagos', in J. Hay & M. Wright (eds), *African Women and The Law: Historical Perspectives* (Boston University Publication, 1982). In a personal communication Kristin Mann informed me that both the Badagri records (dating from the 1860's onwards) and the Epe records 1890's onwards) were full of information on women. Although these records relate to towns that were part of the Lagos colony, Epe at least had more in common with interior towns than Lagos, and may be of interest.

<sup>1</sup> Kristin Mann has informed me that Bishop Phillips papers do contain information about women, especially their domestic conflicts, while there are also other personal papers available.

<sup>2</sup> For example Karin Barber, Kristin Mann, Sandra Barnes, Cheryl Johnson and LaRay Denzer.

by colonial agents similarly recorded what others were telling them in the many documents and journals classed as written sources. Although in both cases the time lapse between hearing and transcribing information is relatively short, both sets of evidence are vulnerable to many similar distortions; for example, those deriving from bias on the part of both the informer and the person recording what has been said and from the loss of expression and meaning conveyed by the intonation and emotion of the spoken word when it is transcribed.

Among the people that I might have interviewed are local historians, chiefs and dignitaries, *oriki* performers and the descendants, relatives and neighbours of women that are referred to by name and location in written sources. This last category would include women who were rich traders, titled chiefs, slaves and some that were described in ways which might convey their position, ('powerful', 'influential' or 'great'). It might also have been profitable to speak to current female market traders and crafts-women.

Such oral data might prove difficult to interpret and utilise; informants may be selective or misleading in recounting certain events and episodes in the history of their family or neighbourhood for many reasons. For example, some people may not wish to reveal that their ancestors held slaves or discuss aspects of the domestic slave system, while others may not wish to emphasise that their ancestors might have been slaves,

especially if the social and economic status of the family has improved in the intervening years.

Oral evidence collected from local official historians might prove to be the most problematic. In the first place an official historian can be expected to relate past events as part of a collective tradition which tends to emphasise key historical developments in the history of a town rather than dwell on the details of the life history of individuals other than those that were prominent in these developments; in most cases men. Moreover, often rival historical accounts exist which are not only subject to revision, but can be supplemented by written accounts.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, details about the life of named women can be modified, added or missed out in order to portray ideals and/or justify past events, both at the time of their occurrence and much later. For example J. Lorand Matory has drawn attention to the constant revision of the multiple historical accounts of Igboho, in the Oyo area, which often reflect beliefs about past and present gender roles and current political conflicts over the legitimacy and supremacy of rival chieftaincy titles. Oyo oral traditions recall that the Oyo-Igboho ruler, Orompoto, credited with introducing cavalry into the Oyo military in the 16th century, was a man, while Igboho accounts contend that Orompoto was a woman. Yet another version advocates that a male Orompoto must have changed into a woman before taking the throne.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For example, J. Lorand Matory pointed out that rival historical narratives of Igboho were often recalled with added quotes from Johnson's *History of The Yorubas*. Matory, J.L. *Sex and the Empire That is No More*, p.77.

<sup>2</sup> Lorand Matory, *Sex and the Empire that is No More: Gender and the*  
(continued...)

Moreover, official historical accounts of people and events usually mix factual and legendary material. What may at one time have been the details of a real event involving a real woman, may be altered and exploited over time for various purposes. Many years later the account acquires a mythical quality. For example a woman may be portrayed as an ideal of womanhood, as in the oft-recounted legend of Moremi of Ife which has become part of Ife's official history. Although official oral accounts of women are problematic, they can be useful for historians. Comparing various accounts of people like Orompoto and Moremi helps to illuminate ideas about past gender roles and what might have been considered as both ideal and unacceptable feminine attributes and behaviour. Also in the oral genre are *oriki* and *ijala*. Studies by both Karin Barber and Bisi Ogunsina suggest that these particular forms of oral information may be excellent sources of historical data on women, gender roles, relations and ideology.<sup>1</sup>

This line of enquiry would probably yield very little on women apart from those ladies that were titled, such as the Iyalode, Erelu or an influential female member of a royal family. Much of this material is preserved in written form in the colonial archives since colonial agents were often informed by official historians or given details from established oral

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<sup>2</sup> (...continued)

*Politics of Metaphor in Oyo Yoruba Religion*, (University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

<sup>1</sup> Ogunsina, Bisi. 'Gender Ideology: The Portrayal of Women in Yoruba Ijala', *African Languages and Cultures*, Vol.9, No.1, 1996, pp.83-93.

accounts. Although the 19th century oral accounts were vulnerable to many of the same distortions as current versions, in a preserved written form they at least provide a less remote and sharper record of oral accounts both of women and 19th century internal politics.

To return to the problem of the apparent lack of historical studies on women in interior Yoruba towns in the 19th century, it is possible that many researchers have assumed that available primary source documents will not contain adequate information on women because they were predominantly written by male missionary and colonial officials who were not innately or primarily interested in, or concerned with, women and their affairs. Indeed, I had some of these same preconceptions when I started my research. I eagerly sought out primary sources specifically written by women, such as the wives of missionaries, colonial officials and traders who had lived or travelled in the Yoruba area. Based on the assumption that a woman was bound to be more interested in other women than a man, I was sure that their journals would be bursting with quality information on Yoruba women's lives over the period: I was disappointed.

In the first place, the number of Western women that actually spent enough time in Yorubaland in the 19th century to write about their experience is minimal. Of course, some women did travel and live in the Yoruba area usually in association with consular, trading or missionary agents. It is possible and

likely that they kept private journals, letters and papers that were never revealed to the public or published and these may still survive in church institutions and family homes somewhere. The main such source for 19th century Yorubaland is Anna Hinderer's diary of her residence in Ibadan between 1853 and 69.<sup>1</sup> However, other accounts are available in both the CMS archives and in the Rhodes House Africana Manuscript Collection.<sup>2</sup>

Some of the most well known narratives were produced by women that had not actually been in Yorubaland.<sup>3</sup> They are largely based on second-hand information and are often overly romantic and simplified for European public consumption. For example Miss Barber's glossy account of life in Osiele, a satellite village of Abeokuta, was written with a view to encouraging donations to the CMS 'Coral Fund'. In 1861 Burton scathingly, but accurately, pointed out the limitations of Miss Tucker's portrait of Abeokuta, published in 1857, quipping,

"The frontispiece to 'Sunrise Within The Tropics' should be called "what Abeokuta ought to be". Like the little book itself, it is all *couleur de rose* - Africa, with an Italian tint".<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Hinderer, *Seventeen Years in The Yoruba Country* (Seely-Jackson & Halliday, London, 1872).

<sup>2</sup> The Rhodes House collection contains diaries kept by the wives of colonial agents and employees stationed in Nigeria; however, they date mainly from the early 20th century onwards. Female missionaries and CMS employees are listed in the *Register of Missionaries* (1904). Five were stationed in Abeokuta in the late 19th century, while others worked in Lagos or were associated with the Yoruba mission in general. The earliest account seems to be that of Annette J. Boyd in 1879; she was an assistant in the Female Institution at Lagos.

<sup>3</sup> For example see, M.A.S. Barber, *Oshielle* (London, Nisbet 1857); and Miss C. Tucker, *Abbeokuta or Sunrise Within The Tropics* (1853) which was compiled before Tucker had actually been to West Africa. For contemporary commentary see, R.F. Burton, *Abeokuta and the Cameroons Mountains*, p.85,87, (London, 1863).

<sup>4</sup> Richard. F. Burton, 'Ascent of the Ogun', Letter from Burton to Dr. Norton Shaw in, *JRGS*, Vol.6, 1861. In his later book *Abeokuta and the Camaroons*



Fortunately a fair number of letters and petitions that were recorded on behalf of Nigerian women are preserved in various collections of 19th century documents. These mainly consist of letters about various matters addressed to the colonial authorities and missionaries. Depositions and interviews relating to court cases involving women (mainly female slaves and runaway slaves) exist and are contained in both the Colonial/Foreign Office and CMS papers and, as indicated by Kristin Mann's work, throughout the District and Native Court records. These were generally statements dictated by the women involved in such cases that were literally translated and transcribed, usually by a repatriate Yoruba official. This material is particularly informative on the origin and development of women's enslavement, their duties and treatment, and on matters relating to domestic conflicts and divorce.

The majority of the sources share a number of limitations. Most references to women are scattered throughout journals and documents and many details are often recorded as incidental observations or notes. In particular, the CMS missionaries were fond of making quick references to the trade of the many women they encountered and engaged in religious discourse with: however, rather frustratingly, they very rarely expanded on the details of women's economic activities.<sup>1</sup> Alternatively, on other

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*Mountains* he takes another opportunity to criticise it stating "Oshielle is written in a friendly, kindly, and amiable spirit, overlaying the black with copious whitewash, and forming a sad contrast with reality", p.85.

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. J.C. Muller, who was stationed at the Abeokuta mission from 1848-50 made this statement in 1849, which provoked wistful thoughts from this  
(continued...)

occasions the missionaries embellished their accounts, relating sensational stories about actual events often for the express benefit of maintaining the interest and financial support of the home audience for the work of the missions. A further problem arises when one considers that the bulk of people attracted to the missions and the majority of people that the missionaries encountered in their almost daily wanderings around the town markets were women. One has to be cautious that the information supplied both about and by these women is not distorted by this disproportion and any hidden agendas that both the missionaries and the women themselves might have had. For example, the relative lack of accounts given by or written about men concerning incidents of domestic violence and divorce, makes it more difficult to come to balanced, solid conclusions about the nature, frequency and extent of such issues.

The main attraction of the CMS journals is that they are mainly first-hand accounts. They not only allow for a deeper understanding of women's position in individual towns, but also for comparisons to be made between women's lives and rights between towns. Additionally, more than 57% of the CMS journals were actually written by Yoruba pastors and catechists while the majority of non-Yoruba missionaries endeavoured to learn the language. Consequently, the missionaries engaged in one to one conversation with people, and unlike many consular officials,

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<sup>1</sup>(...continued)

researcher of what information his journals might have contained; "on perusing my journal the reader may find it very dry. But let it be told, that were I to fill up the skeleton with flesh, the sheets would not suffice to write down all the minor events that took place in the last quarter", CMS, CA2070/11, 24th Sept 1849.

they did not generally require a translator. Thus their accounts may be far more reliable on finer points of detail recorded from conversations and meetings with Yoruba people.

In contrast the Consul and his officials were largely based at the coast in Lagos and were far more reliant on second and third-hand information and in some cases badly translated accounts relating to interior affairs, thus they may have been more prone to misinterpret events and circumstances than the missionaries. These problems were not always lost on foreign agents. In the late 1820's the Lander brothers cautioned of their account of their journey to Oyo;

"So innumerable are the mistakes which the smattering of ignorant native interpreters never fails to occasion, that we despair of getting much accurate information on any of these heads. We can only answer for what we see"

and further,

"it would require a long residence in this country, and a perfect acquaintance with its language, to enable a foreigner to form a correct judgement of its laws, manners, customs, and institutions, as well as its religion and the form and nature of its government".<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless the Foreign and Colonial Office documents are arguably the best source of information on women and slavery in 19th century Yorubaland. Additionally, the documents contain a fair amount of material on other issues relevant to women. For

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<sup>1</sup> R. & J. Lander, *op.cit.*, p.89. Additionally, appointed by the consular authorities to explore the eastern area of Yorubaland in 1858, not more than halfway through his journey Daniel J. May complained, "The task of collecting information... is known to be difficult in this country. How much this would be increased, and how much its value be impaired, by passing through an interpreter whose knowledge of the English language is insufficient and his comprehensibility worse, I here and throughout my journey have painfully learnt". See, D.J. May, 'Journey in The Yoruba and Nupe Countries in 1858', in *JRGS*, Vol.30, 1860, p.215.

example matters relating to debt - in particular the frequent seizure of individuals as ransom for repayment (panyarrying) - are common, and women were often the unfortunate victims of these abductions.<sup>1</sup> The main focus of the despatches is on the political and economic state of the Lagos Protectorate and interior towns. To some extent one must always keep in mind that much of this material relates to Lagos and the coastal area. However, as far as studies on interior women are concerned, some of the limitations of the material are alleviated by the fact that there are also many letters written by Yoruba authorities, missionaries, traders and private individuals, as well as reports and letters from colonial agents on official missions in interior areas. Both men and women from interior towns who were seeking protection, redemption or legal redress at the consulate also gave accounts of their position. To some extent this material provides less remote evidence on interior women, and further allows one to make comparisons between women's position in interior towns and Lagos after annexation in 1861.

Western cultural values also played an important part in forming the character and limitations of accounts written by both men and women. As a middle class Victorian woman, Anna Hinderer's identity and concerns were typically deeply related to her husband's work and her position as the wife of a missionary.

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<sup>1</sup> For examples, PRO, CO147/4, No.68, Enc, Glover to Didelot, 3rd Aug 1863; CO147/40, No.63, Griffith to Ussher, 1880; CO147/42, No.289, Griffith to Ussher, 1880; PP, Vol.63, Colonies, Africa Series, No.8, Enc, 2nd Part of Report by Henry Higgins and Oliver Smith on a 'Mission to the Tribes Interior of Lagos', 20th June 1887.

Throughout her journal her interest in women is clearly limited to her concern with the mission's work, in particular the missionary school and the many incidents of religious persecution endured mainly by women. Although in this sense the book does give a valuable insight into domestic tensions, gender relations and the persecution of women, it does not contain an abundance of information on or concern with women in any other context than that directly related to the mission and religion.

However, as noted earlier the vast majority of primary sources used in this study were written by men. Western values and ideals concerning women clearly shine through in several accounts. A few examples illustrate the point: Clapperton (1825) and the Lander brothers (1830) make it obvious both that they are intolerant and unused to the general confidence and outspokenness of Yoruba women. Travelling from Badagri to Ijanna Clapperton typically complained

"it is beyond the power of African despotism to silence a woman's tongue; in sickness and in health, and at every stage, we have been obliged to endure their eternal loquacity and noise".<sup>1</sup>

Their western ideal of womanhood as being essentially polite, composed and passive has clearly been affronted. Similarly, the missionary Thomas Bowen subjectively interpreted Yoruba marital obligations commenting,

"Men, of course, have the privilege of divorcing their wives, and the matter is made all the easier from the fact that every woman is a free-dealer, who labours for herself and supports herself and has no claim on her husband's property... is sole owner of her property and earnings,

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<sup>1</sup> Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition*, p.13; For similar attitudes see, Richard and John Lander, *The Niger Journal*, p.71,79.

[and] is not obliged to work for her husband and has no claim on him for support, either for herself or her children. In this way the man escapes the burden of supporting his wives and children".<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps revealing his own experience of the pressures that western ideals of masculinity brought to bear on men, he clearly chooses to see this arrangement as a great relief for the husband and not in terms of the economic independence it gave the woman. Thus there is no mention that a woman could also divorce her husband, or that one of the liberating effects of her economic autonomy was to facilitate the process.

Western perceptions of gender roles are also evident in the writing of some of the Christian Yoruba such as the CMS missionaries James and Samuel Johnson.<sup>2</sup> In particular, Samuel Johnson often described independent, politically and socially vocal women as having a masculine character, temperament or nature,<sup>3</sup> as does the Rev Thomas King on occasion.<sup>4</sup> This was not a characteristically Yoruba outlook: it was generally socially acceptable for Yoruba women to express themselves. Rather, Johnson may be revealing a subscription to prevailing western attitudes about womanhood and femininity. By the same token,

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<sup>1</sup> Bowen, op.cit, pp.304-5.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2056/50, S. Johnson, Report of journey from Lagos to Abeokuta, 21st March 1877. Commenting on the great proportion of women in the carrying trade in 1877, he writes "...I must confess that this went against my own sense of respect for their sex..." and further that men should not leave women "to follow services that try the energy of their feeble sex". He does not consider the economic independence that such employment gave women or, as numerous other 19th century accounts attest to, that the women were so skilled at head-porterage that they frequently found no difficulty in carrying the heaviest loads'.

<sup>3</sup> For examples see, S. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, p.173,299; S. Johnson, CMS, CA2058/2, 1st May 1874.

<sup>4</sup> CMS, CA2061/50, King, 17th Aug 1853, describes Tinubu as "a woman of acute judgement and manly courage".

Yoruba perceptions of gender attributes and roles come out in some of the primary material supplied by Yoruba sources; these perceptions will be highlighted and discussed throughout.

The lack of available primary sources written by women makes reliable comparison with those written by men difficult. However, one can safely say that material written by, or on behalf of, both men and women, whether European or Nigerian, focuses on the issues and priorities prescribed by their roles and governed by their own values and interests in any given situation, whether they were missionaries, missionary wives, indigenous priests and politicians, powerful female traders or slaves. Finally, such written sources, portions of which form the basis of the historical picture outlined in this study, are certainly quantitatively and qualitatively rich enough to reveal infinitely more than their authors ever intended.

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## &lt;&lt;&lt;::&gt;&gt;&gt; CHAPTER I &lt;&lt;&lt;::&gt;&gt;&gt;

## YORUBA FAMILY AND SOCIETY.

A Report on the Yoruba written in 1910 and referring to the last half of the 19th century asserts "Women as a general rule have no social position".<sup>1</sup> However, much of the earlier evidence consulted for this study disproves this assertion. Women were priestesses and key ritual functionaries in various cults; they were represented in government at various levels from palace administration to councils of chiefs; many women attained significant social positions due to their economic success and last but not least, they occupied and moved between different hierarchies of authority within the household. The following chapter provides a general outline of the organisation of Yoruba society and women's position within it. Much of the chapter is intentionally based on material written in the late 19th century and first half of the 20th century. Some of the information on the 'traditional' position of women put forward in certain of these ethnographies has become widely accepted as indicative of women's position in the 19th century. At appropriate points in the following chapters these (mis)interpretations will be challenged and/or clarified with reference to more contemporary, 19th century sources. Finally, the chapter is not intended to give the impression that Yoruba society was a static canvas on

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<sup>1</sup> Carr, Johnson, Sapara-Williams, Oke, Edun & Lawson, 'A Report on The Laws and Customs of the Yoruba', 1910, in Hopkins, A.G., 'A Report on The Yoruba', (hereafter, A Report..) *JHSN*, Vol.5, No.1, 1969, p.82.



which changes were added, rather, as further chapters will illustrate, it was complex and dynamic.

The physical environment of Yorubaland generally falls into three geographical and climatic zones: coastal, rain forest and savannah.<sup>1</sup> This environment has had a distinct effect on the development and character of the economy most notably affecting transport, access to agricultural and mineral resources and occupational specialisation. The Yoruba have an ancient history of urban settlement which has largely shaped their economic, political and social development (see Map 2).<sup>2</sup>

Social structure among the Yoruba was basically patriarchal at all levels. As many as twenty-one towns maintained a legitimate ruler claiming lineal descent from the first mythical King of the Yoruba, Oduduwa. Each Yoruba group maintained its own political system in the nineteenth century although the King of Oyo, the *Alafin*, was widely recognised as an authority among many of the towns incorporated into the Oyo Kingdom (and in some cases the former Oyo Empire).<sup>3</sup> In the early part of the century new towns such as Abeokuta, Ibadan and Ijaye arose which considered themselves as autonomous powers. The balance of power between the

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<sup>1</sup> N.A. Fadipe, *The Sociology of the Yoruba*, (1939) Chapter I.

<sup>2</sup> R. Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, Chapter I; N.A. Fadipe, *ibid*, Chapter II.

<sup>3</sup> Oyo had been a large and powerful state and Empire in the 17th and 18th centuries. From the early 19th century the Empire disintegrated and in the process the Oyo capital was re-located further south around 1836. In the text, Oyo before re-location is referred to as Old Oyo or Oyo-Ile (home/original settlement of Oyo) and afterwards as New Oyo. Evidence on Oyo cited from both Clapperton and the Lander brothers always refer to Old Oyo since their visits pre-date the re-location.

monarchies and the civil and war chiefs altered in these and many other towns in favour of the latter. In particular at Ibadan, in the centre of Yoruba country, a militaristic, meritocratic system developed in which the war chiefs dominated and there was no monarchy. Ibadan was the first Yoruba town to develop the Oyo female chieftaincy title, the *Iyalode*, along merit-based lines.<sup>1</sup> Abeokuta in the south-west consisted of various townships, each with its own council of chiefs (*Ogboni*) but with town-wide war and trade chiefs and female representation in the form of the *Erelu* (a female council member) and later, the *Iyalode*. The *Ogboni* councils in the south-western areas comprising the Egba and Egbado peoples and in the south-eastern Ijebu area (where the council was called the *Osugbo*) exercised government and administered justice with the aid of male-dominated, politico-religious, secret societies called *Oro* and *Elukun*. As mentioned previously, the coastal port of Lagos was made a British colony in 1861 and much of the land on either side of it was deemed a Protectorate under the jurisdiction of the consulate to all intents and purposes. Within this general system Samuel Johnson, the Yoruba missionary and historian, considered that Yoruba women could "make their voices heard in municipal and other affairs" principally through the *Iyalode*.<sup>2</sup>

The indigenous system of religious belief and worship in the 19th century was very complex and dynamic but basically consisted of belief in a supreme being, *Olorun* ('the owner of the sky') and

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<sup>1</sup> *Iyalode* translates as 'Mother of the Market'.

<sup>2</sup> S. Johnson, *The History*, p.77.

a vast number of intermediary deities, the *orisa*, to whom worship and propitiation was directed. Particular *orisa* were specific to a person or household. Some *orisa* were recognised across towns and among the Yoruba sub-groups while others were not. Ancestor worship probably predated the majority of *orisa* but by the 19th century ancestor cults such as the *Egungun* were developing further to play a more significant role in the social and political life of many towns.

By the 19th century Islam had spread southward mainly via itinerant traders, refugees and mallams into the Yoruba area. Christianity was introduced mainly from the mid 19th century when missionaries established stations in many Yoruba towns and ex-slaves who had been converted to or familiarised with Christianity at Sierra Leone and in the New World began to return to their homelands. It must be stressed however, that the number of practising Muslims and Christians remained a minority in most Yoruba towns during the century. Many of the sources reveal that most women who chose to convert to or adopt the doctrines and values of both Islam and Christianity often did so in a syncretic flexible manner, either combining belief and worship with the indigenous system of practice and/or choosing certain elements of observance and not others.

At a local level the compound (*agbo ile*) consisted of a collection of household buildings (*idile*) with an average of two/three rooms per family. The rooms were arranged around an open, central courtyard, each wife with her dependant children

having one or more rooms whilst her husband occupied a separate room.<sup>1</sup> The compound and its households was the most basic unit of residence and production. It consisted of the head man or *bale*, his wives, his unmarried/divorced/widowed daughters and his sons and their wives and children. In addition there may have been slaves and their children, pawns (*iwofa*) and various friends and strangers who were residing in the households under the protection of the *bale*.<sup>2</sup> If a compound got too congested, and one of the *bale*'s sons wished to establish his own compound, or, if irreconcilable disagreement occurred between the *bale* and one of his sons, sections of the compound could hive off and establish new residential areas. However, the new compound would still be linked to the original by kinship and lineage ties.

The compound was also patrilineal and the *bale* was the ultimate authority within the households. The *bale*'s sons deferred to his authority but had general control over the affairs of their own families. Polygamy was the social ideal of marriage, although some sources maintain that the Yoruba were mainly monogamic in the past.<sup>3</sup> The number of wives a man had depended upon his wealth, success in capturing slave women who could be taken as wives, and whether or not he had inherited any

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<sup>1</sup> In Ijesa the compound (*akodi*) arrangement differed slightly with each collection of family rooms being arranged around its own courtyard. See, J.D.Y. Peel, *Ijeshas and Nigerians: the Incorporation of a Yoruba Kingdom, 1890's-1970's* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.48-9.

<sup>2</sup> A Report, op.cit, p.77; P.A. Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, Vol III, p.540,885; Fadipe, op.cit, pp.97-105.

<sup>3</sup> S. Johnson, op.cit, p.113.; A Report, ibid, p.80.

wives from his father. In theory polyandry was not permitted for women.<sup>1</sup> Marriage was seen as a union of the two families involved and both parties played key roles in the betrothal and both the organisation and maintenance of the marriage. Fadipe reckoned that the average 'bride-price' or *idana* in Abeokuta up to 1918 was around £2.10s together with a gift of home-spun cloths and sometimes a goat, kola nuts and/or a bottle of gin, although Solanke reckoned in 1906 that it could reach as high as £10, if the girl's family were poor.<sup>2</sup>

A number of sources seek to emphasise the stability of marriages during the period and further suggest that it was mainly due to 'outside influences' such as Christianity, Islam and the establishment of a British colonial judicial system that marital tensions escalated and divorce increased. Thus, some authors state that divorce was both hard to obtain and uncommon in the 19th century,<sup>3</sup> although others suggest that it was easier to secure and more common.<sup>4</sup> In particular, the Report on Yoruba laws and customs contradicts itself by asserting that a man could "repudiate his wife at will" but later stating the exact opposite.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, it is generally asserted that a woman had to

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<sup>1</sup> A Report, *ibid*, p.81.

<sup>2</sup> N.A. Fadipe, *op.cit*, pp.77-78; Partridge, C., 'Native Law and Custom in Egbaland' (originally compiled by colonial Resident Officer, Mr. Solanke in 1906 for the District Commissioner), in *JAS*, Vol.10, No.40, 1910, p.425.

<sup>3</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, p.116; I. Delano, *op.cit*, p.142; N.A. Fadipe, *op.cit*, p.90.

<sup>4</sup> D. Forde, *The Yoruba Speaking Peoples*, *op.cit*, p.28; G. Parrinder, *Religion in an African City*, 1953, pp.171-2.

<sup>5</sup> A Report, *op.cit*, p.79,82.

return her 'bride-price' (*idana*) costs in order to finalise a divorce.<sup>1</sup>

Order of seniority among women in the compound was based on length of residence although a certain amount of respect for age existed.<sup>2</sup> One early 20th century source maintains that a woman could not take over the headship of a family, but under some circumstances she might be appointed as the senior authority in a household. Nonetheless, it was reported that "she cannot represent any member of the family before a public tribunal... The eldest living male member of a family... must fulfil this office".<sup>3</sup> Succession to public office was also predominantly limited to the male line. However, succession varied from one area to another in the 19th century. The northern towns generally maintained a strict agnatic system. Indeed Samuel Johnson emphasised that no succession was possible through the female line to the Alafin title at Oyo or in the Yoruba country.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, in the south and south-east, both the Ondo and Ijebu were cognatic and titles could be passed on through the female line.

The division of labour in Yoruba society was such that nearly every task and job was associated in some way with either of the sexes. Within this division, children carried out chores

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<sup>1</sup> *ibid*, p.83; P.A. Talbot, *op.cit*, p.433,635.

<sup>2</sup> N.A. Fadipe, *op.cit*, p.114.

<sup>3</sup> A Report, *op.cit*, p.77,78,86.

<sup>4</sup> S. Johnson, *The History of The Yorubas*, p.297.

and apprenticeships associated with the jobs they were expected to do in later life depending on their sex. It is generally accepted that women were prominent in trade while men dominated farming, although both men and women engaged in numerous other occupations: in the case of women this included weaving, spinning, dyeing, food-vending and pottery-making.<sup>5</sup> Free women were generally entitled to keep the proceeds of their labour and were often economically independent.<sup>6</sup> Labour was supplied by family members, slaves, *iwofa* (pawns) or in certain cases from the community as a whole. According to Fadipe domestic slaves were generally treated well and found no real difficulty in redeeming themselves; in particular, he stated that a slave woman taken as a wife automatically became free and there was no social stigma attached to any children born by her.<sup>7</sup>

Women with senior status in a household held the authority to control and influence other less senior members of the family and slaves. Social relations between females within the compound produced and validated hierarchies of authority which influenced the allocation of tasks and to some degree the division of labour and distribution of resources and income. A woman's ability to control other women and the degree of that control varied depending on the specific relationship that existed between them.

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<sup>5</sup> A Report, op.cit, p.82; N.A. Fadipe, op.cit, pp.87-89,147-57; P.A. Talbot, op.cit, p.909,920.

<sup>6</sup> A Report, op.cit, p.82; N.A.Fadipe, op.cit, p.80.

<sup>7</sup> Fadipe, op.cit, pp.181-2,188.

However, an important consequence of seniority in familial relations was that senior women, head wives for example, could use their authority to harness their labour and possibly also that of their children.<sup>1</sup>

Everywhere in Yorubaland land was freely available, was held within the community and could not be sold or alienated without the permission of the local ruler. The bale or some higher authority could grant permission for both men and women to use land which could then be passed down to children of both sexes.<sup>2</sup> However, in the case of the Oyo-Yoruba Johnson qualified this further, stating that if "the children are females, they will pass on to the male relatives, unless the daughters are capable of seeing the farm kept up for their own benefit".<sup>3</sup> Additionally, Daryll Forde stated that although Yoruba children could inherit land from their mother's lineage, they must live as part of her natal family in order to claim it.<sup>4</sup> Capital was also easily accessible to both sexes, most commonly from membership of a

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<sup>1</sup> A Report..., op.cit, p.81; N.A. Fadipe, op.cit, pp.114-16; P.A. Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, Vol.III, p.678; I. Delano, *The Soul of Nigeria*, p.143.

<sup>2</sup> S.Johnson, op.cit, p.96; A Report, op.cit, p.85; Native of Yoruba, 'Native System of Government and Land Tenure in the Yoruba Country', in *JRAS*, Vol.1, Part 3, 1902, pp.312-5; 'White Ant', 'Practical Notes on the Yoruba Country and Its Development', in *JRAS*, Vol.1, Part 3, 1902, p.318; P.A. Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, Vol II, pp.683-84; D. Forde, *The Yoruba Speaking Peoples of South Western Nigeria*, pp.25-6.

<sup>3</sup> S. Johnson, op.cit, p.96.

<sup>4</sup> D. Forde, op.cit, p.26.



savings or credit union called the *esusu*.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, N.A. Fadipe specifically states in relation to women that "It was the duty of the husband to supply his wife with the capital needed for starting a trade".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, p.119; Fadipe, *The Sociology of The Yoruba*, p.256.  
<sup>2</sup> Fadipe, *op.cit*, p.87.

## &lt;&lt;&lt;::&gt;&gt;&gt; CHAPTER II &lt;&lt;&lt;::&gt;&gt;&gt;

## WOMEN AND THE COMMERCIAL TRANSITION.

After almost half a century of debate, historians are still discussing how abolition and the commercial transition to exporting vegetable products rather than slaves across the Atlantic affected West African societies.<sup>1</sup> Anthony Hopkins, one of the first historians to expand exploration of the topic, generally focused his attention on the fortunes of the ruling elite and warrior entrepreneurs who both supplied and controlled the Atlantic slave trade. He argued that the economic transition "posed acute problems of adaptation" for these sections of society not least because they faced new competition from relatively small-scale producers of vegetable produce, who found the industry far more accessible to them than the Atlantic slave trade had been.<sup>2</sup>

It is also commonly acknowledged in the relevant literature that the labour demands of the vegetable trade paradoxically helped to fuel the demand for slave labour within West Africa itself just as the Atlantic slave trade was coming to an end.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For the most recent contributions to the debate see, R. Law (ed), *From Slave Trade to Legitimate Commerce*, (Cambridge University Press, 1995) and 'Historiography of the Commercial Transition in 19th Century West Africa', in T. Falola (ed), *African Historiography: Essays in Honour of Jacob Ade Ajayi*, (Longman, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> See Anthony Hopkins, 'Economic Imperialism in West Africa: Lagos 1880-92', *EHR*, 1968 and *An Economic History of West Africa*, (Longman, 1973).

<sup>3</sup> Contemporary commentators popularly termed the new vegetable trade, 'Legitimate' trade or commerce as opposed to the illegitimate trade in slaves.

Hopkins himself briefly acknowledged the productive role of women in the new export trade.<sup>1</sup> Scholars of other Nigerian and West African societies have produced studies on women and commercial and labour transitions in the 19th century;<sup>2</sup> however, surprisingly little is still known about exactly how abolition and the commercial transition both affected and involved women and what role women played in the Yoruba economy as a whole during this dynamic historical period.<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of this chapter then is to explore the history

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<sup>1</sup> Hopkins suggested that female labour was important in palm oil production and that more research was needed on the subject of the division of labour between the sexes. A. Hopkins, *An Economic History...*, (1973) p.126, n.5. In his earlier, 1966 study 'The Lagos Strike of 1897: An Exploration in Nigerian Labour History', *Past & Present*, Vol.35, Hopkins noted the lack of attention paid to rural and urban labour forces in historical studies of the economy of Nigeria and considered the omission "remarkable in view of the predominantly labour-intensive character of economic development in Nigeria..". Sadly, as far research on the labour force involved in Yorubaland's transition to 'legitimate' trade is concerned, his statement generally still holds true today. Noted exceptions are the works of Kristin Mann, Caroline Keyes and Judith Byfield on women's labour history which are already cited and LaRay Denzer's study 'Women in Government Service in Colonial Nigeria, 1862-1945', Working Papers in African studies, Boston University, 1989.

<sup>2</sup> On the Igbo see, Susan Martin, 'Gender And Innovation: Farming, Cooking and Palm Processing in The Ngwa Region, South Eastern Nigeria, 1900-1930', *JAH*, Vol.25, 1984; *Palm Oil and Protest: An Economic History Of The Ngwa Region, South-Eastern Nigeria, 1800-1980*, (Cambridge, 1988); 'Slaves, Igbo Women and Palm Oil in The Nineteenth Century', in Law, *From Slave Trade...*, pp.172-194. On the Krobo of Ghana see, L.E. Wilson, 'The 'Bloodless Conquest' in Southeastern Ghana: The Huza and Territorial Expansion of the Krobo in the 19th Century', in *IJAHS*, Vol.23, No.2, 1990 (I am grateful to Martin Lynn for drawing my attention to this study); Lastly, Onaiwu Ogbomo acknowledges women's role in the palm oil export industry in his study 'Esan Women Traders and Pre-colonial Economic Power', in Bessie House-Midamba and Felix K. Ekechi (eds), *African Market Women and Economic Power*, (Greenwood Press, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> The only study on this topic dealing with interior Yorubaland is Robin Law's exploratory study, 'Legitimate Trade and Gender Relations in Yorubaland and Dahomey', in *From Slave Trade to Legitimate Commerce*, 1995. Toyin Falola concentrated on women's role in the internal economy in his paper, *The Place of Women in The Pre-Colonial Yoruba Economy*, University of Ife Seminar paper, 1978-9, although there is little discussion of the effects of the transition on women since Falola strictly defines the study as an exploration of women's role in the domestic economy. As far as South-west Nigeria is concerned, Kristin Mann has produced the most detailed and numerous historical studies on women, labour and abolition in 19th century Lagos. See K. Mann, *Abolition and the Organisation of Labour in Early Colonial Lagos*, paper presented at Symposium 'The End of The Atlantic Slave Trade: Its Impact on Africa', Stirling University, 17-18th April 1991; 'Owners, Slaves and the Struggle For Labour in the Commercial Transition at Lagos', in R. Law (ed), *From Slave Trade...*, pp.144-171.

of women, labour and the economy in 19th century Yorubaland; however, the study is by no means definitive. Information on some topics is scarce; however, a large body of primary evidence on women's position in the economy does in fact exist. Taken as a whole, the information gleaned is rich enough to present the following study. In addition, the Appendix at the end of the thesis provides the reader with an interesting supplement to the overall discussion of domestic slavery; the table traces in outline some of the biographical details of around 160 individually identifiable domestic slaves (mainly women) and hundreds of unidentifiable others which were picked out from the sources used for this study.<sup>1</sup>

### Some Aspects of The Impact of Abolition.

#### Gender Roles.

There is nothing novel in stating that the Atlantic slave trade was a business dominated by men. On the supply side, the capture and control of people destined to be slaves required capital and influence, and the male chiefs and great warriors had the power, wealth and influence not only to acquire slaves but to control and deliver them to the coast for sale.<sup>2</sup> Evidence relating to the pre-nineteenth century indicates that some women were also active in the Atlantic slave trade. During the reign

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<sup>1</sup> This material was initially compiled as a small contribution to the ongoing international research project co-ordinated by Robin Law and Paul Lovejoy, *The Development of an African Diaspora: The Slave Trade of the Nigerian Hinterland 1650-1900*, one of the aims of which is to compile a database of slave biographies.

<sup>2</sup> PP, Vol 41, No.7, Consul Campbell to Earl of Clarendon, 1st June 1854.

of Oba Akinsemoyin of Lagos around the 1760/70's a woman named Fajimilola was one of the biggest traders in export slaves and thus amassed the wealth to found *Oja Ita Faji* market and her own farm, named *Oko-Faje*.<sup>1</sup> In recognition of her success and support of Akinsemoyin the Faji chieftaincy title was created for her.<sup>2</sup>

In the 19th century itself, the Egba Iyalode, Madame Efunroye Tinubu and the Ibadan Iyalode, Madame Efunsetan, were both well known as active slave traders. It is widely recognised in the secondary literature that Tinubu dealt in slaves during her early business career.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, there is less evidence on Efunsetan, although it is possible to say that she also sold slaves to middlemen/women for Atlantic export from the 1850s.<sup>4</sup> Finally, Tinubu's political and business rival, the Lagos *Erelu*,

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<sup>1</sup> On the market see, Nina Mba, 'Women in Lagos Political History' in B. Agiri, A. Adefuye, & J. Osuntokun (eds), *History of The Peoples of Lagos State*, (Lantern Books, 1987), p.244. On the farm see CMS, CA2087/44, White, 27th Aug 1854. Fajimilola is also described as a 'wealthy trader and diviner' by Sandra Barnes in 'Ritual, Power, and Outside Knowledge', *JRA*, Vol.20, 3, 1990, p.267, n.26.

<sup>2</sup> T. Folami, *A History of Lagos, Nigeria*, (Exposition University Book, 1982), p.131.

<sup>3</sup> See Oladipo Yemitan, *Madame Tinubu: Merchant and Kingmaker*, (Ibadan, 1987), pp.13-14; Sandra Barnes, *The Politics of Support and Protection in West African Communities of the Early 19th Century*, Paper prepared for the ASUK Biennial Conference at Stirling University, 1992, p.2; Nina Mba, 'Women in Lagos Political History', op.cit, p.245.

<sup>4</sup> See Bolanle Awe, 'Iyalode Efunsetan Aniwura: Owner of Gold', p.62 in Awe (ed), *Nigerian Women in Historical Perspective*, (Ibadan, 1992).

Opu-Olu, also traded in slaves.<sup>1</sup>

It is worth noting that written and oral sources only consistently record details of the most famous or significant personalities of the day: these examples must surely only represent a small portion of the number of women that were active in the Atlantic slave trade. Certainly, there are many brief or one-off accounts in sources of other, less-famous women. For example in his 1820 account of his enslavement, a man named Josiah Yansey mentions women who both bought and sold him at various points in his journey through the hinterland to the coast for export.<sup>2</sup> The Yoruba missionary and liberated slave, Thomas King relates in his account of enslavement that it was a woman who bought and sold him along with his mother and niece.<sup>3</sup>

The significance of highlighting women involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade is to allow for a comparative consideration of how abolition affected the women and men involved. By the mid-19th century the British were actively promoting a larger export trade in vegetable products; mainly palm oil (epo), and later palm kernels. The "crisis of adaptation" described by Hopkins was characterised by complaints from the slave-trading elite to the Lagos Consul about the detrimental effect that abolition was having on both their income

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<sup>1</sup> S. Barnes, *The Politics of Support...*, op.cit, p.2.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA10126/121, W. Augustin Johnson.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2061/36, King, 7th April 1850. Bishop Ajayi Crowther was also bought by a woman.

and status.<sup>1</sup> For example in the Autumn of 1855 a deputation of Egba chiefs representing the former slave traders had a meeting with the Sierra Leonian and Brazilian traders in Lagos to discuss their collective grievances and declared that, since they had given up the slave trade

"those that have 300 slaves, now left 50; and they that have 200, left 40; and that of 100, left 20; that of 50, left 5. So they remember that it would have been better if they have been trading in slaves as they used to do... Sodeke [Egba war chief] asked the white man what to do after leave off from selling slaves. The white man told them to trade palm oil; so they ask how is that -is not a woman to sell oil, how can a man sell oil like a woman".<sup>2</sup>

Clearly, the men were having initial difficulty adapting to two additional requirements of the new trade. Firstly, they were reluctant to enter into a business which had been dominated by women for decades and had, by the mid-19th century, a strong gender association with the female sex.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, and consequently, at that stage they had little appreciation of the skills, pre-requisites, and labour intensity that the processing, trade and transport of palm oil demanded. Indeed the statement clearly implies that at that stage the chiefs were not retaining enough slaves within their households to engage in palm oil production on a scale that would earn enough to meet the profits they made in selling slaves for export.

Of course female slave traders faced some of the same

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<sup>1</sup> See A. Hopkins, 'Economic Imperialism..', op.cit, for a detailed study of the 'crisis' among chiefs and traders in coastal south-west Nigeria.

<sup>2</sup> PRO, FO84/976, No.22, Campbell to Clarendon, 2nd October 1855 (reproduced in PP, Vol.42, Africa Consular, Class B, No.17 and Enclosure).

<sup>2</sup> See, CMS, CA2049/104, Hinderer, 4th October 1851; Bowen, op.cit, p.308; R. Campbell, op.cit, p.48,51; Clarke, op.cit, p.245; S. Johnston, op.cit, p.124.

initial problems of adaptation that their male counterparts did. Indeed, Madame Tinubu consistently came into conflict with the Lagos Consulate because of her determination to continue both in the export of slaves and in her support of pro-slavery agents. However, a point which most previous studies on the effects of the transition have failed to recognise, due to their failure to carry out gendered studies, is that female slave traders were possibly in a better position to adapt quickly to the requirements of the palm oil trade than their male counterparts. Palm oil and other vegetable products had been produced and traded by women both for domestic consumption, and on a small scale to supply Atlantic slave ships for many years.<sup>1</sup> Both Tinubu and Efunsetan established their businesses trading in agricultural and other produce, eventually in conjunction with slave trading. Therefore, they already possessed the knowledge and skills and most importantly, the contacts and established trading networks associated with trade in palm and other produce, which their male counterparts did not.

Moreover, from the outset they had a greater appreciation of the labour that the industry required if it was to be pursued on a scale large enough to compensate for the financial loss precipitated by the demise of the export slave trade. They

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<sup>1</sup> As Martin Lynn points out in relation to West Africa in general. See, 'The West African Palm Oil Trade in the Nineteenth Century and the "Crisis of Adaptation"', p.60-61, in Law, *From Slave Trade...*, pp.57-77. Robin Law has recently highlighted the need for research on the provisioning of slave ships as a step toward understanding the nature and extent of interaction between the Atlantic trade and African domestic economies, R. Law, *The English in West Africa 1681-99*, paper read at Symposium on Sources for Studies on the Slave Trade held at Stirling University, April 1996.



continued to buy and use many slaves both in domestic work and palm oil production at the same time that the Egba chiefs mentioned earlier were complaining about the reduction in the number of their slaves.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile the male slave traders were faced with overcoming many more obstacles on the road to successful economic transition: the ideological hurdle of engaging in women's work; their comparative lack of familiarity (in terms of skill, knowledge and contacts) with the palm oil industry; and their apparent initial shortage of appropriate, i.e., female, labour. In the light of this situation it is possible to suggest that the female slave traders may have made the initial transition more smoothly than their male contemporaries.

### Sex Ratios.

There has been a long-running debate on the relative importance of supply and demand factors in influencing age and sex ratios in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Recent work by Eltis, Richardson and Behrendt estimating the sex ratio of slaves exported to the Americas from the eastern Bight of Benin (including Lagos) between 1810 and 1863 calculates that men accounted for 67.4 percent of the total slaves shipped. Moreover, the figures reveal a long-term trend of increasingly more men and children of both sexes, and less women being sold abroad between 1662 and 1863.<sup>2</sup> One would expect, as did the Rev. Henry Townsend,

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Delaney, 'Official Report of The Niger Valley Exploring Party', in *Search For A Place: Black Separatism and Africa, 1860*, (University of Michigan Press, 1969) p.79.

<sup>2</sup> See, David Eltis, David Richardson & Stephen D. Behrendt, *The*  
(continued...)

an Anglican missionary based in Abeokuta from 1848, that "since a large proportion of the slaves imported into America are males: a large disproportion of the sexes must therefore exist in Africa".<sup>1</sup> The imbalance would have been particularly noticeable both in towns that fell victim to the wars, raiding and kidnapping that supplied captives and in slave-market towns en route to the coastal ports which retained female slaves and sold on the men. Indeed Townsend later confirmed to the Select Committee on the African Slave Trade in 1849 that he estimated the female population of Abeokuta to exceed the male as a result of the active buying and retention of female, and sale of male captives in that town.<sup>2</sup> Historians are still searching for convincing reasons to explain why the proportion of women captives sold abroad was consistently less than men and children of both sexes. Eltis, Richardson and Behrendt suggest that future research should focus on supply rather than demand factors.<sup>3</sup>

Townsend's evidence indicates that the development of polygamy among the wealthy and powerful slave trading elite in

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<sup>2</sup>(...continued)

*Transatlantic Slave Trade in the Bights of Benin & Biafra: New Evidence of Long Run Trends from 17th-19th Centuries*, paper presented at the Workshop on the African Diaspora & the Nigerian Hinterland, York University, 2nd Feb 1996. Also, David Eltis & Stanley Engerman, 'Was the Slave Trade Dominated By Men?', *JIH*, Vol.23, 1992 and 'Fluctuations in Age and Sex ratios in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade 1663-64', *EHR*, Vol.47, No.2, May 1993.

<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2085/1, Rev. Townsend to Captain Trotter, Letter dated 31st Jan 1849.

<sup>2</sup> PP, Vol.6, Session 1850, Report of the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the African Slave Trade, May 1849, p.68.

<sup>3</sup> David Eltis, David Richardson & Stephen D. Behrendt, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade in the Bights of Benin & Biafra: New Evidence of Long Run Trends from 17th-19th Centuries*, paper presented at the Workshop on the African Diaspora & the Nigerian Hinterland, York University, 2nd Feb 1996.

Abeokuta may have been one reason why specifically adult females were being retained in the early 19th century: he told the Select Committee in 1849,

"the natives have told me that polygamy did not exist to the same extent to which it does now, but that it has resulted from the slave trade in this way, that a man has gone to war and he has made captives of men and women, and the women frequently he has preserved to be his wives; the men he has sold into slavery".<sup>1</sup>

Although lack of evidence makes it difficult to gauge to what degree polygamy existed before the Atlantic trade, it most certainly did exist: captive women would have been available from the North and from the spoils of local battles, and of course, free-born women became co-wives through normal marriage procedures and as tokens of political allegiance between towns.

A report on the Yoruba written in the late 19th century by four Yoruba men notes that in former days "Only kings were allowed to take more than one wife. A similar privilege was also granted by the king to powerful chiefs and wealthy men".<sup>2</sup> On the other hand Samuel Johnson indicates that in ancient Oyo (presumably before re-location further south at New Oyo around 1836), men were only allowed to marry women of the same status or origin: "free-born must be married to free-born, slaves to slaves and foreigners to foreigners".<sup>3</sup> It is not clear whether

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<sup>1</sup> PP, Vol.6, Session 1850, Report of the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the African Slave Trade, May 1849, p.68.

<sup>2</sup> A Report on the Yoruba, p.80. In, A. Hopkins, *JHSN*, Vol.5, No.1, Dec 1969.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, p.103; Johnson also asserted in relation to Yorubaland in general that "In ancient times... although polygamy was not actually forbidden, yet only rich folk could avail themselves of indulgence in that condition of life", *ibid*, p.113.

this rule was devised by the authorities to apply only to untitled or un-privileged men; if it applied to everyone the logical effect would have been to limit polygamy among the rich since free-born men would not be able to acquire numerous slave wives. Nonetheless, slave women could still be held as concubines and the evidence below strongly suggests that the restrictions did not apply to privileged men in Oyo before re-location.

Lack of sources makes it difficult to comment on the period before the early 19th century. However, at least as early as 1825/6 Clapperton witnessed the extent of polygamy in the Alafin's household on his visit to Oyo commenting "It was impossible to count the number of his ladies they were so densely packed".<sup>1</sup> Again at Ilaro in the Egbado area, the head chief told Clapperton that apart from his wives and concubines that were present with him on that occasion (c.200), the other half of them were housed at Oyo.<sup>2</sup> Although many of the women seen by Clapperton at Oyo were in fact *ilari* (slaves) and not *ayaba* (the Alafin's proper wives), the number of *ayaba* was large. Indeed, on more than one occasion in Clapperton's travels Yoruba chiefs and their households literally found it laughable that any man of standing should willingly limit himself to only one wife.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> H. Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition*, p.36. A fair number of these women were probably *ilari* or female slaves.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, p.10.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, p.9; Also for a similar exchange between Karaka, an Ilorin war chief, and Major Claude MacDonald in 1889 at Ofa: upon finding out that MacDonald has one wife Karaka says "why, that is absurd". See Mockler-Ferryman, A.F., *Up the Niger: A Narrative of Major Claude MacDonald's Mission to the Niger and Benue* (continued...)

Ideologically, clearly polygamy was well established. Although Clapperton gives no evidence on the extent of polygamy among the general population, perhaps the reaction of the more wealthy elements in society stated above indicates at least that polygamy was deep-rooted and of long-standing among the rich in earlier years. These men held a virtual monopoly on control and distribution of captives: they decided who they kept and who they sold.

Clearly these sources suggest an active policy to limit ownership and availability of female slaves to the rulers and head chiefs involved in supplying and buying slaves in early 19th century Yorubaland and possibly before. This implies, and is indeed stated by Samuel Johnson in the late 19th century, that the majority of people were necessarily monogamous. Nonetheless, as LaRay Denzer has pointed out, it is to be expected that as a Christian, Johnson would wish to promote the idea that the Yoruba were essentially monogamic in order to encourage people to return to so-called established Yoruba practices which were apparently akin to Christian doctrine.<sup>1</sup> However, whatever his motives were, the evidence strongly indicates that Johnson's opinion was in fact correct, at least for the earlier part of the 19th century. For the remainder of the population then polygamy remained the ideal, something that most men aspired to, until changes

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<sup>3</sup>(...continued)  
*Rivers*, p.202-3, (London, 1892).

<sup>1</sup> LaRay Denzer, *Yoruba Women in History*, p.4.

associated with the demise of the Atlantic slave trade and both the rise of the domestic slave trade during the era of palm oil exports and militarism increased the availability of and demand for women captives and general accessibility to them.

In particular in militaristic towns such as Ibadan a wider diffusion of wealth and easier access to slave women as rewards for service in battle encouraged the growth and spread of polygamy. Hinderer in 1861 explained the process whereby "a man for example catches four persons, two men and two women, the former are most sure to be sold coastward for shipment, whereas the latter, if not past the age, are, if possible kept to be additional wives and thus it happens that in this war-like town of Ibadan there is hardly a man however poor, with only one wife".<sup>1</sup> Samuel Johnson highlighted some further important aspects of these changes in practice when he explained that although the rich still added women captives to their harems in Ibadan "the younger men save on the expense of a dowry by making wives of their captives" and further that "male slaves had wives given them by their masters from among the slave women".<sup>2</sup> By 1887 Henry Higgins reported that "many wealthy chiefs have upwards of a thousand wives, and minor individuals as many as they can afford to keep".<sup>3</sup> Additionally female slaves were taken as wives in many other towns. Normal marriage procedures were not carried out and

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2049/124, Hinderer, Annual letter, 31st Jan 1861, Ibadan.

<sup>2</sup> S. Johnson, *The History...*, p.324,5.

<sup>3</sup> PP, Vol 63, No.6, Part 1 of Report by H. Higgins & O. Smith, 10th Feb 1887, p.33.

the women were generally considered inferior by free born wives and family members.<sup>1</sup>

Bowen likewise indicated the spread of polygamy among the poorer classes by the mid-1850s in western Yorubaland in general commenting, "Kings, nobles and rich men have large numbers of wives, and even the common people sometimes have two or three".<sup>2</sup> Indeed, while on his daily rounds in Abeokuta in June 1872, on two consecutive days the missionary Cole commented on individual instances of polygamy among the common people that he encountered.<sup>3</sup> In some of the more northern towns polygamy was widespread too. While the Rev. Stone was based at Ijaye around 1861/2 he commented that polygamy was "universal".<sup>4</sup> The missionary George Meakin noted in 1858 at Ilorin that "polygamy exists to a fearful extent in this town".<sup>5</sup> Indeed, apart from those who chose to follow Yoruba practices, Islamic law officially sanctioned up to four wives per man, regardless of wealth or status, among the practising Moslem population.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, some Moslem men acquired additional women who were added to their harem as concubines.<sup>7</sup> The universality of polygamy

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<sup>1</sup> PRO, CO147/57, No.288, Evans to Granville, Sept 1886; A Report..., op.cit, p.81.

<sup>2</sup> T.J. Bowen, op.cit, p.304.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2029/10, Cole, Abeokuta, 26th and 27th June 1872.

<sup>4</sup> R.H. Stone, *In Afric's Forest*, p.98.

<sup>5</sup> CMS, CA2069/10, Meakin, 2nd April 1858.

<sup>6</sup> S. Johnson, op.cit, p.117; J. Sabini, *Islam: A Primer*, (USA, 1987), p.111.

<sup>7</sup> PRO, CO879/58/580, No.47, McGregor to Chamberlain, 1899-1901. McGregor  
(continued...)

was further confirmed by other observers in the second half of the period.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the established practice of widow inheritance in Yorubaland during the period would have had the effect of augmenting polygamy, particularly during a period when premature death from warfare was also a factor.

Clearly, significant changes in the degree and extent of polygamy occurred in the 19th century. The end of the Atlantic trade, increasing militarism and the growth of the domestic slave trade broke the old elite's monopoly on female slaves and opened up possibilities for acquiring slaves to those who had previously been largely excluded. Polygamy became more intense among the powerful and more widespread among the rest of society particularly in militaristic towns such as Ibadan and Ijaye where a wider diffusion of wealth and easier access to women captives encouraged its growth and spread.<sup>2</sup> Overall, increases in both the degree and extent of polygamy may well have been linked to the increasing demand for female labour skills and reproductive ability in the era of the palm oil trade; a suggestion which will

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<sup>7</sup>(...continued)

witnessed that the Olowu of Iwo, although professing to be Moslem, had more than four wives.

<sup>1</sup> PRO, CO879/15/178, Gov. Lees, 1879, p.21, stated "All heathens and Mahammedans who are able practice polygamy"; In 1889 the Yoruba and African Ministers of interior Christian churches advised the Lagos legislature compiling the Divorce Act that polygamy had been and still was the "ruling practice" everywhere in Yorubaland among both Muslims and non-Muslims, see, PRO, CO147/71, No.261, Enc.1; Sir A. Moloney, 'Notes on the Yoruba and the Colony of Lagos', in PRGS, Vol.12, Series 2, 1890, p.604.

<sup>2</sup> The following are just some examples of the powerful men that had many wives; Sodeke supposedly had six hundred wives and Sagbua was said to have 50 wives (CMS, CA2085/1, Townsend, 31st Jan 1849, Abeokuta); Chief Shogkenu had c.200 wives (PP. Vol 40. 1854. Class B. Inc.4 in No36, Abeokuta); Are Kurunmi had c.4-600 wives (CMS, CA2077/22, Phillips Snr, 12th Nov 1857, Ijaye; Ogunmola's wives could be numbered by the hundreds (S. Johnson, *The History*, p.376).



be discussed in more detail below. Additionally, the evidence suggests one possible explanation for the active retention of specifically adult female captives within Yorubaland during the 19th century.

### The Division of Labour.

"The Africans... are great at division of labour, which, indeed they often so divide that the remainder is imperceptible".<sup>1</sup>

### Childhood.

Children were familiarised with the world of work from an early age as the Rev. Sunday observed when he spoke to a young mother, baby at her side, in Agbadu Street in Abeokuta selling hot yams and *agidi* (corn-flour blancmange).<sup>2</sup> If the child was a girl, as soon as she was capable she would begin to help her mother in small ways, whether she was trading, dyeing, making pots or preparing and cooking food. When boys were old enough to

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Burton, *Abeokuta and the Cameroons Mountain*, p.116,7. To my knowledge there are presently no historical studies of gender roles and/or the division of labour in 19th century Yorubaland; however, many studies deal with 20th century or present day developments and incorporate a small section on the pre-colonial situation. See, S. Afonja, 'Changing Modes of Production and the Sexual Division of Labour among the Yoruba', *Signs*, Vol.7, No.2, Winter 1981, pp.299-313; J.I. Guyer, 'Food, Cocoa, and the Division of Labour by Sex in Two West African Societies', *CSSH*, Vol.22, No.3, July 1980, pp.355-373; N. Sudarkasa (also known as Gloria Marshall), 'Division of Labour by Sex in Yoruba Society', Chapter II in Sudarkasa, *Where Women Work: A Study of Yoruba Women in The Marketplace and in the Home*, 1973 (developed from her Ph.D. Thesis, 1964); C. Johnson, 'Class and Gender: A Consideration of Yoruba Women during the Colonial Period', Chapter 13 in I. Berger (ed), *Women and Class in Africa*. For studies on Nigeria and Africa in general see S. Afonja, *Historical Evolution in the Sexual Division of Labour in Nigeria*, Paper presented at Meeting of experts on the Theoretical Frameworks and Methodological Approaches to Studies on the Role of Women in History, 1984; R.A. LeVine, 'Sex Roles and Economic Change in Africa', in J. Middleton (ed), *Black Africa: Its Peoples and their Cultures Today*, Collier Macmillan, London, 1970.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2084/1, Sunday, 30th Nov 1879; In 1910 Frobenius also noted that when mothers went to market their little girls went with them and learned everything, see L. Frobenius, *The Voice of Africa*, p.157.

leave their mother's care they likewise helped their mother carry loads, accompanied their father to farm or learned other trades such as weaving. Gradually they were given more and more responsibility until they had learned a trade.

Captain Hugh Clapperton noted the industry of children throughout his journey to old Oyo in 1825/6. At Ijanna in the Egbado area he noticed that boys were weaving cloth of about 4 inches in width in the weaving establishments that he visited.<sup>1</sup> Just outside Leobadda, to the west of Oyo, he met with a large caravan containing children who were carrying loads. These children may have been slaves since he notes that the caravan was "guarded by men with bows and arrows and swords, ten or twelve armed men marching between each fifty".<sup>2</sup> Further evidence related by Clapperton suggests that child slaves additionally performed other jobs.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, around the same time Richard and John Lander commented on the "numerous herds of cattle attended by little boys" on the trade road between Kano and Gonja to the north of Yorubaland.<sup>4</sup> In Yorubaland itself, in the south-west between Igbeji and Tshow they witnessed the use of slave children in carrying trading goods, writing, "children of not more than five or six years of age trudged after them [women], with loads that would give a full grown person in Europe a brain fever".<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition*, p.16-17.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, p.32.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, p.2,13.

<sup>4</sup> R. & J. Lander, *The Niger Journal*, in Hallet (ed), p.78.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, p.70.

The value and contribution of children's work to overall economic output became increasingly greater over the next two decades. Free-born children continued to contribute to household activities of all sorts. The Baptist missionary Rev. William Clarke commented in the mid-1850's that "It is nothing strange to see small children perfectly at home in the markets buying and selling with all the spirit and tact of grown persons".<sup>1</sup> Similarly in the early 1860's, the explorer Richard Burton commented on the numbers of children of all ages scattered about the markets engaged in various tasks.<sup>2</sup> By the mid-century boys were still playing a significant role in the production of cloth as suggested by William Clarke, who noticed that "it is common to see in the vicinity of the female weaving apartments small boys warping who seem as expert in their department as those who throw the shuttle...".<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, as the Rev. White witnessed at Otta in the south in 1855, girls from the ages of about 8-12 years old went about the streets selling different commodities.<sup>4</sup>

In general boys and girls followed separate lines of apprenticeship and duties related to the work that their father or mother (or some other adult guardian) engaged in. Thus the sexual division of labour in adult industry was established early on through the pattern of generational division of labour. It was more common for boys to work on their father's farm while girls

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<sup>1</sup> W. Clarke, *Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland*, p.265.

<sup>2</sup> R. Burton, *op.cit*, p.131.

<sup>3</sup> W. Clarke, *op.cit*, p.272.

<sup>4</sup> CMS, CA2087/46, White, 17th Jan 1855.

traded:<sup>1</sup> Hinderer noted in 1869 in Ibadan that "as soon as they are able to hold a cutlass and hoe" all boys helped their fathers on the farm.<sup>2</sup> The variety of work depended on what occupations adults engaged in; for example in Iddo, the native pastor Daniel Coker commented of the children aged around ten and over that, "the boys pull canoes and do works for fishing, the girls assist their mothers in selling of articles of food as fish etc".<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, girls often carried out many more duties than boys since they had to help their mothers with domestic chores such as preparing food, collecting water and looking after younger children. So much so that Samuel Johnson commented that, as with the adults, "Boys and young men certainly have more idle hours than the girls".<sup>4</sup>

However, some productive activities such as general farmwork required the labour of both boys and girls. Many of the missionaries commented on the irregular and seasonal attendance of children at the mission schools in most Yoruba towns due to the demands of this occupation. At Osiele, a satellite village of Abeokuta, in 1850 the Rev. David Hinderer lamented "I do not reckon upon a large number of day scholars, as the children are always wanted in the farms for fetching water, picking beans, and such like easy work".<sup>5</sup> Similarly, many of the missionaries in

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2087/89, White, Annual letter dated 1st Jan 1859.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2049/121, Hinderer, Half Yearly Report to 25th June 1869.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2028/4, Coker, 1872.

<sup>4</sup> S. Johnson, *The History of The Yorubas*, p.125.

<sup>5</sup> CMS, CA2049/100, Hinderer, Osielle, Oct 1850.

other towns complained of the same problem.<sup>1</sup> However, Hinderer later contrasted this with the situation in Ijebuland where "the children are not too much engaged in the farms until 10-12 years old when they are able to carry a load, unlike the other Yoruba towns".<sup>2</sup>

An early conditioning to the world of work was not simply intended to exploit children's labour for the benefit of the family. Children were also being trained to become self-sufficient. Drawing on his experiences while travelling through Yorubaland in the mid 1850s William Clarke considered that "the instinctive desire to trade manifests itself at a very early period in children who are early taught to take care of themselves by personal efforts".<sup>3</sup> Indeed Robert Campbell, a member of the Niger Valley Exploring party which travelled through Egbaland in 1859-60, further suggested that, "There is not a child among the Akus [another term for Yoruba]... who is not instructed in some means of realizing a living".<sup>4</sup> William Hoad, the Wesleyan Methodist missionary based at Oyo, indicated in 1896 that the reason for this early self-sufficiency was that "the conditions of life are so reversed that instead of the husbands supporting the wife and family, the wives and family often support the husband. So the little ones begin to work as

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2075/18, Olubi, Ibadan, 25th Sept 1866 and CA2075/33, 31st Jan 1876; CA2098/10, Young, Ode-Ondo, 30th May 1875; CA2078/19, Phillips Junior, Ode-Ondo, 15th Jan 1877.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2049/110, Hinderer, Remarks to the local Committee of the Yoruba Mission, March 1855. He considered that it would be more successful to have schools in the Ijebu towns since the children would be more available.

<sup>3</sup> W. Clarke, op.cit, p.265.

<sup>4</sup> R. Campbell, *A Pilgrimage to My Motherland*, p.48.

soon as they are old enough to balance a load on their head".<sup>1</sup> Early exposure to commerce also familiarised children with money, its value and the value of various goods.<sup>2</sup> Additionally because the financial burden of child support fell mainly on the mother, she encouraged her children to ease that burden through their contribution to and help in household duties and income-generating activities. Learning these skills was especially important for girls since in married life they were expected to largely support themselves and their children (and also their husband to some extent) and pass on the relevant knowledge of how to do so in turn to their children.<sup>3</sup> Leo Frobenius gives this illuminating account of one mechanism that encouraged early gender role playing in turn of the century Ibadan,

"The child gets a toy very early in life, a wooden dolly... These girls' dollies are called 'Allangiddi' [wooden doll]. The girl ties the doll on its back and walks about with it, just as it sees its mother do with its younger brothers and sisters. It plays with it just like a European children with theirs, and when it is put to sleep of nights, it lays down its 'allangiddi' by its side".<sup>4</sup>

#### Adulthood.

The gender association attached to certain jobs in childhood continued into the adult world of work. Based on his experiences travelling through mainly Western Yoruba towns, the Baptist

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<sup>1</sup> WMMS, West Africa Correspondence, Nigeria, 1893-1904, W. Hoad, Oyo, 18th March 1896.

<sup>2</sup> L. Frobenius, *The Voice of Africa*, Vol I, p.157-8.

<sup>3</sup> PRO, CO879/15/178, Information Respecting the Settlement of Lagos, Lieut. Gov. Lees, 1879; Stone, op.cit, p.23 (referring to Abeokuta in the 1860's).

<sup>4</sup> L. Frobenius, op.cit, p.158. It seems likely that Frobenius termed the doll 'Allangiddi' based on the name he heard it being called. The wording seems to stem from Omo-langi-igi, literally meaning 'child'- 'doll' - 'wood' or in other words a child's wooden doll.

missionary Thomas Bowen remarked in the 1850's that "for the most part men and women have their own occupations", although he noted that, "everyone is perfectly free to choose, follow, or change his occupation at pleasure" and later that "there is no legal or customary restraint as to the choice of occupations".<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless another resident in Yorubaland, R.H. Stone commented in the early 1860's that the women "most diligently follow the pursuits that custom has allotted them... they are indefatigable workers".<sup>2</sup> This suggests that the division of labour between the sexes was far more well established and that gender roles were more entrenched than Bowen indicated. However, the questions remain; just how rigid were gender roles in practice?, Were there any changes and how and why did they develop?. These questions and others will be addressed not only in this chapter but throughout the study.

Established wisdom contends that women did not farm in Yorubaland in the 19th century. Indeed, a fair body of 19th century evidence clearly states that women did not cultivate. The Baptist missionary Thomas Bowen noted in the mid 1850's that "it is worthy of particular remark that women never cultivate the soil as they do in Guinea" and further, in 1858 that it was "not reputable" for them to do so.<sup>3</sup> Bowen's observations on the division of labour in farming sit rather tenuously with his other statements suggesting that custom did not restrict access to any

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<sup>1</sup> T. Bowen, *op.cit*, p.308 and, *Grammar and Dictionary of The Yoruba Language*, 1858, p.xviii.

<sup>2</sup> R.H. Stone, *op.cit*, p.23.

<sup>3</sup> T.J. Bowen, *op.cit*, p.308 and *Grammar*, *op.cit*, p.xviii.

occupation. Around the same time Clarke also commented that "Females... are never known to cultivate the farms" in Yorubaland. Indeed, he stressed,

"So strong is the aversion of the native mind to this kind of female servitude that I have yet to see the first instance of a women engaged hoe in hand, in cultivating the soil".<sup>1</sup>

The gender roles portrayed in these sources strongly exclude women from cultivation. This association continued on into the 1860's when it was apparently still unheard of for a woman to farm, and, as Burton commented, still disreputable for them to do so.<sup>2</sup>

This distinct division of labour in cultivation in Yorubaland has not only been frequently mentioned in the primary sources above but perpetuated in various 20th century studies.<sup>3</sup> However, the relevant sections of secondary material dealing with the 19th century are not based on 19th century sources, rather, most authors have chosen to take the established viewpoint on the 'traditional' or 'customary' division of labour in farming at face value. Gloria Marshall's examination of the topic is very heavily based on Samuel Johnson's retrospective account which presents the same picture that Bowen, Clarke and others did before him.<sup>4</sup> Some secondary sources quote Marshall as their

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<sup>1</sup> W. Clarke, op.cit, p.245,260.

<sup>2</sup> R. Burton, op.cit, p.130.

<sup>3</sup> G.A. Marshall (also known as Niara Sudarkasa), *Women, Trade and The Yoruba Family*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Columbia, 1964, Chapter 3; Cheryl Johnson, 'Class and Gender: Yoruba Women in The Colonial Period', Chapter 13 in I. Berger and C. Robertson (eds), *Women and Class Hierarchies: African Perspectives*, (NY Africana, 1986) p.283; S. Afonja, *Historical Evolution in the Sexual Division of Labour in Nigeria* (1984), p.137; J. Guyer, 'Food, Cocoa and the Division of Labour by Sex in Two West African Societies', *CSSH*, Vol.22, No.3, July, 1980, pp.362-3.

<sup>4</sup> Marshall, *ibid*.



authority. However, none of these studies question the nature or reliability of the evidence that they use. In particular, the situation reflected by Bowen, Clarke and Burton, even if reliable, can only be applied to both the time and areas they travelled in and therefore witnessed. Nonetheless, most 20th century authors have not taken these limitations into consideration, and have therefore assumed two things; firstly, that women did not farm before the mid-19th century, and secondly, that they can extend Clarke and Bowen's accounts to cover the areas they did not travel in.

This general belief that women did not farm anywhere in Yorubaland in the 19th century implies that the division of labour in farming was strict, universal and constant. However, there are a number of flaws in this belief. Firstly, as Robin Law has suggested,<sup>1</sup> as early as 1825 in the Oyo area Clapperton noted that "all the labour of the land" devolved on women.<sup>2</sup> Law highlights the contrast between Clapperton's apparent reference to women's heavy involvement in cultivation in early 19th century Oyo and the later, mid-century accounts of Bowen and Clarke which clearly contradict this position. However, Law cautions that Clapperton may have mis-interpreted what he saw, since women would have been more visible in farmwork anyway at this harvest season between December and March when they helped with collecting and carrying produce. Nonetheless he suggests that the evidence may indicate that women farmed in the early period and

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<sup>1</sup> R. Law, 'Legitimate Trade' and Gender Relations..', op.cit, p.201.

<sup>2</sup> H. Clapperton, op.cit, p.58.

then withdrew from farming as demand for their labour increased with the rise of the palm oil and kernel industry as the century wore on. However, as yet, none of the sources consulted contain any evidence that may shed any further conclusive light on this question.

Secondly, under certain conditions women did farm. In the western area of Yorubaland in 1876 the native catechist Samuel Cole relates in his journals that the daughter of one David Olubo of Ikija, Abeokuta had been farming for a considerable time, taking over the work of her father who had been sick for several years.<sup>1</sup> Admittedly, this is an isolated piece of evidence, probably the exception rather than the rule, nonetheless it does show that some women had to farm out of necessity. Moreover, it is possible that many more women were put in this situation not only because the farmer of the family was ill, but because during this century of recurrent warfare many of the farmers were engaged at the war camps for long time periods and other family members, including women, helped to maintain their farms.<sup>2</sup> Although it may have been dangerous for women to farm in warfare conditions, it is possible that some did, both in order to keep up their husband's farm, and to supply food for themselves, their family and trade. Moreover, although the majority of women may not have engaged in actual cultivation, most women assisted their husband or male members of the household in varying degrees in related tasks such as clearing, weeding, harvesting and carrying

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2029, Cole, 12th May 1876.

<sup>2</sup> For which see the Section, *Women and War* in Chapter IV.

produce.

Thirdly, and more concretely, women cultivated in the eastern areas that Bowen, Clarke and Burton did not visit. Charles Nathaniel Young, the native catechist based at Ode-Ondo from 1875 relates on numerous occasions that the Ondo women cultivated. In 1875 he stated "a good many of the men and children have gone away to their farms and a good many of the women too - as their women also cultivate lands as well as the men". This observation was made in July when planting and cultivation were at their height. It was also common in some areas of Ondo for men to withdraw from farming altogether and leave it entirely in the hands of women. In 1878 Young writes, "it is common with the women to go to farm for cultivation and the men remain at home", a statement which he later reiterated.<sup>1</sup> That women farmed in Ondo is to some extent suggested by the point that the *Lobun* (the main female chief in Ondo) was expected to withdraw from farming upon taking office.<sup>2</sup> Logically, the obligation would not have existed in the first place if women did not farm in Ondo. Unfortunately, I do not know when this stipulation was introduced, only that it was in operation in the 19th century. If it was introduced earlier, it may indicate that women farmed in Ondo even before the 19th century. At any rate, Clarke, Bowen and Burton's journeys generally did not take them

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, Young, CA2098/11, 11th July 1875; CA2098/22, 9th Aug 1878; CA2098/22, 12th Sept 1878.

<sup>2</sup> T. Falola, *The Place of Women in the Pre-Colonial Yoruba Economy*, op.cit, p.140.

into the east/south-east of Yorubaland where it is clear that women did in fact farm, along with if not to the exclusion of the men.

Be that as it may, women did not generally farm in the remainder of the Yoruba area at a time when women dominated farming in nearly every other West African country.<sup>1</sup> Very few authors have attempted to explain why this was so. Early studies put forward unconvincing explanations. B.W. Hodder<sup>2</sup> reiterates F.J. Pedler's earlier opinion that the division of labour that resulted in men dominating cultivation developed from insecure conditions caused by warfare in ancient Yorubaland. The contention is that men farmed and women traded because "the custom of the country did not permit attacks on women" and they were therefore in a better position than men to trade. Meanwhile the men were employed in the relative safety of the farms.<sup>3</sup> Marshall rightly questions these statements, alternatively arguing that the opposite was in fact more likely: that women traded in the security of the local and nearby markets and used guards or the security of travelling in groups to trade long-distance, while men went to the farms, which were at times dangerous also either armed or guarded.

The constant fear of being killed or captured by marauding troops and kidnappers is well documented in primary sources other

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<sup>1</sup> See Herman Baumann, 'The Division of Labour According to Sex in African Hoe Culture', in, *Africa*, Vol.1, No.3, July, 1928, pp.289-317.

<sup>2</sup> B.W. Hodder, 'The Yoruba Rural Market', in P. Bohannan and G. Dalton (eds), *Markets in Africa*, (1968), p.110.

<sup>3</sup> See G. Marshall, *Women, Trade and the Yoruba Family*, op.cit, p.71,72.

than Johnson. For example, in 1862, H.S. Freeman reported that the people of the Egba villages "dare not cultivate far from their homes lest they should be kidnapped". One year later, Governor Glover noted the persistent complaints of the Abeokuta people that they were in danger of being abducted in their farms. Indeed, they alleged that no less than 30 people, had been taken in the space of a month by Ofin marauders, five of whom were known to have been killed.<sup>1</sup> By the next year the Rev. William Moore had reported that the civil war had forced the farmers to farm nearer the town.<sup>2</sup> Foreign and Colonial Office correspondence is full of examples of men, women and children abducted and harassed in the farmlands and trade routes all over Yorubaland in the following years.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, the farms were no place for women and children to spend a great deal of time. Even if they were accompanied by men it is still clear that this was not a guarantee against aggressors. In these circumstances it may well have been prudent for women to employ themselves largely in activities within the safety of their town and compound walls, whilst men farmed, taking the precaution of arming themselves for extra security. When women did venture out on unsafe trade routes they were usually accompanied by armed guards or they travelled

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<sup>1</sup> PRO, CO147/3, Freeman to Newcastle, 1863; PRO, CO147/4, No.74, (Slave Trade No.14) Enclosure, Gov.Glover to Henry Robbin, August 1863.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2070/51, Moore, 25th Feb 1864.

<sup>3</sup> For example, PRO, CO147/8, No.35, Enc 6, Glover, 1865, Ibadan; CO147/27, No.23, Berkley to R.N. Keale (Gov In Chief), Visit to the Eastern District, 1873; CO147/42, No.224, Enclosure, T. Tickel to Griffith, Visit to Weme, Western District, 1880; CO147/43, No.300, Griffith to Ussher, Seizure in Ijebuland, 1880; CO147/48, No.40, Enclosure 8, Statement of the King Ore, Head of the Ekitiparapo, Jan 1882; CO147/64, No.192, Enclosure, Moloney to Knutsford, Correspondence with Ilorin, Ibadan and Ekitiparapo, 1888; CO147/65, No.256, Enclosure, Moloney to Knutsford, 1888. Additionally, Anna Hinderer noted that the farms around Ibadan were not safe in 1860 at the start of the Ijaye war, see Hinderer, *Seventeen Years*, op.cit, p.228;

in large groups and caravans for extra security.<sup>1</sup>

As discussed above, Law suggests that women may have largely withdrawn from farming because of the demand for their labour and skills in the processing, transport and trade of palm produce which significantly increased with the rise of the trade from the 1850s.<sup>2</sup> The prominent role of women in the palm oil and kernel industry from the 1850's is well attested. It is possible that they gave up or spent less time farming than they had done prior to the mid-century when demand for their skills and labour in palm oil and kernel production was rising.<sup>3</sup> Possibly the insecure conditions outlined above also forced women out of the occupation. On the other hand, if women had never farmed in the western areas of Yorubaland, the new demand for their labour, combined again with insecurity in the farms, ensured at least that they probably never would. Indeed, in Ondo which has been established as an area of female farming, Young related that women made very little oil and the cloth production industry was poor while on the other hand both yams and Indian corn were grown by them in abundance.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the Ondo were to some degree discouraged from entering the vegetable produce trade directly until after the 1870's because interior-coastal trade routes remained largely underdeveloped in that region due to the strong

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<sup>1</sup> For example see, Clarke, op.cit, p.22,65,73; PP, Vol.63, No.26, Enc.10, S, Johnson to Moloney, 21st May 1886; Part of the Ibadan army had been reserved at home to escort trade caravans going to Orun once a month.

<sup>2</sup> R. Law, 'Legitimate Trade and Gender Relations..', op.cit, pp.201-2.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2049/104, Hinderer, 4th Oct 1851; Bowen, op.cit, p.308; R. Campbell, op.cit, p.48,51; W. Clarke, op.cit, p.245; S. Johnson, op.cit, p.124.

<sup>4</sup> CMS, CA2098/11, Young, 11th July 1875.

monopoly held by their Ijebu neighbours on middle-man routes to their west.<sup>1</sup> It is possible then that Ondo women were able to farm because their labour was not being re-allocated to the production of palm oil and other valuable trade goods. In the absence of more convincing evidence this appears to support Law's suggestion.

Furthermore, pre-existing beliefs and ideological barriers worked to restrict females from certain occupations such as iron-working and *Ifa* divination which were ritualised and maintained taboos and secrets surrounding their profession. For example, taboos existed which excluded women from blacksmith's premises while they were working and by implication from the occupation itself. These included the beliefs that some women were witches and would use their malicious powers to obstruct the smithing process, that women could not be trusted to keep the smithing processes secret and that smelting iron would be spoiled by both the odour of menstruation and sexual intercourse.<sup>2</sup>

Likewise, many 19th century commentators asserted or suggested that the *Ifa* divination priesthood was exclusively male.<sup>3</sup> This belief has also been widely represented in many secondary studies.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, there is some evidence to

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<sup>1</sup> See S.A. Akintoye, 'The Ondo Road Eastward of Lagos, c.1870-95', *JAH*, Vol.10, No.4, 1969, pp.581-98.

<sup>2</sup> Men were also barred from entering the blacksmiths hut if they had recently had sexual intercourse. See, Toyin Falola & Demola Babalola, 'Religion and Economy in Pre-colonial Nigeria', in Falola & Olupona (eds), *Religion and Society in Nigeria*, pp.155-58.

<sup>3</sup> Bowen, *op.cit.*, p.317; Clarke, *op.cit.*, p.280; Burton, *op.cit.*, p.189; Stone, *op.cit.*, p.89.

<sup>4</sup> See, N.A. Fadipe, *op.cit.*, pp.264-275; W. Bascom, *Ifa Divination: (continued...)*

suggest that women did in fact become *babalawo* or Ifa divination priests/priestesses. Karin Barber cites evidence that female *babalawo* existed at Oyo in the early 20th century. An old man who was a *babalawo* himself prior to 1927 told her that one woman named Fakemide had become a diviner after learning it from her father and husband. She was not obstructed in any way from following the occupation, and not only did she practice, she trained other initiates. Another informant maintained that it was not uncommon for women to become Ifa priestesses in the Oyo and Ogbomoso areas. For example, a woman named Iyanifa Mopelola Fawenda Amoke was initiated as a *babalawo* in the 1940's. These examples may have represented the continuation of established practice in the Oyo area.<sup>1</sup> Certainly in the 19th century Samuel Johnson explained the functions of a woman named the *Iyale Mole* at New Oyo who was considered as "the head of all the *babalawos* (Ifa priests) in the city". He stated, "when the Ifa priests come every fifth day to worship and consult it, she takes an active part in the ceremonies".<sup>2</sup> This suggests that the *Iyale Mole* was initiated into the secrets of Ifa divination and it is possible that she was an Ifa priestess. Meanwhile in Igbore township in Abeokuta in 1859, King reported that one woman had adopted Ifa although it was "exclusively for the men".<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, it is interesting that a number of Yoruba myths

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<sup>4</sup>(...continued)

*Communication between Gods and Men* (1969), p.81; C. Odugbesan, 'Femininity in Yoruba Religious Art', pp.203-4, in M. Douglas and P. Kaberry (eds), *Man in Africa*, Tavistock, 1969.

<sup>1</sup> K. Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*, pp.288-89, p.327, n.19.

<sup>2</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit.*, p.65.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2061/64, King, 27th June 1859.



recognise the possibility of female babalawo. One legend holds that a woman named Aruigba-Ifa introduced the Alado of Ado into the secrets of Ifa divination during the reign of Alafin Onigbogi in the early 16th century.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, William Bascom relates the legend of the goddess Osun who acquired specialist knowledge of Ifa's mysteries while living with Ifa himself.<sup>2</sup> In a more detailed account of this story D. Badejo explains,

"Osun learns Ifa divination while married to Orunmila. Although untutored in its practices, she acquired its knowledge because she used to watch and listen to Orunmila whenever he would consult Ifa... recognising her intellect and talent, Orunmila gave Osun *merindinlogun*, the sixteen cowries divination system".<sup>3</sup>

The division of labour in other jobs was similarly not as clear-cut as formerly supposed. As with farming, the exigencies of trade, war, militarism and, additionally, Islam, had great influence on the development of the division of labour in many fields of work. The growth in domestic slavery, polygamy, and the use of *iwofa* (pawns) all affected the allocation of work and the status of certain occupations. These further changes will be discussed in the following sections at the appropriate points.

### Elderly.

The older generation generally turned to activities that required less physical exertion than they had been used to as younger men and women. In particular Johnson writes that old

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<sup>1</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit.*, p.158-9.

<sup>2</sup> W. Bascom, *op.cit.*, p.11.

<sup>3</sup> D. Badejo, 'The Oral Literature of the Yoruba Goddess Osun', p.85, in Falola and Olupona (eds), *Religion and Society in Nigeria*. Ifa was known by a few names and there is some confusion as to whether Orunmila was one of them. See Bascom, *op.cit.*, p.107.

women were most prominent in cloth production, both seeding cotton and spinning thread, these being more sedentary occupations.<sup>1</sup> In 1825 Clapperton noted that the older female slaves in Oyo were principally the spinners of thread.<sup>2</sup> The Landers also related in 1830 that the older free-born and royal women engaged in both long distance trade and the less exacting spinning.<sup>3</sup> At a later date too both the Rev Samuel Cole, in 1873, and Catechist J.A. Sunday, in 1879, meet elderly women in different areas of Abeokuta engaged in spinning to earn a living.<sup>4</sup> Older women helped to take care of children and infants for other female family members as Robert Campbell remarked in 1860, "In Abeokuta and throughout Aku country, old women are seen nursing infants not their own...".<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, some women were fit enough into their old age to do more strenuous work. As Clapperton relates of the carriers he engaged between Oyo and Bussa in 1825 "the heaviest loads were mostly carried by old women".<sup>6</sup> Elderly women carried on their trade at the markets too, not only outside their town, as seen above, but at home.<sup>7</sup> Finally, Johnson states that "aged women who reside in the farms also employ their time in shelling the kernels from the palm nuts, and also tending poultry, goats and sheep for the market".<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S. Johnson, *The History*, p.123-4.

<sup>2</sup> H. Clapperton, *op.cit*, p.94.

<sup>3</sup> R. & J. Lander, *The Niger Journal*, p.71.

<sup>4</sup> CMS, CA2029/12, Cole, 11th Mar 1873, Abeokuta; CA2084/1, Sunday, 12th June 1879, Abeokuta.

<sup>5</sup> R. Campbell, *op.cit*, p.68.

<sup>6</sup> H. Clapperton, *op.cit*, p.64.

<sup>7</sup> CMS, CA2084/1, Sunday, 14th Sept 1879.

<sup>8</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, p.125.

Women's Role in the Palm-oil Industry.

In 1825 captain Hugh Clapperton observed that the women he saw on his journey through Yorubaland and in Oyo-Ile bore the greatest burden of drudgery and labour.<sup>1</sup> Towards the end of the 19th century Samuel Johnson similarly commented that in Yorubaland

"On the whole the women seem to be far more industrious than the men, for whereas the men always contrive to have leisure hours and off days from work, the women seem to have none".<sup>2</sup>

On the face of it would seem that nothing considerable had changed over nearly three-quarters of a century regarding the disproportionate share of work that women performed as opposed to men. However, changes did in fact take place in the intervening years. Women's share of work actually rose: in some cases by choice in others by force. One of the most dramatic increases in demand for women's labour was precipitated by the rise of the palm-oil and kernel export trade.

**Production.**

In 1849, on the eve of the rise of the palm oil export trade in Yorubaland, Henry Townsend reported that palm oil was "not a commodity that exists to any great extent far in the interior":<sup>3</sup> production was limited in scale mainly to supply the domestic market. The West African export trade in general arose mainly due to demand for palm oil as an industrial lubricant and a base ingredient in the manufacture of soap and candles which were

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<sup>1</sup> H. Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition*, p.58.

<sup>2</sup> S. Johnson, *The History...*, p.125.

<sup>3</sup> PP, Vol.6, Session 1850, Report of The Select Committee on the African Slave Trade, p.53.

significant products aiding the process of industrialisation in Europe. Imports of palm produce from West Africa as a whole grew from around 10,000 tons in 1830 to an average of 50,000 tons after 1860. The price per ton of oil on the coast of West Africa and at one of the main British ports, Liverpool, peaked between 1854 and 1861 at £45. The main items of exchange imported into West Africa were textiles, spirits, salt, iron, guns, gunpowder and tobacco.<sup>1</sup> The most popular unit of currency for small-scale and retail transactions was the cowry shell.<sup>2</sup>

By the second half of the 1850's many interior Yoruba towns were now engaged in supplying the export trade. Centres of production, supply and trade lay within the forest belt and the oil and kernels were funnelled down through interior markets to coastal wholesale markets and bulking stations for eventual export, mainly from the port of Lagos. William Clarke, a Baptist missionary travelling through the Western towns of Yorubaland, observed at the time that palm oil production

"in the palm districts employs a large number of labourers and presents more the appearance of a manufactory than any other department of labour. I have seen establishments of

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<sup>1</sup> A.G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, pp.128-133.

<sup>2</sup> Cowries were small shells imported from the Maldives and later from Zanzibar. The shells were the main unit of currency and exchange in Yorubaland at this time, but were also commonly used both in rituals and as ritual objects. On the coast and in most interior towns the shells were valued in 'strings' of 40 cowries each, 'heads' of 50 strings and 'bags' of 10 heads. The following conversion table serves as a rough guide to changing values in £, shillings and pence;

	1 head	1 bag
1853	4s	£2
1863	1s.4d	13s.4d
1874	1s.3d	12s.5d
1882	6.5d	5s.4d

See, M. Johnson & J. Hogendorn, *The Shell Money of the Slave Trade* and for a 19th century evaluation, A. Mann, 'The Numeral System of The Yoruba Nation', *JAI*, 1887, p.59-64.

this kind where perhaps fifty persons or more were engaged in labour".<sup>1</sup>

Similarly in 1859 Robert Campbell commented on the large scale of production in Egba towns in general and in the early 1860's R.H. Stone noted the same of Ijaye further north.<sup>2</sup> Palm oil was also produced on a smaller scale by individuals and small groups.<sup>3</sup> Clearly both large and small scale enterprises developed side by side in Yorubaland. As briefly discussed above, the productive skills and labour required for this growing industry were supplied mainly by women: every stage of palm oil production was dominated by them, except the collection of the nuts from the trees.

Additionally, from 1859 palm kernels entered the Lagos market in small quantities.<sup>4</sup> Women dominated this industry too. The demand for kernels rose at the coast due to its use in the manufacture of soap and margarine in Europe. In 1863, 2,664 tons was brought into Lagos from the interior for export, subsequently, this figure doubled every year so that by 1869 it had reached 20,394 tons.<sup>5</sup> The kernels and husks were also manufactured by women into a great variety of other sought-after products such as lamp oil, soap grease, charcoal and fire

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<sup>1</sup> Clarke, *op.cit.*, p.274.

<sup>2</sup> Campbell, *op.cit.*, p.51; Stone, *In Afric's Forest...*, p.24.

<sup>3</sup> For examples of smaller-scale production see, CMS, S. Cole, CA2029/18, 25th Jan 1875; PRO, CO879/15/192, 1979; CMS, Johnson, J. CA2056/52, Ilaro to Awayade, Aug-Nov 1878. Olubi gives an extensive list containing more than 14 useful items that women made from the palm tree, see CMS, CA2075/20, 27th Oct 1867.

<sup>4</sup> PRO, FO881/3621, Report on Trade for Lagos, 1859 and Brand to Russell, 1860. To some extent the increasing demand for kernel exports compensated for the decline in palm oil prices from the early 1860's.

<sup>5</sup> PRO, CO147/28, No 71, Berkley to Hennesy, 'Imports of Kernels in Tons to Lagos', Blue Books for 1873.

kindling.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, women profited from the sudden demand for the kernel refuse as cattle food after a severe drought in the summer of 1868.<sup>2</sup> The demand for kernels and their by-products and the resultant trade continued on up to the end of the century although the price per ton gradually fell by around a third from an average of £15 in the 1860's to £10 by the late 1880's.<sup>3</sup> In the northern districts such as Ogbomoso, Osogbo and Ilorin, palm trees were not as abundant and shea butter replaced palm oil as a cooking and lighting aid exclusively produced by women and children for the domestic market.<sup>4</sup>

#### Transport.

More palm and other vegetable products were being produced than ever before in Yorubaland. In order to reach the markets and coastal bulking stations, these commodities had to be transported.<sup>5</sup> The transport industry was well established in some areas of Yorubaland long before the mid-nineteenth century and consisted mainly of carrying goods on foot and transporting by canoe in the lagoon and riverine areas (see Figure 5).

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<sup>1</sup> R. Campbell, *op.cit.*, pp.51-2; R.H. Stone, *op.cit.*, p.24; PRO, FO881/5622X, 'Precis of Information on the Colony of Lagos and the Neighbouring Tribes', compiled by R.E. Darwin, Feb 1888.

<sup>2</sup> PRO, CO147/15, No.3, Enclosure in Glover to A.E. Kennedy, 1869.

<sup>3</sup> A. Hopkins, *An Economic History...*, p.133. Even in 1892 Gov. Carter reported that kernels were still being brought into Ejinrin market in large enough quantities with other goods that "it has been found necessary to enlarge the market", PRO, CO147/86, No.313, Carter to Ripon, Sept 1892.

<sup>4</sup> H.B. Herman-Hodge, *Gazetteer of Ilorin Province*, (Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1929), pp.240-45; Clarke, *op.cit.*, p.274.

<sup>5</sup> See, 'Deji Ogunremi, *Counting the Camels: the Economics of Transportation in Pre-colonial Nigeria* and 'Human Portage in Nigeria in the Nineteenth Century: A Pillar of the Indigenous Economy', *JHSN*, Vol.8, No.1, Dec 1975; Toyin Falola, 'The Yoruba Caravan System of the Nineteenth Century', *IJAHS*, Vol.24, No.1, 1991.

Professional female carriers were well established in Nupe, north of Yorubaland, where Clapperton remarked that "A great number of fine women hire themselves to carry loads on their heads", also loading their male and female slaves to work alongside them.<sup>1</sup> Numerous other northern trade caravans that he observed consisted of men, women and children all carrying loads, the majority of these being slaves.<sup>2</sup> In particular, the women seem to have been more accustomed to this mode of transporting goods since they always carried the heaviest loads.<sup>3</sup> The Lander brothers were likewise struck by the skill and strength of the many female carriers they encountered during their journey with Clapperton to Oyo-Ile in 1825.<sup>4</sup> Clapperton observed that even the Alafin of Oyo's wives carried large loads on their heads to market like women of the common class.<sup>5</sup>

Further south and nearer the coast, the professional carrying trade developed more slowly up to the mid-century. Although Clapperton indicated that he engaged female carriers at every stage of his journey between the port of Badagri and Ijanna in the Egbado area during his 1825/6 expedition to Oyo,<sup>6</sup> the Rev.

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<sup>1</sup> H. Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition...*, p.137.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, p.32,68,75,94.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, p.64,75.

<sup>4</sup> R. Lander, *Records of Captain Clapperton's Last Expedition to Africa*, p.70,127.

<sup>5</sup> H. Clapperton, *op.cit*, p.21.

<sup>6</sup> Clapperton, *op.cit*, p.13. He comments here that the professionalism of the carriers was, in his opinion, somewhat sullied by the constant chatter of the women at every stage of the journey.

T.B. Freeman found the industry little further developed at Badagri in 1843, "that kind of work being strange and new to the people".<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless the Rev. King did engage women in Badagri in 1850 as porters to Abeokuta.<sup>2</sup> In Abeokuta itself, at this time the work seems to have been largely undertaken by men, Townsend stating that when merchandise had to be transported across country "always men carry it, and it is not considered a degrading occupation; they are paid wages for it".<sup>3</sup>

The demand for palm produce on the one hand, and European imports on the other, together with the expansion of the domestic supplies market created a large increase in demand for labour in the transport industry. As Thomas Bowen noted, all of the commodities produced and imported "being carried on people's heads... give employment to great numbers of carriers". William Clarke similarly observed that "hundreds and thousands of people are thus engaged in the carrying trade".<sup>4</sup> Women in particular began to head-load in increasing numbers in many interior towns.<sup>5</sup> With their considerable skill in head-loading it is no surprise that women were prominent in carrying palm oil to both local

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<sup>1</sup> WMMS, Notices: New Series, Vol.2, 1842-44, *Journal of Rev. T. B. Freeman from Cape Coast to Badagri, Yariba and Dahomi*, (1843). pp.376-7.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2061/36, King, 28th March 1850.

<sup>3</sup> PP, Vol.6, Session 1850, Townsend, *Report of the Select Committee on Slavery in Africa*, 1849, p.66.

<sup>4</sup> Bowen, *op.cit.*, p.307; Clarke, *op.cit.*, pp.264-5.

<sup>5</sup> For examples see, CMS, CA2061/44, King, Abeokuta, 21st Feb 1852; CA2021/5, Barber, 18th Dec 1853; CA2061/61, King, 24th Nov 1856. Ijaye: CMS, CA2066/88, Mann, 31st July 1855. Ibadan: CMS, CA2049/115, Hinderer, Aug-Sept 1858.



interior and coastal wholesale markets. Rev. White reported from Ota in 1855 that the trader's goods bound for Agboye and Lagos (which would most certainly have included palm produce) were chiefly carried by women and girls.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, as one colonial official reported in 1880, crowds of people came from the interior to Atigere market, on the eastern lagoon area, and women carried the goods.<sup>2</sup> By 1877 James Johnson noticed "Women are largely employed as porters" which he suggested was partly because they were "considered less troublesome".<sup>3</sup> Men dominated canoe transport in the coastal lagoon areas.<sup>4</sup> However, in 1863 Burton noted one exception to established gender roles in water transport, commenting that among the people inhabiting the Agboye Creek area "the women ply the paddle - in every other part of Egbaland a disgrace to women".<sup>5</sup>

In the north-eastern areas that were relatively untouched by the coastal boom in trade there were fewer professional carriers. Hinderer complained in August 1858 after leaving Ikirun that he found trouble getting carriers because the road to Ilesa ~~was not frequented~~.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, in the same year D.J. May

<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2087/47, White, Ota, 3rd May 1855.

<sup>2</sup> PRO, CO147/43, No.316, W.B. Griffith to Kimberley, 1880.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2056/50, J. Johnson, Report on journey from Abeokuta to Ibadan, 21st Mar 1877.

<sup>4</sup> R. Burton, op.cit, p.58.

<sup>5</sup> R. Burton, *Abeokuta and The Cameroons Mountain*, p.26; Giambattista Scala also mentions in 1857 that among the Agboye women used canoes to trade. Giambattista Scala, 'Memorie Intorno da un suo Viaggio in Abbeokuta Citta nell Anno 1858', (unpublished manuscript) pp.64-5. I would like to thank both Robert Smith and Mrs Brenda Packman for their kind permission to cite from the as yet unpublished 'Memorie'.

<sup>6</sup> CMS, CA2049/115, Hinderer, 20th Aug 1858.

(continued...)

lamented of his journey that;

"this want seems trivial, almost absurd, to cause so much trouble and delay... After leaving Ibadan I never found a professional carrier, though they are common and universal on the trunk road through Yoruba (Nupe to Abeokuta)".<sup>1</sup>

### Trade.

As mentioned earlier, the trade of palm produce was considered by men to be women's work. Women had been market traders of agricultural and food produce among other things par excellence throughout most of Yorubaland well before the export palm oil trade took off (see Figure 3). Clapperton commented in 1825/6 that 90 per cent of the retail traders coming into Kulfo from western towns were women, twenty one of whom were residing in the same premises as himself.<sup>2</sup> The Lander brothers similarly stressed that further south in the Egbado town of Igan "the women here are the chief, if not the only traders".<sup>3</sup>

The division of labour in trading remained strong in the years to follow. Thomas Bowen noticed that women bought and sold most of the provisions in the western and northern towns that he visited between 1849 and 1856.<sup>4</sup> About five years later Clarke stated further that while "the females.. sell all articles of

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<sup>6</sup>(...continued)

<sup>1</sup> D.J. May, 'Journey in the Yoruba and Nupe Countries in 1858', in *JRGS*, Vol.30, 1860, p.223.

<sup>2</sup> H. Clapperton, *op.cit*, p.136.

<sup>3</sup> R. & J Lander, *The Niger Journal*, Hallet (ed), p.71.

<sup>4</sup> T.J. Bowen, *op.cit*, p.308.

merchandise..the males..very seldom engage in the art of selling".<sup>1</sup> Women carried on this dominance in trade to take advantage of the export market for palm produce as Consul Campbell highlighted in 1858 when he stated "It is the women that trade at the oil markets".<sup>2</sup> Another account from 1865 noted the predominance of women coming into Lagos via the lagoons to trade palm oil and kernels among other goods.<sup>3</sup> The pivotal role of women in the trade was painfully highlighted in 1858 when a ban imposed by the Abeokuta authorities directed specifically at female traders completely paralysed the inflow of palm produce to Lagos from the Egba interior.<sup>4</sup>

#### Women's Role in other Industries.

The manufacture, trade and transport of oil stimulated the growth of other related industries. Both Campbell and Stone specifically mention the use of large clay pots at two stages in oil manufacture.<sup>5</sup> Copious quantities of water were also required for the boiling and washing stages of processing. Water supplies were not always within reasonable distance from manufacture

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<sup>1</sup> W. Clarke, op.cit, p.245.

<sup>2</sup> PP, Vol.45, No.11, Campbell to Clarendon, 28th Mar 1858.

<sup>3</sup> John Whitford, *Trading Life in Western and Central Africa*, (Liverpool, 1877), p.94.

<sup>4</sup> PRO, FO84/1061, No.18, Acting Consul Lodder, 25th Dec 1858, Lagos: regarding violation of a treaty between Campbell and the Abeokuta authorities to ensure freedom of passage for both men and women to trade between Abeokuta and Lagos.

<sup>5</sup> R. Campbell, op.cit, p.51-2; R.H. Stone, op.cit, p.24.

sights and so it had to be continually collected, transported and stored in earthen-ware pots.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, once made, oils were stored and transported in manageable amounts in clay pots,<sup>2</sup> at least until they reached wholesalers who would collect and transport supplies in casks or puncheons if they were being transported by canoe.<sup>3</sup> Clearly earthen-ware pots of all sizes were crucial items in the palm oil industry, and it is to be expected that demand for their production and supply would rise accordingly.

The manufacture of pottery was another occupational preserve of women, as Clapperton, Clarke, Bowen and many other people who travelled and lived in Yorubaland commented.<sup>4</sup> Clay was procured by women from sites either in town or nearby.<sup>5</sup> A real sense of how over-worked some of the clay pits actually were and how perilous digging for raw material in such pits was, was

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<sup>1</sup> PRO, CO879/36, No.428(153), Carter to Knutsford, 1892, Report of visit to Ijebu Ode. Carter noted that Ijebu-Ode had no wells and lacked a convenient water supply, the nearest being about 2 miles out of town.

<sup>2</sup> PRO, CO147/4, No.68, Enc, Glover to Didelot, 3rd Aug 1863; CO147/27, No.1, Enclosure in Hennesy to Kimberley, Visit to Eastern District, Captain Bryden's Report, Dec 1872; CO147/40, No.65, Enclosure, Mr Tickel to Griffith, Kojo, brother of King of Weme to Tickel, 1880.

<sup>3</sup> PRO, CO147/6, No.7, Freeman to Duke of Newcastle, Feb 1864; CO147/72, No.309, Denton to Knutsford, Oct 1889; R. Burton, op.cit, p.25,58.

<sup>4</sup> Clapperton, op.cit, p.14; Clarke, op.cit, pp.241-42,245; Bowen, op.cit, p.308; Burton, op.cit, p.164,304; Campbell, op.cit, p.48. For a detailed analysis of traditional methods of pottery production see, B.N. Igwilo, 'Traditional Pottery in Nigeria', *Nigeria Magazine*, No.147, 1983.

<sup>5</sup> W. Clarke, op.cit, p.275; R. Burton, op.cit, p.164, notes that at Abeokuta "the reddish clay is brought from a place about two and half miles to the north east of the city"; PRO, CO879/Part2, Ewart, 1890, notes the use of black clay deposits by women in Ilaro.

highlighted in June 1877 when an Ibadan woman called Mary Aina and her fellow female potter tragically died when the clay pit they were collecting material from collapsed in upon them both.<sup>1</sup> Pots of all sizes were manufactured both in small and large scale establishments. King noted in his journal that at Ijemo quarter of Abeokuta in 1850 he saw women making and piling up quantities of various sized pots and lighting a fire in preparation to bake them.<sup>2</sup> Likewise in 1879 in the Iporo quarter the Yoruba catechist, Sunday visited what he described as a "potware" where "we spoke with women engaged in making pots, I happened to meet with a man whom the women there called Ogboni, master of the place",<sup>3</sup> suggesting that this was an established large-scale ceramic business possibly using slave labour. Noting earlier that pot manufacturing was the preserve of women, Martin Delaney commented in 1859-60 that in Abeokuta "crockerware is manufactured very extensively of almost every conceivable size and kind of vessel".<sup>4</sup> At Ota in 1858, the Rev White comments on what seems to be the activity of an individual woman "moulding clay into pots. The pots were of various sizes and some were beautifully ornamented with intersecting lines".<sup>5</sup> The expanding dyeing industry also required large earthen vats, which was yet

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2075/35, Olubi, 30th June 1877; CA2019/17, Allen, 30th June 1877.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2061/37, King, 7th Aug 1850. The Rev. Muller also saw women making pots in Ijemo township in 1849, see, CMS, CA2072/9, 29th Jan 1849.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2084/1, Sunday, 19th Oct 1879.

<sup>4</sup> M.R. Delaney, *Official Report of The Niger Valley Exploring Party*, in *Search for a Place*, p.74.

<sup>5</sup> CMS, CA2087/56, White, 2nd Mar 1858.

another source of demand.<sup>1</sup> Although women stood to profit from the demand in their industry Burton considered that at Abeokuta "This handicraft is depressed by the competition of the calabash maker... ornamental engraving is said to be a lucrative trade".<sup>2</sup> However, women maintained their hold on providing pots for oil production and dyeing since calabashes could not be used for boiling.

An additional area of employment for women was the cloth industry which expanded as demand was created by growing populations in towns and an increase in disposable income. Hand woven cloths of different varieties and quality were produced for both the domestic and export markets. The cloth industry employed the skills of both male and female and the production process consisted of a number of separate but inter-dependent stages; growing of cotton; preparation of cotton and silk (some cloths were mixed); spinning; weaving; dyeing; tailoring. The overall industry displayed a fairly well-defined sexual and generational division of labour.<sup>3</sup> Cotton was grown by male farmers and sold to females. Johnson noted that the seeding and spinning stages mainly employed older women, a statement which, as seen in the earlier discussion of generational division of labour, is backed

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<sup>1</sup> H. Clapperton, *op.cit*, p.15; W. Clarke, *op.cit*, p.272.

<sup>2</sup> Burton, *op.cit*, p.164.

<sup>3</sup> See the extensive study by Caroline Keyes, *Adire: Cloth, Gender and Social Change in Southwestern Nigeria, 1841-1991*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1993. Jennifer Bray produced a detailed study of the cloth industry in Iseyin, although this is not a historical study, it highlights the sexual and generational division of tasks involved. See, J. Bray, 'The Organisation of Traditional Weaving in Iseyin, Nigeria', in *Africa*, Vol.38, 1968, pp.270-80.

up by other evidence. Weaving was carried out by both sexes. However, men and women employed different equipment and techniques to produce two distinct types of cloth.<sup>1</sup> Clarke described the differences in the early 1850's; "the narrow loom of 6" is entirely used by men in the open air under sheds throughout the town while the wide cloth is woven by women from a quarter of a yard in width belongs especially to the females, who confine their labour to within doors" (see Figure 1).<sup>2</sup> Thread and finished cloth was then dyed by women.<sup>3</sup> The narrow cloth produced by men had to be sewn into broader cloths before being made into a garment and this was an exclusively male skill as noted by both Bowen and Clarke in the 1850's and Johnson in the last quarter of the 19th century.<sup>4</sup> Similarly in the early 1860's Burton observed that at Abeokuta men were "the best, if not the only, needle-workers".<sup>5</sup>

In some areas the cloth industry had been long established and important. Johnson maintained that weaving was the established preserve of men among the ancient Yoruba, i.e. the Oyo, until broad width Akoko cloths woven by women in Ila in Igbomina province in the east were introduced into the Oyo market

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<sup>1</sup> R. Campbell, *op.cit*, p.50.

<sup>2</sup> Clarke, *op.cit*, p.272.

<sup>3</sup> Bowen, *op.cit*, p.308; R. Burton, *op.cit*, p.163; R. Campbell, *op.cit*, p.48.

<sup>4</sup> Clarke, *op.cit*, p.245; T. Bowen, *op.cit*, p.308.

<sup>5</sup> R. Burton, *op.cit*, p.162-3.

and broad weaving spread as a female technique.<sup>1</sup> However, Johnson's assertion is questionable. Exportation of Ijebu cloth is documented as far back as the 17th century. Osifekunde remembered in his account of his Ijebu homeland that as early as 1810, if not before, spinning, weaving and dyeing were the established occupations of the women and a considerable quantity of their broad cloth was exported to the coast and to Brazil, where they were preferred by the Afro-Brazilian population.<sup>2</sup> This is supported by the observation of Captain Adams in 1823 that the Ijebu women made an immense number of home spun cloths for sale to Lagos and Brazil.<sup>3</sup> Additionally Ijebu traders exploited an expanding market for their home-produced cloths in the north and travelled as far as Kulfo in Nupe to sell the cheaper variety to the poor and slaves in the early 19th century and before.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the Lander brothers met with women weaving in the Egbado area in the southwest of Yorubaland in 1830. Clearly, contrary to Johnson's suggestion, female weaving was a well established industry in Yoruba towns in the early 19th century and most certainly before and enjoyed a flourishing market both at home and abroad.

The Oyo produced high quality cloth although reports tend to suggest that male weaving dominated in the early period. Adams

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<sup>1</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, p.110.

<sup>2</sup> Osifekunde, in P. Curtin, *Africa Remembered: Narratives of West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade*, (University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), p.263.

<sup>3</sup> J. Adams, *Remarks on the Country Extending from Cape Palmas to the River Congo*, 1823, (Frank Cass and Co, 1966) p.96,97,108.

<sup>4</sup> H. Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition*, p.136.



stated in 1823 that "the cloth manufactured in Hio (Oyo) is superior both for variety of pattern, color, and dimensions, to any made in neighbouring districts".<sup>1</sup> About two years later Clapperton witnessed the extent of this cloth industry in Old Oyo when he visited "several manufactories of cloth and three dye houses". In one instance he saw eight to ten looms in use which he described as "a regular manufactory".<sup>2</sup> The whole industry grew in the Oyo area so that by 1858 Meakin the CMS missionary based at New Oyo reported the case of an Ogbomoso chief who grew substantial amounts of cotton and he certainly had "never seen so much in any market before ie; so many people retailing it".<sup>3</sup>

At Old Oyo Clapperton noticed the sexual and generational division of labour such that boys were the weavers whilst the women were the dyers.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, as the Oyo Empire disintegrated, the spread of Oyo and other northern refugees and slaves southwards caused male weaving techniques to be introduced in areas that had formerly been bastions of female weaving thus altering established sexual divisions of labour within the cloth industry.<sup>5</sup> The introduction of male weaving into Ijebuland in the early 1820's through the diffusion of Oyo refugees was noted in

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<sup>1</sup> J. Adams, *op.cit*, p.94.

<sup>2</sup> H. Clapperton, *op.cit*, p.14, also see p.15,16,94.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2069/10, 14th April 1858.

<sup>4</sup> Clapperton, *op.cit*, p.15,16.

<sup>5</sup> See, Keyes, *op.cit*, p.83. Peter Lloyd points out in his study 'Craft Organisation in Yoruba Towns' in *Africa*, Vol.23, No.1, 1953, the element of male weaving in Ado introduced by Oyo immigrants.

Osifekunde's account of his homeland.<sup>1</sup> Oyo and northern weaving techniques also began to develop in Egba and Egbado towns alongside female weaving, as Clarke's description above of weaving in the western area of Yorubaland makes clear. A similar transfer of skills occurred in Ibadan where it is related that an Oyo man initiated male weaving in the early days of the town's establishment in 1830.<sup>2</sup> Thus, by the mid century many testimonies can be found that include references to encounters with men weaving in their own manner in outdoor sheds around the towns of Abeokuta and Ibadan.<sup>3</sup> Bowen and Burton misleadingly write that only men wove at Abeokuta.<sup>4</sup> However, their statements must be viewed with caution since, as mentioned above, women confined their weaving activities to within their compounds, so they were less visible to passing observers. In other areas, as John Peel noted of Ilesa in the northeast, there seems to be no tradition of male weaving at all.<sup>5</sup>

Male weaving techniques also spread in conjunction with Islam. In the early 19th century many Moslem refugees fleeing from the war with Ilorin settled in the northwestern town of Iseyin and helped to establish a considerable weaving industry,

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<sup>1</sup> Osifekunde in Curtin (ed) *Africa Remembered*, op.cit, p.264, n.122.

<sup>2</sup> T. Falola, *The Political Economy of a Pre-colonial State: Ibadan*, p.100.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2049/95, Hinderer, Abeokuta, 16th Sept 1849; CMS, CA2075/18, Olubi, 10th July 1866, Oke Kudeti, Ibadan; CA2019/8, Allen, 7th July 1869, Oke Kudeti and CA2019/14, Allen, 26th Mar 1873.

<sup>4</sup> Bowen, op.cit, p.308; Burton, op.cit, p.162.

<sup>5</sup> J.D.Y. Peel, *Ijeshas and Nigerians: the Incorporation of a Yoruba Kingdom*, p.278, n.50.

based on male-weaving techniques.<sup>1</sup> Moslem slaves, such as the men Clapperton witnessed weaving in Old Oyo also augmented or introduced male weaving methods.<sup>2</sup> As Moslem traders, *Imams* (holy men/priests), refugees and slaves all dispersed further south, those men among them who could weave often maintained this occupation and passed on their skills to Yoruba men who had previously considered weaving a female preserve.

Additionally, European manufactured cloth began finding its way into interior markets. Consul Campbell reported that in 1856 "The importation of British cotton manufactures in this part of Africa has, as yet, been to an extent below the wants of commerce, yet their effect in supplanting the use of native fabrics among the population at Abeokuta is already felt in the numerous weavers in that large town, who begin to find that the primitive looms and shuttles used by them... cannot compete".<sup>3</sup> By 1862 the extent of preference for the cheaper European cloth in the Abeokuta area was evidenced by Moore, who conducted a study in 1862 of the proportion of people wearing home as opposed to foreign manufactured cloths at Osiele, a satellite village of Abeokuta. He found that out of the 1,305 people, mainly women, that he observed on the trade route between Abeokuta and Osiele, no less than 1,108 were wearing European cloths, 195 were wearing mixed and only 2 wore home-spun cloths.<sup>4</sup> However, the domestic

<sup>1</sup> See Jennifer Bray's study 'The Organisation of Traditional Weaving in Iseyin, Nigeria', in *Africa*, Vol.38, 1968. Bray highlights the sexual division of labour in the cloth production industry in Iseyin such that women spin and dye thread and cloth while men alone engage in the actual weaving and in tailoring.

<sup>2</sup> Clapperton, *op.cit*, p.94.

<sup>3</sup> PP, Vol.63, *Africa Consular*, No.1, Campbell to Clarendon, 1857.

<sup>4</sup> CMS, CA2070/48, Moore, 12th May 1861.

(continued...)

industry may have been less affected in other areas of Yorubaland. Alvan Millson reported in 1890 that the cloth used in Yorubaland as a whole was generally 95% home produced.<sup>1</sup>

The extensive production of cloth in the Oyo area required an extensive dyeing industry such as the three dye works Clapperton visited in 1825 with "upwards of twenty vats or large earthen pots in each".<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in later years the dyeing industry grew in the more central and southern towns.<sup>3</sup> This female industry, unlike weaving, was not negatively affected to any extent by European imports, since plain cloths were still dyed to suit domestic tastes. Dyeing was carried out in establishments of various sizes in most of the towns that Clarke visited (see Figure 2).<sup>4</sup> Indeed this industry had grown so much over the period that Clarke had cause to remark that there were a "large number of dyeing establishments, employing a number of persons".<sup>5</sup> Blue indigo dye was the most abundant and popular in many areas such as noted by McGregor in the Ilesa district, and

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<sup>4</sup>(...continued)

<sup>1</sup> PRO, CO879/33, Part 1, No.399, No.23, Enc.1, Millson to Colonial Secretary, 1890.

<sup>2</sup> H. Clapperton, op.cit, p.15-16.

<sup>3</sup> For an excellent, detailed study of the dyeing industry in a Yoruba town see, J. Byfield, *Women, Economy and the State: A Study of the Adire Industry in Abeokuta 1890-1939*, PhD. Thesis, Columbia University, 1993. Also, C. Keyes, op.cit, 1993.

<sup>4</sup> W. Clarke, op.cit, p.272. Gerhard Rohlfs also noted the dye-works in Share in eastern Yorubaland in 1867, See, E. deVeer & A. O'Hear, 'Gerhard Rohlfs in Yorubaland', in *HIA*, Vol.21, 1994, p.258.

<sup>5</sup> W. Clarke, op.cit, p.275.

Carter in Ogbomoso where extensive dyeing industries existed.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, commenting on the growth in commerce in the 1850's Clarke wrote "there are certain routes along which this trade passes and from which it seldom deviates, engaging hundreds and thousands and acting as an important stimulus to every department of labour".<sup>2</sup> One of the main female activities that benefitted from the constant to and fro of caravans and crowds on trade routes and in markets was food and drink vending. Clarke noted that "women only are engaged in the culinary arts".<sup>3</sup> Women and girls extended their domestic production of food to meet the demand among increasing numbers of travellers and traders everywhere for sustenance and refreshment.<sup>4</sup>

Bowen noted too that "women are always engaged in preparing all sorts of dishes for sale to passers by" and they also "make a beautiful malt, and a passably good beer, of Indian corn and millet". Women sold the beer as well as the food.<sup>5</sup> Men dominated

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<sup>1</sup> PRO, CO879/58/580, Nigeria 1899-1901, No.47, McGregor to Chamberlain; PP, Vol.64, Carter to Ripon, 11th Oct 1893.

<sup>2</sup> Clarke, *Travels and Explorations*, p.263.

<sup>3</sup> Clarke, *ibid*, p.242.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, p.33,34. At Ogbomoso a large caravan bound for Ilorin was detained overnight waiting for secure passage. He noted that "vendors of various eatables in any number, praising their articles".

<sup>5</sup> Bowen, *op.cit*, p.301. CMS, CA2049/95, Hinderer, Abeokuta, 19th June 1849.  
(continued...)

the sale of palm wine, probably because they were able to scale the palm tree trunks to make the required incisions and collect the juice from which it was made (see Figure 6).<sup>1</sup> At Imowo Bowen commented on seeing a man "paddle up to the landing, with several large calabashes full of palm wine which he retailed to the noisy travellers" in a trading caravan of several hundreds.<sup>2</sup> The extent and degree of specialisation in ready-made food trading specifically in Yorubaland is indicated by Clarke who noticed that after leaving Ibadan in a north easterly direction his

"hungry carriers were a little disconcerted in not finding the good old cooks of Yorubaland with their fine dishes ready to hand and the young lassies bearing about for everyone's convenience the little knick-knacks".<sup>3</sup>

It is clear then from the evidence that women dominated the production, trade and transport of palm produce. All of these activities were undertaken by women before the rise of the palm produce export trade; however, they were considerably extended to meet the growing demand for these skills which were specifically related to the new trade. In addition, many other established female industries benefitted from the increase in commerce and population such as the dyeing, pottery and food

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<sup>5</sup> (...continued)

<sup>1</sup> Examples are, CMS, CA2077/14, Phillips Junior, 30th May 1856. One of the church goers had a farm and made palm-wine part-time; PRO, C0147/72, No.295, Enc.3, Denton to Knutsford, 1889. This document mentions that a man implicated in murder was a palm wine maker.

<sup>2</sup> Bowen, *op.cit.*, p.101.

<sup>3</sup> Clarke, *Travels and Explorations*, p.171.

vending trades.

Labour Supply in The Palm Oil Industry.

Nineteenth century methods of palm and kernel oil extraction were time consuming and labour intensive. Robert Campbell gave this detailed account in 1860 describing both the processing techniques and division of labour in oil production,

"The nuts are gathered by men. From on to four or five women separate them from the integuments. They are then passed on to other women, who boil them in large earthen pots. Another set crush off the fibre in mortars. This done they are placed in large clay vats filled with water, and two or three women tread out the semi-liquid oil, which comes to the surface as disengaged from the fibre, where it is collected and again boiled to get rid of the water which mechanically adheres to it".<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, William Clarke explained the equally laborious process of kernel oil production at this time "by slightly burning, then by beating in the mortar into the consistency of wet mud, when it is trodden by foot and boiled, and thus converted into a brown colour *after some time*".<sup>2</sup> In the early 1860's Burton noted that every kernel had to be broken by manual labour because "as yet no efficient crusher has been invented" (see Figure 4).<sup>3</sup> Shea butter processing in Ilorin was similarly laborious and yielded a relatively low quantity of butter per woman hours. The colonial Resident, Herman Hodge, reckoned that it took 2 women 5 days to convert 6 baskets of kernels into shea butter using established Yoruba processing methods; a system which required more than 52 hours of preparation to yield around 28 pounds of butter.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R. Campbell, *op.cit*, p.51,2.

<sup>2</sup> Clarke, *op.cit*, p.274 (emphasis in quote author's own). Also see 'White Ant', 'Practical Notes on The Yoruba Country and Its Development', JRGS, Vol.1, Part 3, 1902, p.320.

<sup>3</sup> R. Burton, *op.cit*, p.129.

<sup>4</sup> H.B. Herman-Hodge, *Gazetteer of Ilorin Province* (George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1929), p.244.



However, time and labour saving devices were available to women producing oil. By 1880 E.G. Gunnell's Palm Nut and Kernel Machinery was advertised in "The Lagos Times". Available were; the Sifter, to sort nuts into various size categories; the Cracker, which was portable "for inland carriage"; the Separator, for removing the kernels from their shells; and the Palm-Pulp Press introduced in 1883 apparently due to "constant demand from Native Merchants and Traders for such a machine".<sup>1</sup> Further savings in labour could also be made in production of kernel oil. Burton pointed out in the early 1860's that some women produced black kernel oil which did not require the prior removal of kernels from their husks, thus saving time and labour.<sup>2</sup>

Despite this, most women still used the techniques that they had employed since the beginning of the century.<sup>3</sup> The fact that the majority of producers maintained traditional methods of extraction to such a late date rather than using equipment designed to aid large scale industry suggests that there were many small-scale producers. The high cost of Gunnell's machinery may have excluded many poorer, small scale producers from buying it. Alternatively, if a producer wished to expand it may simply

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<sup>1</sup> PRO, CO147/48, No.50, Enc.5, "The Lagos Times", Vol I, No.20, 24th Aug 1881; PRO, CO147/57, "The Lagos Times", Vol.III, No.72, 24th Oct 1883.

<sup>2</sup> Burton, Abeokuta and..., p.129.

<sup>3</sup> For production methods in the early period see, Captain J. Adams, Remarks on the Country Extending From the Cape Palmas to The River Congo, 1823, (Frank Cass, 1966), pp.171-2. For the late 19th century see, PRO, FO881/5622X, Precis of Information on the Colony of Lagos and the Neighbouring Tribes, compiled by R.E. Darwin, Feb 1888, p.22.

have been cheaper to employ or recruit more labour instead of machines. At any rate the evidence strongly suggests that the key to increasing output in the industry was indeed to increase labour.<sup>1</sup> Numerous options such as family, slaves and pawns of both sexes and of all ages were available as extra labour; the individual or combined option depended on the resourcefulness, status and/or wealth of the producer. The following sections will explore exactly how the rising labour demands of the palm industry were serviced, from which specific sections of society the labour was recruited and the ways in which these demands altered the sexual and generational division of labour within the industry.

#### Female Labour.

Authors studying the effects of the transition in both Nigeria and other West African societies have emphasised that the sexual division of labour in the palm produce industry, whether carried out on a small or large scale, particularly increased demand for female labour skills. The labour of women could be harnessed in two main ways: through the family, mainly via polygamy, and through slavery.<sup>2</sup> In relation to the 19th century

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<sup>1</sup> The Cracker and Palm Pulp Press were dear, at £25 and £30 respectively, while the Sifter and Separator were more reasonable at £5 and £4 respectively. Peter Kilby informs that in the early 1920's the Department of Agriculture began an official investigation into ways to improve the efficiency of processing techniques. The main advance was the introduction of a screw press with a 22 gallon capacity priced at £13, obviously intended to aid large scale production. See, Kilby, 'The Nigerian Palm Oil Industry', *Food Research Institute Series*, Vol.VII, No.2, 1969.

<sup>2</sup> See, C. Robertson and M.A. Klein, 'Women's Importance in African Slave Systems', in *Women and Slavery in Africa*; B.I. Obichere, 'Women and Slavery in the Kingdom of Dahomey', in *Revue Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer*, Vol.65, 1978.

Ngwa region of eastern Nigeria Susan Martin concluded that slave labour was not used to any great degree in the industry but rather that family and community members augmented labour needs.<sup>1</sup> In particular Martin found that men acquired more wives, which is similar to the Yoruba case, however, most of the women were free-born and not predominantly drawn from the slave population as in Yorubaland. The Ngwa case additionally differed from the Yoruba case since men largely gained control of the palm produce industry in Ngwa at the expense of women, something which they did not do in Yorubaland.

The options of polygamy and slavery were by no means mutually exclusive. As mentioned earlier slavery and polygamy were often linked in that many slave women were added to households as slave-wives and concubines in 19th century Yorubaland.<sup>2</sup> Yoruba men often stated that wealth and status was directly linked to the number of women, children and slaves that they had.<sup>3</sup> However, slaves and wives were not only an outward sign of wealth, more crucially, their value lay in their productive and reproductive input (and output).<sup>4</sup> As discussed previously, polygamy both increased and spread among the general population from the mid-century onwards. As the following section

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<sup>1</sup> Martin, 'Slaves, Igbo Women and Palm Oil in the 19th Century', 1993, pp.12-14.

<sup>2</sup> For an interesting study of polygamy in 19th century Yorubaland see Anthony Copley, 'The Debate on Widow Remarriage and Polygamy: Aspects of Moral Change in Nineteenth-Century Bengal and Yorubaland', *JICH*, Vol.7, No.2, 1979.

<sup>3</sup> PRO, CO147/4, No.96, Enc.2, Chiefs, Traders and People of Lagos to Gov. Glover, 1863. Refer to Chapter III for a fuller discussion of wealth in 19th century Yorubaland.

<sup>4</sup> WMMS, Rev. W. Hoad, Oyo, 18th Mar 1896.

will highlight this development in part reflected the rising demand for female labour as the palm produce and other female industries flourished.

What is less commonly appreciated in discussions on polygamy and slavery is that although many slaves and slave-wives were owned by men, it was senior women in slave-owning households that usually controlled and used their labour. Both free-born co-wives and slave wives provided an important source of labour for senior wives. A husband did not generally interfere in his senior wife's management of labour. In addition men were largely excluded from entering and controlling women's economic activities and the income thus generated. Therefore, unlike the Ngwa case in which men financially gained from their wives labour, in Yorubaland many more women directly benefitted from the extra labour that availability of junior co-wives provided within their household.

Fadipe related that in the early 20th century, and by implication in the 19th century, a junior co-wife "must for some considerable period of her life place her services at the disposal of all and sundry and thus constitute herself into a sort of common drudge" and further that "A great deal of drudgery and heavy work normally falls upon junior wives, whether they like it or not".<sup>1</sup> In the early 1860's the Rev. Stone noted that a senior wife managed all the domestic affairs of a household.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> N.A. Fadipe, *The Sociology of the Yoruba*, p.80,115.

<sup>2</sup> R.H. Stone, *op.cit*, pp.98-99.

Management of labour was an important part of that authority.

Most contemporary commentators saw polygamy as an advantage for senior wives. Burton emphasised the particular labour advantage of polygamy in 1863 (mainly based on his experience of life at Abeokuta) stating that the Yoruba are

"polygamic because they are dependent for the necessaries and for the little comforts of their poor existence upon a plurality of women and the number of their children... A single wife cannot perform all the offices required even in the simplest stage of society".<sup>1</sup>

Often women themselves may have played an active role in encouraging their husband to take another wife in order to lighten their domestic load as suggested by Lieut. Governor Lees in 1879 when he noted,

"a wife falls in, perhaps the more readily with polygamy than she otherwise would because she has to support herself and her children in a very large degree, and she is cautious lest her burden should become too heavy".<sup>2</sup>

The allocation of time-consuming chores to junior wives freed a considerable amount of time for senior women in which they could concentrate on lucrative business ventures such as long distance trade trips or simply enjoy more leisure time. In addition, senior women used the labour of slave wives and concubines to provide extra labour for their business ventures. The free-born senior wife could either keep all of the income generated, allow the slave-wives a small share or come to an arrangement with her husband about splitting the profits between them.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Burton, *Abeokuta and The Camaroons Mountain*, p.208.

<sup>2</sup> PRO, CO/879/15/178, 'Information Respecting the Settlement of Lagos' by Lieut. Gov. Lees, 1879, p.21.

Moreover, in the 1890's Alvan Millson suggested a further incentive for polygamy when he explained that to some extent men were forced to obtain more than one wife as a result of the social practice current at the time whereby a woman who had just given birth was confined indoors for a considerable period of time nursing her baby (c.3 years) and was therefore unable to perform all of her domestic and trading activities.<sup>1</sup> Formal recognition of the value of a woman's labour was incorporated into the bride-price, of which A.B. Ellis commented in 1894 "The amount paid for a wife is regarded as a compensation to her parents for the loss of her services in the household..".<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, much evidence indicates that many other slave women were taken as concubines, which meant that the man had sexual relations with them but they were not taken as additional wives. These women were often used by either the man or his other wives as a source of labour. One well documented case is that of Awa, a female slave bought by Henry Robbin, a prominent cotton producer and trader connected with the Church Missionary Society in Abeokuta. In 1865, after escaping to Lagos, Awa stated to the Lagos authorities that she and nine other slave women were kept by Henry Robbin as concubines. However, according to Awa, Mr.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Millson, 'The Yoruba Country, West Africa', *PRGS*, 29th June, 1891, p.578. This practice also applied in earlier years, seemingly with the same affect: in 1825 at Saki, to the west of Oyo, Clapperton informed the head chief that an Englishman had only one wife, the chief in turn asked "What does he do... when one of his wives has a child?", Clapperton, *Second Expedition..*, p.25. Millson's statement may also have applied to the nursing mother herself, who may have wanted a co-wife to take over some of her domestic and trading work while she was confined within the household and pre-occupied with her new child.

<sup>2</sup> A.B. Ellis, *The Yoruba-speaking Peoples...*, p.182.

Robbin's principal wife "constantly employed [her] to carry and count cowries..". On one occasion Awa was sent by her senior co-wife along with seven of her fellow slave wives to the Aro gate to collect cowries.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, Awa was placed in the care of a Jemima Sekumade, a wealthy women of Abeokuta, for a time. Madame Sekumade stated that she used Awa to carry loads of provisions and to carry and count cowries for her .<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, in 1886 two slave women, Ramatu and Asatu, both recounted how they were captured and then eventually sold to the Balogun of Ikorodu who took them as concubines. Both women had children with him. Nonetheless, they both felt they were treated as slaves by both the Balogun and his family which suggests that they all exploited their labour. Part of their duties included producing and trading palm products, handing over all of the income to the Balogun.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally women bought and employed domestic slaves in their own right to help them with their increasing workload. Well known and documented examples can be given such as the Iyalode's Madame Tinubu and Madame Efunsetan who both owned hundreds of slaves of both sexes whom they employed both on their farms and in their households.<sup>4</sup> In particular, it was reported in 1859-60

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2080/39, Robbin, Abeokuta and CA2011/32, Deposition of Awa, 12th Nov 1865.

<sup>2</sup> PRO, CO147/9, No.147, Enc.1, Records of meeting at Abeokuta to hear evidence in defence of Mr. Robbin in the case of Awa, Nov 1865.

<sup>3</sup> PRO, CO147/57, No.288, Evans to Granville, Sept 1886.

<sup>4</sup> For Tinubu see, CA2029/16, Cole, Abeokuta, 17th June & 13th July 1874; (continued...)

by Mr. Martin Delaney who had several meetings with Madame Tinubu at her residence at Abeokuta that "she has attached to her immediate household about sixty persons and keeps constantly employed about three hundred and sixty persons bringing her in palm oil and ivory".<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it was said that Efunsetan was "very rich, owning some 2,000 slaves in her farms alone exclusive of those at home".<sup>2</sup> Indeed both women did not have children and therefore needed slaves both to build up their household and to perform duties and roles which children and relatives might otherwise have performed. The fact that they did not need to spend some of their income on maintaining children further strengthened their financial ability to buy slaves.

Although both Tinubu and Efunsetan were clearly large-scale slave owners, they were representative of many other less-famous women who also bought and used slaves on a lesser scale over the century. James Johnson remarked in 1879 that one Betsy Desola of Ake, who was in the process of trying to 'buy' the title of Iyalode of the *Parakoyi* society at Ake, also lacked children and a family of her own and "is an owner of a number of slaves". Her slaves worked in her household and handed over a set amount of their daily earnings to her. He gives four further examples of

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<sup>4</sup>(...continued)

CA2056/52 Johnson, 2nd Sept 1878; PP, Vol 43, Class B, No.5, Campbell to Clarendon, 26th March 1856 & No.16, Campbell to Clarendon, 26th May 1856; On Efunsetan see, CA2058/2, Johnson, S. Ibadan, 1st May 1874; S. Johnson, *The History...*, p.393.

<sup>1</sup> M. Delaney, *Official Report of The Niger Valley Exploring Party 1859-60*, p.79.

<sup>2</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, p.393.



Saro women who traded and owned and used slaves in that connection in Abeokuta; Lydia Gemowi, Mary Coker, Fanny Fisher and Susannah Lawolu.<sup>1</sup> Similarly in Ondo, Young noted the case of another rich, industrious woman who had bought around ten slaves with her earnings.<sup>2</sup> In Ibadan too, Efunsetan was not the only female large-scale slave owner. James Johnson noted that other "Well-to-do women in the town also buy slaves of both sexes".<sup>3</sup> Indeed, it was reported by Mr. Scott, a CMS missionary based at Ibadan, that around 1880 the Ibadan authorities ordered that all of the opulent women in the town were to contribute some of their slaves toward funding the war effort.<sup>4</sup>

Poorer women similarly bought individual slaves to help them in their work, as in a case related by Young at Ondo in 1879 where a woman seeking baptism was reported to have bought a male slave and sent him to Aye to trade on her behalf.<sup>5</sup> Many other examples of female slave owners are cited throughout this study either in the text or footnotes. Clearly, unlike the Ngwa case studied by Susan Martin, slave labour played an important part in the development of the palm industry in Yorubaland and many women used slave labour either through slave co-wives and concubines or independently in order to mount small and large

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2056/28, J. Johnson, 2nd Aug 1879.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2098/13, Young, Ondo, 6th March 1876.

<sup>3</sup> S. Johnson, *The History...*, p.325.

<sup>4</sup> PRO, CO147/46, No.124, Enc.3, Scott to Hethersett, Aug 1881.

<sup>5</sup> CMS, CA2098/26, Young, 4th Aug 1879.

scale enterprises.

#### Male Labour.

Evidence from the 1860's onwards suggests that whereas previously men confined their input to the palm oil industry to the initial gathering of the palm fruits, some now actually entered other stages of the industry. In 1867 Rev. Allen met with both women and men actually making palm oil at a place 2 miles outside Oke-Ogunpa, Ibadan.<sup>1</sup> It is likely that these men were slaves. The intense militarism in Ibadan had affected occupational status<sup>2</sup> and although some free-born men still engaged in farming and other agricultural work, increasingly, many more male slaves who were not absorbed into the army were detailed to farmwork and agricultural production.<sup>3</sup> The majority of soldiers and warriors, and many other men would not engage in agricultural tasks because farming was increasingly seen as a low status occupation, therefore in some cases male slaves were used to provide the extra labour. Indeed, the association of slaves with agricultural production in general became so strong among the warrior and some of the common class of men that they not only looked down upon those occupied in agricultural production

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2019/4, Allen, 7th May 1867.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, David Hinderer, Ibadan, CA2049/104, 4th Oct 1851, CA2049/112, 26th Oct 1855 and CA2049/116, Half Yearly Report to April 1859; CMS, James Johnson, Ibadan, CA2056/50, Feb-April 1877.

<sup>3</sup> S. Johnson, *The History*, pp.324-325; Also see, Bolanle Awe, 'Militarism and Economic Development in Nineteenth Century Yoruba Country: The Ibadan Example', *JAH*, Vol.14, No.1, 1973 and 'The End of An Experiment: The Collapse of The Ibadan Empire 1877-1893', *JHSN*, Vol.3, No.2, 1965.

in Ibadan, but also in other towns.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly in the Eastern District of the Lagos Protectorate, at Atigere, Acting Administrator Simpson heard the testimony of a male, Hausa slave called Dawudu, who stated that a fellow Hausa had been abducted at Igbo-Egunrin while he was making palm oil.<sup>2</sup> Most Hausa in the coastal area were either slaves or ex-slaves. It is possible that some of these male slaves were either being employed, or were acting on their own initiative, to produce palm oil. Both individually and in combination, the demise of the Atlantic slave trade and the growth of so-called 'legitimate' commerce and militarism stimulated significant alterations in occupational status and the sexual division of labour. As far as the sexual division of labour in the production of palm oil is concerned, by the late 1860's, slave men had now entered an industry long dominated by women.

In the early 1860's the Rev. R. H. Stone saw "several caravans composed of hundreds of carriers of both sexes hurrying on to the coast", he noticed that "Palm oil in large carboy-like calabashes and elephant tusks, seemed to constitute the chief articles for export from the interior".<sup>3</sup> In the interior

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<sup>1</sup> For example, in April 1860 Ibadan troops attacked two Egba villages after which they haughtily declared "Who are the Egbas but cotton-growers and palm oil traders?", WMMS, Notices, Vol.15, p.215, Extract of letter from E. Bickersteth, 10th April 1860 (Also stated by Chiefs of Abeokuta in PRO, CO147/12, No.3, 1866).

<sup>2</sup> PRO, CO147/51, No.250, Acting Administrator F. Simpson to Administrator of Gold Coast, 1881.

<sup>3</sup> R.H. Stone, op.cit, p.46.

producing town of Ibadan itself, Hinderer noted in 1860 that some men had indeed entered the palm oil business by head-loading the oil to market towns and trading it later with other goods.<sup>1</sup> In both accounts Hinderer does not mention whether these men were slaves or freeborn. However, further evidence does indicate that slaves were commonly used to transport palm produce from 'middleman' states to coastal markets, although the specific sex of the captives is not stated. In 1889 one man involved in the coastal transport business stated that slaves brought from Abeokuta and the Ijebu area for sale at Ado generally also carried provisions, including palm oil, and other commodities on their heads. Indeed this man considered that "The slave season is the same as the oil season: when oil is scarce, slaves are scarce", indicating the ingenuity of traders who waited until they had sufficient quantities of oil and other goods before embarking on combined trading trips to sell slaves and commodities, and also perhaps that they were to some extent reliant upon that slave labour to head-load the goods.<sup>2</sup> In particular, the Awujale of Ijebu explicitly stated in 1882 that "... captives were bought and used in carrying palm oil and palm kernels to the market for their masters for the purpose of trade, as there is no river passage in which canoes can be used as in other towns".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> PRO, FO84/1115, Hinderer, Ibadan, 8th Sept 1860.

<sup>2</sup> PRO, CO879/29/365, No.29, Enc.1, Millson to Denton, 20th Jan 1889, Statement of Wheto of Badagry (7th Jan 1889). The evidence may also suggest that traders were combining the sales of palm produce and other goods with slaves to make up diminishing profits in the slave trade as slave prices dropped.

<sup>3</sup> PRO, CO147/49, No.62, Enc.2, Whilloughby to Rowe, Feb 1882.

Many of these slaves originated from northern Yoruba towns and further afield. James Johnson noted in 1877 that "at present the number of male porters is small and this is made up more of Housas (sic) and other Niger people than Yorubans and Egbas".<sup>1</sup> This statement not only indicates that women must have made up the majority of porters at that time, but also makes it clear that male slaves were employed. The dominance of women and slaves in the carrying trade together with the fact that wages were lower than in most other professions caused many, and especially full-time soldiers, to look down on portering as a low status job.<sup>2</sup> However, if pride could be conquered money was there to be earned as Hinderer pointed out when he recalled his advice to some destitute soldiers in Ibadan to respond to calls for *alaru* (porters).<sup>3</sup>

Previous evidence has hinted that men also traded palm produce in some areas. In particular, it is well known that Ijebu men were keen traders.<sup>4</sup> In 1886 two runaway female slaves, Ramatu and Asatu, testified that they often traded with Ijebu men in

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<sup>3</sup>(...continued)

<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2056/50, J. Johnson, Report on journey from Abeokuta to Ibadan, 21st Mar 1877.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Campbell noticed in 1860 that when the Alake at Abeokuta detailed some soldiers to head-load some of Campbell's goods to Ibadan they seemed to regard the office "as derogatory to the dignity of soldiers". Campbell, op.cit, p.126.

<sup>3</sup> PRO, CO147/52, No.298, Enc.1, Letter from Hinderer to Johnson, 1882.

<sup>4</sup> CMS, CA2087/62, White, Ota, 26th July 1861; CMS, CA2075/29, Olubi, Ibadan, 28th Dec 1873; PRO, CO147/24, No.63, Enclosure in Fowler to Hennesy, Aug 1872.

palm produce in particular. Ramatu stated that she sold her palm kernels to one Majolangbe and Asatu asserted that she sold her oil and kernels regularly to one Ojo and one Sani.<sup>1</sup> By the last decade of the 19th century the extent of male trading in Ijebuland was highlighted by Millson who asserted in 1891 that among the population of Ijebu-Ode "nearly all the able bodied men are scattered on trading expeditions through the interior" while the women vended food in and around town.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Ijebu men became so committed to trade that they generally withdrew from farming as the decades passed, leaving cultivation largely in the hands of their slaves, as Governor Rowe reported in 1887.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, Richard Burton commented that on his journey to Abeokuta from Lagos in 1863, he passed both male and female traders in "numerous canoes ascending with empty and descending with filled oil puncheons".<sup>4</sup>

Many other reports suggest that men may have been prominent in the palm oil trade nearer the coast. In some cases the men were trading on behalf of others, such as Amodu, a Lagosian man, who traded for several Lagos merchants: on one recorded occasion

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<sup>1</sup> PRO, CO147/57, No.288, Closing of the Ikorodu market, Enclosures 1 and 2, 28th Aug 1886.

<sup>2</sup> PRO, CO147/85, No168, Carter to Knutsford, Enc, "Yoruba" by Alvan Millson 1891.

<sup>3</sup> PP, Vol 63, Colonies: Nigeria, Memo on War existing between Ibadan and interior Tribes, 1887, p.33. Also, PRO, CO147/85, No.182, Carter to Knutsford, Visit to Ijebu, June 1892.

<sup>4</sup> R. Burton, *Abeokuta and the Camaroons...*, p.25.

he departed from Porto Novo with a "large quantity of palm kernels, two pots of palm nut oil and two rolls of tobacco" which he had either bought or was intending to sell.<sup>1</sup> In another case the agents of a male trader called Siedu Olowu were detained at Igbo-Bini further inland while on their way to Lagos with a bulk load of 60 casks of palm oil to trade on behalf of their boss.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, there is much evidence in cases relating to theft and seizure of trading goods on the coast that supports the assertion that many men also traded palm produce for themselves on a smaller scale.<sup>3</sup>

Overall the evidence strongly indicates that some freeborn, but many more slave men were producing, transporting, buying and selling palm produce from the 1860's onwards. Indeed, in relation to slaves, Consul Campbell explicitly noted in 1855 that the Ibadan warriors and slave traders were unable to find a sufficient market for the adult portion of their captives on the coast.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, many of these captives were alternatively absorbed into households as domestic slaves. Perhaps, as Robin Law has convincingly suggested in relation to the Dahomian

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<sup>1</sup> PRO, CO147/4, No.68, Deposition of Amodu at the Police Court in Lagos, 1863.

<sup>2</sup> PRO, CO147/72, No.309, Denton to Knutsford, Oct 1889.

<sup>3</sup> PRO, CO147/4, No.68, Enclosure in Glover to Didelot, 3rd Aug 1863; PRO, CO147/6, No.7, Freeman to Duke of Newcastle, Feb, 1864; PRO, CO147/40, No.65, Enclosure Kojo, brother of King of Weme to T. Tickel, 1880; PRO, CO147/40, No.3, Enclosure, Statement of Jemetoh and Whasu, Moloney to Ussher, 1880; PRO, CO147/40, No.66, Enclosure, 'Statement in letter form from Bada, a trader of Epe', 1880.

<sup>4</sup> PRO, FO84/976, Vol.19, No.35, Campbell to Clarendon, 7th Sept 1855.

industry, some of the male slaves were being used to provide the extra labour that the growing palm produce industry required since it was more profitable to utilise male slaves that could no longer be (easily) exported.<sup>1</sup>

The entry of men into trade at the coast may have been related to the fact that men dominated the canoe transport business throughout the coastal lagoon networks where they were employed both autonomously and by other traders to transport and trade palm produce and other goods. Hopkins pointed out that large wholesalers were still needed at the coast to collect incoming goods just as they had been during the slave trade era.<sup>2</sup> Men had formerly filled this position and clearly they held on to it as 'legitimate' commerce took over; although some men also entered the trade as small scale retailers, a niche generally long dominated by women. Nonetheless, despite the fact that men had become more involved in the industry, women were most prominent as what Hopkins defined as a "new generation of traders" operating on a smaller scale in 'legitimate' production further inland.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly though, women had a long-standing dominance in the production and trade of palm produce on a small scale for the domestic market, and particularly for the provisioning of merchant and slave ships, which pre-dated the export trade. In this sense women's developing role in the export

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<sup>1</sup> See, R. Law, 'Legitimate Trade and Gender..', op.cit, p.206.

<sup>2</sup> A. Hopkins, *An Economic History*, p.145.

<sup>3</sup> Hopkins, *An Economic History*, p.146.



industry shows vital continuities as well as changes and suggests to some extent that women as the "new generation" of small scale traders may not have been as 'new' after all.

The entry of some men into the palm oil industry marked a departure from established gender roles and altered the existing sexual division of labour in the industry.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, this development is not compatible with Martin's findings on alterations in the established sexual division of labour in the Ngwa industry which document free-born men's appropriation and control of the trade at the expense of women over the century. The majority of men working in the Yoruba industry were slaves who were mainly employed by men working in the wholesale trade in palm produce nearer the coast or by women operating on both a large and small scale further inland.

#### Children's Labour.

Children's labour became increasingly more vital in all areas of production as the palm oil and other industries expanded from the mid-19th century.<sup>2</sup> Samuel Johnson noticed that during the corn harvesting season in the Aremo farming area of Ibadan in 1874, the women in particular carried the full baskets back to town for sale employing the help of their children in doing

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<sup>1</sup> PRO, FO881/5622X, 'Precis of Information on the Colony of Lagos and the Neighbouring tribes', Captain R.E. Darwin, 1888.

<sup>2</sup> For examples see, CMS, Phillips, CA2078/17, Ondo, 8th April 1877; Johnson, S. CA2058/3, Ibadan, 8th July 1874; Young, C.N. CA2098/10, Ode-Ondo, 7th May 1875.

so.<sup>1</sup> Young, commenting on the Ondo area one year later, further emphasised that "the women must have the children to help them in the domestic business such as going to farms and some trading places to fetch things for them".<sup>2</sup> Moreover, as noted previously, children performed key tasks at certain stages in the cloth production industry which was growing in the second half of the 19th century.

However, the life expectancy of children in Yoruba towns was generally very low at a time when one would expect that children's labour was becoming increasingly valuable with the rise in demand for both food and vegetable products for the domestic and export trade respectively and the impetus this gave to other occupations.<sup>3</sup> In 1830 the Lander brothers concluded from the high number of women carrying *ibeji* in the western Egbado area that "the mortality of children must be immense indeed here..".<sup>4</sup> In 1849 Henry Townsend considered that the birth rate in Abeokuta had been adversely affected by a rise in polygamy.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2058/3, S. Johnson, 7th July 1874.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2098/10, Young, 7th May 1875.

<sup>3</sup> Evidence indicating low birth rates and poor life expectancy among children in 19th century Yorubaland can be found in R & J Lander, *The Niger Journal*.., p.72; CMS, Townsend, CA2085/1, letter dated 31st Jan 1849; Bowen, *op.cit*, p.305.

<sup>4</sup> R. & J. Lander, *The Niger Journal*, Hallet (ed), p.70,72. *Ibeji* were small, carved, wooden figurines made to represent and embody the likeness of a deceased individual or twin baby. See CMS, CA2087/50, White, 1st April 1856 and CA2087/47, 24th May 1855.

<sup>5</sup> CMS, CA2085/1, Letter dated 31st Jan 1849, Rev. Townsend to Captain Trotter, R.N. Johnson provided a concrete example of this from Ibadan, noting in 1866 that although Ogunmola's "wives could be numbered by hundreds" apparently  
(continued...)

Moreover, referring to the five or so years that followed, Thomas Bowen stated in relation to the western areas of Yorubaland that in his experience "Yoruba women are not prolific, and entire barrenness is not uncommon".<sup>1</sup> One late 19th century source considered that children often died due to birth complications, disease and poor sanitation.<sup>2</sup> Henry Townsend in particular became quite involved in trying to establish the exact extent and origin of the problem among the general population of Abeokuta. However, it will suffice to say that after much investigation he concluded, "a large number of women had no children, a large number but one or two, and a large number had lost all their children by death" and further that the people themselves generally remarked that by comparison, the Sierra Leonian people had many children.<sup>3</sup>

One way that this problem could be bridged was through the *iwofa* or pawnage system.<sup>4</sup> James Johnson explained the system as it operated in 1877 whereby a person seeking a loan, offered either a son or daughter, or a slave's labour services to a

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<sup>5</sup> (...continued)

he had "but three children by all these", see S. Johnson, *The History*, p.376.

<sup>1</sup> T.J. Bowen, *op.cit*, p.305; Also, R. Burton, *op.cit*, p.207.

<sup>2</sup> *A Report*, *op.cit*, p.99.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2085/1, Letter from Townsend to Captain Trotter, 31st Jan 1849.

<sup>4</sup> For individual studies of pawnship in African societies including Yorubaland see, P. Lovejoy and T. Falola (eds), *Pawnship in Africa*, Westview Press, 1994 and for a detailed study on 19th century Yorubaland see, E.A. Oroge, 'Iwofa: An Historical Survey of the Yoruba Institution of Indenture', in *AEH*, Vol.14, 1985, pp.75-106.

creditor as interest upon the debt owing.<sup>1</sup> According to Samuel Johnson (probably in relation to Ibadan) children of both sexes could be pawned; "The boys generally tend horses and run errands, and the girls engage with the house-wives in domestic affairs". Moreover, unlike adult iwofa, children usually lived with the money-lender as apprentice domestic servants.<sup>2</sup> However, a number of issues are not made clear by the available evidence. Firstly, in theory, only someone with the capital to lend money in the first place would be able to benefit from the labour offered through the system. Indeed a report on the Yoruba referring to the last quarter of the 19th century explicitly states that "the consideration for the loan [is] that the borrower is deprived of, and the lender enjoys, the services of the borrower's child" through the iwofa system.<sup>3</sup> Samuel Johnson related that the system provided a labour pool of domestic servants in the absence of a class of paid domestic workers, "A parent will even put his child into service that way when there is no debt to pay in order to train him into habits of discipline and industry..". Clearly both parties could benefit from the system; however, Johnson further states that in such cases money was still given to the child's parent or guardian.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, even if the money merely acted as a token loan, the available evidence supports the case that a sum

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2056/50, J. Johnson, Feb - April 1877, Journey from Lagos to Ibadan.

<sup>2</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, pp.126-130.

<sup>3</sup> A Report, *op.cit*, p.78.

<sup>4</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, p.129.

of money still had to pass between lender and guardian and the poorer of the two would temporarily lose their child's labour.

Similarly, the question arises whether a person with available capital would not have been equally able to buy a slave rather than loan money for an iwofa? Answering this question would require a discussion of the relative merits and drawbacks of the iwofa and domestic slave systems of labour which would deviate from the present topic. However, Olubi does mention that due to an abundance of cowries in Ibadan in 1869, people were unwilling to "labour with their own hands when they can get a slave or a pawn to work for them".<sup>1</sup> Another missionary reported from Sagamu in the Ijebu area in 1895 that labour was a little more expensive to secure due to cowrie inflation.<sup>2</sup> Both sources suggest that buying slaves and hiring pawns were equally affected by financial considerations such as in these cases, cowrie availability and value. Additionally by the same token it is possible that resort to the iwofa system was made when child slave prices were high and/or the availability of child slaves was poor. Overall, Johnson reflected the demand for child pawns when he stated that "Pawning children and slaves...is very common".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2075/20, Olubi, 21st Aug 1867.

<sup>2</sup> WMMS, Rev. H.J. Ellis, Ofin, Sagamu, 16th Mar 1895.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2056/50, J. Johnson, Feb - April 1877, Journey from Lagos to Ibadan.

The demand for child slaves was satiated to some extent through the widespread sale of slave children supplied mainly by the Egba<sup>1</sup> and in particular, the Ibadan army, which frequently captured many children whilst marauding or raiding enemy towns, as noted by both the Rev. Olubi and Rev. Allen in 1870 during Ibadan's war with Ilesa.<sup>2</sup> Some of the children were kept to work for the victors whilst some were sold away. By 1855 there was a keen demand for child slaves in Lagos: Consul Campbell noted that,

"the young children captives made by the Ibadans, are finding their way down here for sale; these would be unsaleable at Whydah for exportation, but are eagerly bought here for domestic purposes".<sup>3</sup>

Even in interior towns the demand for children outstripped that for adults, as Campbell noted later that year:

"the Ibadans... have found no difficulty in disposing of the children captives, these being readily bought up everywhere, for domestic purposes".<sup>4</sup>

Evidence indicates that the use of slave children in the carrying trade had increased since Clapperton and the Lander brothers had travelled in Yorubaland. The demand for the transport of the above mentioned domestic and export products provided the extra stimulus for labour in this area. By 1878, the

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2069/13, Meakin, Oyo, 31st Oct 1859.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, Allen, CA2019/9, 8th June 1870; Olubi, CA2075/25, 8th June 1870. And earlier, in the 'Report of the Ijaye Relief Committee' CMS, CA2011/25, 1st Oct 1861.

<sup>3</sup> PP, Vol 42, No.16, Campbell to Clarendon, 1st Oct 1855.

<sup>4</sup> PRO, FO84/976, Vol.19, No.35, Campbell to Earl of Clarendon, 7th Dec 1855.

introduction of the Registration of Alien Children Ordinance by the British authorities, caused a panic among the traders in both the Lagos settlement and the surrounding areas. In particular, no less than thirty nine prominent female traders pointed out to the Consulate that the "produce of the country...is generally brought into the settlement by the domestic slaves and children of slaves of the natives of the countries around the settlement..". The women feared that their slaves and slave children would be encouraged to desert them at Lagos in a bid for freedom, thus injuring their business activities.<sup>1</sup> Louis Wilson noted the increased use of children's labour among the Krobo of southern Ghana during the rise of the palm oil and kernel trade, however he concluded that children's labour was largely drawn from within the family or community and not primarily from the slave population.<sup>2</sup>

Overall then, it is not surprising that by 1867 some of the Brazilian population of Lagos were complaining that prohibitions limiting their ownership of slaves meant "that they could not compete in productions on their farms with the natives of the interior", who were not affected by the restrictions.<sup>3</sup> However, interior slave owners had problems of their own. After the establishment of the Lagos colony in 1861, increasing numbers of slaves abandoned their 'homes' in the interior in search of

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<sup>1</sup> PRO, CO147/35, No.18, Enc, Dumaresq to Freely, 1878.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, 'The Bloodless Conquest...', op.cit, pp.292-297.

<sup>3</sup> CO147/13, No.12, Blackall to the Duke of Buckingham, Visit to Lagos, 1867.

liberation and protection at Lagos. This caused a serious crisis among interior slave owners which both highlights the crucial role that women and children played in industry in general and the palm industry in particular, and the ultimate dependence that many producers and traders had on them for labour.<sup>1</sup> In 1872 the Alake and the trade chiefs (parakoyi) of Abeokuta complained to the consul:

"Our slaves... our wives, our children, are all running away to Lagos, and for which we dare institute no enquiry... our slaves here are used in the same way as children of our own body begotten, they are to help us in working our farms to obtain the produce needed in the European market, this is the only investment we had here, by taking them from us [you are] reducing people of importance to abject beggary in a day".<sup>2</sup>

The crisis was still ongoing in 1887 when Soranke, the Jaguna of Igbein expressed his fears about fugitive slaves;

"there are those who are assisting us in working to get enough palm oil, palm kernels for trading, and when they who will assist us in working will be running away so furiously every day... it will cause trading to be lessened".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, E.A. Oroge, 'The Fugitive Slave Question in Anglo-Egba Relations 1861-1886', *JHSN*, Vol.8, No.1, Dec 1975; Kristin Mann, *The Emancipation of Female Slaves in Colonial Lagos*, unpublished paper, 1991 and *Abolition and the Organisation of Labour in Early Colonial Lagos*, paper presented at symposium on The End Of The Atlantic Slave Trade, University of Stirling, April 1993.

<sup>2</sup> PRO, CO147/21, No.49, Enclosure in Pope Hennesy to Kimberley, 1872, 'Letter from Alake, Ogoni, Baloguns and Parakoyi of Abeokuta to Governor Pope Hennesy'. By the end of the century Carter reported that at Abeokuta desertion of women, children and slaves was still the major preoccupation of the chiefs: PRO, CO879/45/509, No.16, Carter to Chamberlain, 1896.

<sup>3</sup> PRO, CO879/27/345, No.16a, Enclosure 2, 1887, 'Soranke, the Jaguna of Igbein to Moloney'. Many more letters with similar complaints were submitted to the consulate over the period: see, PRO, CO147/6, No.49, Enc, Glover to Cardwell, 23rd July 1864, 'Ogundipe to Glover'; CO147/3, No.41, Enc, Cptn. William-Rice Mulliner to Duke of Newcastle, 1863; CO147/59, No.127, Enc, Mr. Kester to Acting Administrator Evans, 'Visit to Ijebu-Ode', 1887; CO147/38, No.135, Enc.2, Ussher to Sir Hicks-Beach Bart, 'Letter from Awujale of Ijebu-Ode', 1879. Also see, CMS, CA2029/15, Cole, 15th Feb 1874.



One consequence of the productive and reproductive value attached to women was noted by Consul Campbell in 1858,

"The male domestic slave finds little trouble in arranging with his master the price of his redemption... It is the unfortunate female slave who meets with difficulty in obtaining the redemption of herself and her children, particularly if they happen to be daughters... their masters often show great unwillingness to part with them".<sup>1</sup>

This reluctance to lose female slaves, specifically if they were taken as wives and concubines, is evident in the following statement issued by the Ikorodu authorities following the escape of Ramatu and Asatu, the two female slaves mentioned earlier that belonged to the Balogun:

"slaves running to Lagos we understand, but as the two women in question were the Balogun's wives the Governor should be able to send them back. That forty-eight men slaves of the Balogun had been away to Lagos, but he never asked for them".<sup>2</sup>

Female slave owners faced similar problems: In 1862 a male slave who had escaped from his mistress in Abeokuta brought his case for redemption before the Slave court at Lagos. Much to the anger of his mistress, who resented the court's interference, the slave was able to buy his manumission. It was subsequently reported that his mistress had seized members of the Superintendent of the Liberated African Yard's family and was holding them to ransom demanding the male slave back.<sup>3</sup> Similarly in 1874 Madame Tinubu accused one James Asoro, a man working as

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<sup>1</sup> PP, Vol.45, No.11, Campbell to Clarendon, 28th Mar 1858.

<sup>2</sup> PRO, CO147/57, No.288, Enc.2, 'News from Ikorodu Market', 1886.

<sup>3</sup> PRO, CO147/1, Freeman to Newcastle, 4th June 1862 (Also reproduced in PP, Vol.48, No.17, Enc.1, pp.14-16).

a mail carrier for the missionaries, of being instrumental in freeing some of her slaves through the Lagos Slave Courts.<sup>1</sup> The emancipation of slaves, slave-wives and their children threatened to undermine the established patriarchal authority in many Yoruba towns. The consequences of these changes will be examined in greater depth in Chapter V.

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2029/16, Cole, 17th June 1874.

## &gt;&gt;&gt;::&lt;&lt;&lt; CHAPTER III &gt;&gt;&gt;::&lt;&lt;&lt;

## WOMEN AND WEALTH.

Wealth in Yoruba Society.

What exactly constituted wealth in Yoruba society? Simi Afonja has argued that the rich could be distinguished from the wealthy in Yorubaland. He asserts that the fortunes of the wealthy were usually derived from extensive farmland and house property items which were of a permanent nature, while on the other hand, the rich could provide ready cash, but their fortunes could fluctuate and their wealth was based on credit.<sup>1</sup> However, much contemporary evidence suggests that certainly in the 19th century less distinction was made between the wealthy and the rich. Wealth was both perceived as and composed of a more complex, fluid interaction of the elements which Afonja mentions - such as property, farmland and money - together with other elements which seem to be more important in the 19th century; people in particular. In his detailed study of pre-colonial Yoruba monetary systems A. G. Adebayo contends that the positions of both a wealthy person and a rich person were interchangeable. The dynamic nature of Yoruba society at that time promoted evolving, flexible systems of access to wealth, titles and social position.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the Yoruba term for 'rich' and 'wealthy' (*loro* meaning 'one who has riches, wealth') is interchangeable; no

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<sup>1</sup> S. Afonja, 'Women, Power and Authority in Yoruba Society', in Leacock and Ardener (eds), *Visibility and Power*, p.141.

<sup>2</sup> A.G. Adebayo. 'Money, Credit, and Banking in Pre-colonial Africa: the Yoruba Example', *Anthropos*, Vol.89, 1994.

distinction is made purely in terms of which elements define each.<sup>1</sup> In particular, one group of Lagosian chiefs and traders emphasised in 1863 that their wealth definitely derived largely from people and not any of Afonja's elements, stating that while

"the wealth and opulence of a European consists of money, land etc... that of the black is far in the reverse, which is of slaves and wives".<sup>2</sup>

Robert Campbell, who travelled through the Egba area in 1859-60, highlighted a further nuance, asserting that a man's wealth was best manifest "by the number of his wives, children and slaves".<sup>3</sup>

If wealth was perceived to both consist of and be represented by women, children and slaves, how was the value of those people realised in real terms? One of the most fundamental links between people and wealth was their labour power, as the Rev. Hoad of Oyo stated in 1896; "The rich man is the one who owns the most wives and slaves, having at his command not money, but labour".<sup>4</sup> Wealthy, independent women also accumulated, measured and represented wealth by the number of people they had attached to their household. However, instead of wives, they had

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<sup>1</sup> *lowo* means 'one who has money' which defines the means of wealth. Nonetheless, Karin Barber points out that although the Yoruba term "Aje can be translated as 'wealth' in contradistinction to *owo* (money), this distinction is not clear-cut... In many texts Aje is used to refer to the actual means of exchange, i.e. cowries or coin". See, 'Money, Self-Realisation and The Person in Yoruba Texts' in J. Guyer, *Money Matters: Instability, Values and social Payments in the Modern History of West African Communities*, Currey, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> PRO, CO147/4, No.96, Enc.2, Chiefs, traders and people of Lagos to Glover, 1863.

<sup>3</sup> R. Campbell, *op.cit*, p.57.

<sup>4</sup> WMMS, Rev. W. Hoad, Oyo, 18th Mar 1896.

more slaves and children incorporated into their households. *Iwofa* can also be added to the index of people who helped to add to and display a person's wealth, especially toward the end of the 19th and into the early 20th centuries, which saw a considerable increase in the use of *iwofa* as slavery declined.<sup>1</sup> Isaac Delano recollected how *iwofa* were used heavily in farmwork in the early 20th century when he was a boy: although produce was valuable, he noted,

"a farmer's wealth was not measured by the gold standard but by the man-power working on his farm".<sup>2</sup>

Labour in the form of people, especially women and children (both slave and free), provided a productive capacity which was utilised to sustain a household and accumulate those elements of wealth defined both by *Afonja* and the above sources, i.e. surplus money, farms, property, valuable goods and people. Thus, many people who possessed immovable property, such as farms, also had money and/or valuable goods, and vice versa. In addition, the number of people incorporated into a household provided some visible indication of the productive capacity of the household and the financial ability of the *bale* or mistress to both sustain those people and acquire or attract more. Moreover, in an era of slavery, people were bought, sold and exchanged for money and other goods in commercial transactions and therefore were both used and perceived as units of economic value and currency in themselves.<sup>3</sup> In 1858 the *Balogun* of *Isoya* told David Hinderer,

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<sup>1</sup> E.A. Oroge, 'Iwofa: An Historical Survey..', op.cit; P. Lovejoy & T. Falola (eds), *Pawnship in Africa*, op.cit.

<sup>2</sup> I. Delano, *The Soul of Nigeria*, p.71.

<sup>3</sup> PRO, CO147/85, No.168, Carter to Knutsford, Enclosed report on the Yoruba (continued...)

"though I am a warrior, yet I know war is no good... This house... in which we sit, belongs to the best farmer in this place, and there is nobody either here or in Ife that is richer than him".<sup>1</sup>

Contrary to Afonja's suggestion, the Balogun identifies a successful farmer as 'rich' and reveals that the farmer's economic success had earned him the Balogun's respect.

The fundamental relationship between people and wealth is illuminated in John Iliffe's studies of poverty among the Yoruba in the 19th century which clearly show that it was often people who, for one reason or another, had no support in the form of wives, children, relations or slaves that fell victims to poverty.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, for both men and women, wealth was an important social tool. Money, goods and people themselves could be given on loan, as credit or as presents to translate wealth into influence, secure more labour, accumulate more money or valuables or enhance one's social standing and influence. Because women were largely under-represented in official social and political positions, wealth was a particularly potent asset for them, greatly facilitating their acquisition of social and political

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<sup>3</sup> (...continued)

by Alvan Millson, p.4, 1891. Millson writes that cowries and slaves are the two main currencies in use. Slaves are used for larger transactions at greater distances. He reported "a slave, be it remembered, combines the security and portability of a bank note with the carrying power of a pack horse".

<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2049/115, Hinderer, Ibadan, 31st Aug 1858.

<sup>2</sup> See, J. Iliffe, 'Poverty in Nineteenth Century Yorubaland', *JAH*, Vol.26, No.1, 1984, pp.43-57 and *The African Poor: A History*, especially Chapter 6, Cambridge University Press, 1987.

influence. The association of wealth with influence among women is particularly common in many written accounts. The funeral was one occasion when a woman's wealth, social position and influence were thrown into final relief. For example at Awaye in the mid-1850's the Baptist missionary William Clarke witnessed one dead woman's ceremony, writing she was a

"rich woman, well-known to the people... the chief too was actively taking part. This woman who by her own efforts had amassed a native fortune and was much esteemed for her wealth had exerted a considerable influence in the town".<sup>1</sup>

In Abeokuta in 1876, at the immense funeral of the wealthy Madame Suada, Rev. Cole noted that she too had been very influential in the town.<sup>2</sup> Other reports were made of the burials of rich women which claim or suggest that they too were influential in their town.<sup>3</sup> Among the Ondo in particular, occasionally, rich women were honoured at their funeral service with a human sacrifice, regardless of status at birth. In 1876 Young noted that a slave woman was bought specifically to be sacrificed at the funeral of one such lady, and further that the Lisa<sup>4</sup> stated "How would it look when she had laboured so hard and by it got so rich and then bought about ten slaves and how could she go alone?".<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W. Clarke, op.cit, p.47.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2029/20, Cole, 21st Dec 1876.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, G3A2/O/1880-81, Johnson, Ibadan, 13th Feb 1880. Apparently this lady owned about 500 slaves of both sexes; WMMS, No.3, Bickersteth, 14th Jan 1856, in Abeokuta.

<sup>4</sup> 'Lisa' was a male chieftaincy title at Ondo.

<sup>5</sup> CMS, CA2098/13, Young, Ondo, 6th Mar 1876; For other examples see CMS, CA2078/18, Phillips Junior, 21st July 1877 and PP. Vol.63, Colonies Nigeria, 1887, No.33, Encl.6, Rev. Charles Phillips, Report of Second Visit to the War-camps.

The symbolic importance of the elements that both promoted and constituted wealth is represented by the popularity of the particular orisa (deities) that were associated with money, wealth, and economic success in 19th century Yorubaland. The two orisa most directly symbolic of wealth and money matters were Aje meaning 'wealth', 'money' and Ori, meaning one's own 'head' (evoking luck, fortune).<sup>1</sup> Aje was believed to preside over money transactions. In particular it was prominently propitiated by traders and those seeking wealth.<sup>2</sup> Trading women often testified to the potency of both Aje and Ori, which also appears to have been particularly popular among market women.<sup>3</sup> In 1892 Lijadu met and observed a market woman at Ode Ondo preparing to propitiate an orisa in her market stall and asked her what she was doing:

"she was consulting Aje the goddess of money through Ogun the god of iron; 'and what answer have you received?', said I, "Aje promises to send me many customers with much money to carry home after the market", asked what reply she got on her previous consultations the woman said, "I have always obtained from Aje most favourable answers, many customers and much money".<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Karin Barber has explored the ideology, symbolism and role of money, and the orisa associated with it such as Aje and Ori in Yoruba society in her recent study 'Money, Self-Realisation and The Person In Yoruba Texts', in Jane Guyer (ed), *Money Matters: Instability, Values and social Payments in the Modern History of West African Communities*, Currey, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> R.E. Dennett, *Nigerian Studies*, pp.145-6; J.O. Lucas, *The Religion of The Yorubas*, pp.153-55.

<sup>3</sup> For examples see, CMS, CA2061/55, King, Abeokuta, 17th Jan 1855; CA2061/66, King, Abeokuta, 18th Sept 1860; CA2058/3, Johnson, S, Ibadan, 21st Sept 1874; CA2019/7, Allen, Ibadan, 25th Oct 1868; CA2075/29, Olubi, Ibadan, 15th Dec 1873; CA2075/28, Olubi, Ibadan, 21st May 1873; CA2066/90, Mann, Ijaye, 27th May 1856; CA2076/45, Pearse, Badagri, 2nd April 1863. Toyin Falola discusses the significance and popularity of Aje particularly among women in present day Yorubaland as a symbol of success in trade. See, T. Falola, 'Gender, Business and Space Control: Yoruba market Women and Power', in B. House-Midamba and F.K. Ekechi (eds), *African Market Women and Economic Power*, 1995, p.29.

<sup>4</sup> CMS, G3A20/1892, Lijadu, Ode Ondo, 11th Nov 1892.



The actual representation of Ori was described by one missionary at Ibadan in 1868 "it was made of cowries formed together in rows upon thick calico, and a large bead is put at the top of it."<sup>1</sup> The Ori was central in guiding one's fate and in order to have one made a person had to both use and contribute as many cowries as he/she could afford.<sup>2</sup> In particular the Rev. Pearse relates that an influential and wealthy trading woman of Badagri named Osu Daropale, worshipped Ori.<sup>3</sup> Further accounts testify to the strong faith that women had in Ori and the reverence in which they held it.<sup>4</sup> Many women told missionaries in various Yoruba towns the same thing that one female devotee said to Johnson in 1874 at Ibadan: "forbid the worship of all other gods, but not the Ori".<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, the symbolic and functional importance of children and money as elements which promoted and contributed to wealth are reflected in the great preoccupation with and frequency with which both feature among the number of things that people regularly propitiated the orisa for. On one occasion in Ijaye in 1854, the Rev. Phillips enquired of a man whether he was pleased with what Ifa had divined for him and the man replied "what do

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2019/7, Allen, Ibadan, 25th Oct 1868. See also R. Burton, *Abeokuta and the Cameroons Mountains*, p.191.

<sup>2</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, p.27; Burton, *op.cit*, p.191.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2076/45, Pearse, Badagri, 2nd April 1863.

<sup>4</sup> CMS, CA2066/90, Mann, Ijaye, 27th May 1856; CA2019/7, Allen, Ibadan, 25th Oct 1868; N.A. Fadipe, *The Sociology of...*, *op.cit*, p.268.

<sup>5</sup> CMS, CA2058/3, Johnson, S. Ibadan, 21st Sept 1874.

we come for in the world? Is it not to have plenty of children and money?".<sup>1</sup> An Ifa diviner was often approached first to identify which orisa the parents needed to worship for success in achieving fertility, uncomplicated childbirth and the general health of the baby.<sup>2</sup> If men were preoccupied with having children, women were even more so, since, as one missionary put it, "although it is not considered a crime... it is regarded a great disgrace to be without children"<sup>3</sup> and infertility or child mortality was often blamed on the woman. When asked by missionaries what their main aims were in worshipping certain deities, not surprisingly time and again women specifically identified fertility and children.<sup>4</sup>

Although some orisa were specifically concerned with fertility matters,<sup>5</sup> any deity could prove successful in this area, and the sources reveal that women often moved from one to

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2077/9, Phillips Snr, Ijaye, 17th July 1854. Also, CA2029/10, Cole, Abeokuta, 27th June 1872, writes of a man who sought help from an Imam (Muslim priest) to have a child by one or all of his three wives.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2061/63, Rev. Thomas King, Abeokuta, 1st Aug 1858. King reports that a woman named Lydia was told to propitiate Elegbara for children, and a woman in the same position called Sarah, who had already sacrificed to half a dozen Orisa for children, was told to propitiate Onifrin by applying to a priest of that orisa.

<sup>3</sup> T. Bowen, op.cit, p.305; Also, CMS, CA2028/5, Coker, 1874. The exception to this was noted by Samuel Johnson who explained that childlessness was an honour, and pregnancy a dishonour among the wives of the titled Eunuchs at Oyo who were termed "awewo" i.e. one with hands tied; because they were doomed to be childless forever; if they were found pregnant it was known that they had been adulterous and whereas in the past the man and woman both were executed they were now fined or punished less severely. See, S. Johnson, *The History*, p.60.

<sup>4</sup> CMS, CA2061/45, King, Abeokuta, 2nd April 1852; CA2087/47, White, Otta, 31st May 1855; CA2087/51, White, 1st Aug 1856; ; CA2077/18, Phillips Snr, 6th April 1857; CA2061/64, King, 24th June 1859.

<sup>5</sup> CMS, CA2058/10, S. Johnson, Ibadan, 9th Feb 1878. Oloriko, connected with Egungun, had "the power to bestow propagation to man: hence all virgins in the town, as soon as they are married, are to perform some ceremony to the Oloriko in order to have children".

another or worshipped more than one at a time until they were successful.<sup>1</sup> For example, in 1856 at Abeokuta Rev. King met one woman who had propitiated the deities Sango, Yemaja, Yewa, Oge and Elegbara, but without success.<sup>2</sup> In some cases women turned to Christianity in a bid to improve their chances of conception, sometimes relinquishing the orisa, while in other cases they combined worship of both.<sup>3</sup> Other women believed that the orisa were the only tried and tested and sure route to success. In 1861 the Rev. Moore talked with a woman propitiating the orisa Obatala:

"she will never serve or worship the living God that she has heard that God never give his worshippers children therefore she would rather worship Obatala that he may give her children as he had given to all his worshippers. I asked her whether Obatala has eternal life to give her and all his worshippers. She said in reply that she do not care for eternal life and she said in a loud voice '*Ommo ne mo o nfe*' which signifies 'child or children is what I want'".<sup>4</sup>

Paradoxically however, the careers of many of the women who particularly excelled in long-distance trade or in business in general in the 19th century were facilitated by the fact that they were either older, and had already brought their family up, or were childless altogether. P.C. Lloyd noted the frequency of correlation between such wealthy women and paucity of children in 1962.<sup>5</sup> Among the many examples of childless women who became successful in business and held many slaves and built up large households were Efunsetan of Ibadan, Abu of Ijanna and Betsy

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2087/54, White, 8th April 1857.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2061/45, King, Abeokuta, 11th April 1856.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2087/51, White, Ota, 15th aug 1856.

<sup>4</sup> CMS, CA2070/47, Moore, Osielle, 8th aug 1861.

<sup>5</sup> P.C. Lloyd, *Yoruba Land Law*, op.cit, p.34.

Desola, Ayebomi<sup>1</sup> and Tinubu of Abeokuta. Most of these women did not have normal marital relationships and were very independent of both men and family. They were often perceived and described as 'manly', or as having masculine qualities by 19th century observers. They often had their own slaves and gained support and income from them in the same way that men and women with extensive households relied on their family to do so. Lack of dependent children freed a considerable amount of both their time and money and gave them an incentive not only to become economically independent, but to support a 'family' of associates and slaves who could look after them in their old age - a duty that was usually fulfilled by children.<sup>2</sup> These women could not gain societal acceptance or respect or a personal sense of honour and pride from bringing healthy children into the world. This simple reality may have fuelled their commitment and motivation, and ultimate success, in business.<sup>3</sup>

### Capital.

Sources dating from the late 19th and early 20th century are considerably more informative on matters relating to raising capital and loans than those that I have consulted so far dating

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<sup>1</sup> Although one source suggests that Ayebomi had 3 daughters, none of them were located or were traced after her death, indicating that the information may have been erroneous.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2029/16, Cole 29th May 1874 (Martha Labulo is suffering from a fever, she is distraught and says she has no children to take care of her and her husband ill-treated her and left her helpless); CA2035/11, Doherty, 29th May 1876 (Old woman using Oya and begging.. "I take up this Goddess to go about and ask for cowries, because I have no helper. I am too old to have a husband, I have had many children at Oyo, but they are all dead, hence I have no supporter and none to look again but the Goddess Oya who is now supporting me"); CA2031/78, Crowther to Hutchinson, 10th Sept 1856 (Crowther reported "Parents are respected by their children by whom they are cared for and provided in their old age").

<sup>3</sup> See, T. Bowen, op.cit, p.305 and CMS, CA2028/5, Coker, 1874.

from the earlier period. This makes it difficult to determine to what extent the practices outlined in later sources were in operation in previous years or how they may have changed over time. However, it seems that a number of options were available to women in order to raise capital. A report on the laws and customs of the Yoruba written in the early 20th century but relating to the last quarter of the 19th states that numerous types of loan could be taken out in order to secure capital.<sup>1</sup>

Fadipe relates that in the past, capital was easily accessible to both sexes. He specifically states in relation to women that "It was the duty of the husband to supply his wife with the capital needed for starting a trade".<sup>2</sup> However, earlier evidence seems to contradict this position. Writing in the 1850's the Rev. T. Bowen remarked that in Yorubaland in general a wife in fact had no claim on her husband for support of any nature with the exception that he provide her and any children with living space.<sup>3</sup> Lack of further evidence makes the task of resolving these different statements difficult. They may indicate a change in practice over time, or represent variations in the obligations of a husband to his wife between towns. It is also possible that Bowen was stating the law on this matter, but that in practice a husband may have considered it his responsibility to provide financial and other assistance for his wife at the

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<sup>1</sup> A Report, op.cit, p.81. Different types of loan were a Gratuitous loan, Loan for consideration, Loan on interest (ele).

<sup>2</sup> N.A. Fadipe, op.cit, pp.86-89.

<sup>3</sup> T. Bowen, op.cit, p.305.

outset. If so this may indicate that in the case of disputes about marital obligations brought before the authorities, in theory, women may have had no legal right to claim initial financial support from their spouse.

Additionally women could borrow money from their husband throughout their marriage. In 1870 at Otta the Rev. White gave a lengthy report on a dispute between a man and his wife over ownership of a slave girl. It transpired that the wife had borrowed 14 heads of cowries from her husband to put towards the total 134 heads of cowries it had cost her to buy the slave.<sup>1</sup> In this case the local authority decided in favour of the woman; she had to pay back the 14 heads of cowries to her husband but was allowed to keep the slave. By the same token women could also borrow money from friends or relatives or from someone willing to help.<sup>2</sup> One missionary reporting on a debt case in Abeokuta in 1855, mentioned that an Igbein woman had given credit to a Sierra Leonian woman.<sup>3</sup> Usually a loan was secured using the *iwofa* system, whereby a woman would offer either her own, her children, a relative or a slave's labour to a creditor in lieu of the interest on the loan.<sup>4</sup>

However, perhaps the most widespread and popular system of

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2087/76, White, 23rd April 1870.

<sup>2</sup> In Ibadan in 1860 cowries were scarce and the Rev. Hinderer and his wife were running out of supplies. In order to help them out, the Rev. Olubi's aunt gave Anna Hinderer a loan of 2 bags of cowries. See A. Hinderer, *op.cit.*, p.238.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2061/57, King, 21st July 1855.

<sup>4</sup> N.A. Fadipe, *The Sociology of The Yoruba*, pp.155-157.

securing money was the *esusu* club, the equivalent of a credit union.<sup>1</sup> Johnson explained how the system operated in the late 19th century as,

"a universal custom for the clubbing together of a number of persons for monetary aid. A fixed sum agreed upon is given by each at a fixed time (usually every week) and place, under a president; the total amount is paid over to each member in rotation".<sup>2</sup>

The system operated in much the same way in previous years. Robert Campbell noted in 1860 that in the Egba area in particular *esusu* "are formed chiefly by the women" and perhaps indicating their popularity he further states that the most frequent processions held in the area were of these clubs.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, in 1861 there were around 300 saving clubs in Abeokuta alone.<sup>4</sup> The Rev. Crowther commented in the 1870's that the *esusu* was a great inducement to industry, so much so that it was "universal in the Yoruba country, the cowries so saved are not hoarded up but put into immediate use". Membership included both sexes in some clubs "but most commonly each sex forms separate clubs of themselves".<sup>5</sup> The proliferation of so many *esusu* suggests that small-scale enterprises may have been numerous.

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<sup>1</sup> For a recent discussion of credit institutions (including *esusu*), currency and wealth in the Yoruba area see T. Falola, 'Money and Informal Credit Institutions in Colonial Western Nigeria', in Jane Guyer (ed), *Money Matters...*, op.cit, pp.162-185.

<sup>2</sup> S. Johnson, op.cit, p.119; Acting District Officers Wormal and Wilkes mention the general use made of *Esusu* clubs in the western coastal town of Ojo in the 1930's. NNAI CSO 26/4 File 29979, Intelligence Report on Central Awori, 1935.

<sup>3</sup> R. Campbell, *A Pilgrimage to my Motherland*, p.72.

<sup>4</sup> CMS, CA2043/68, Gollmer, 4th June 1861.

<sup>5</sup> CMS, CA2031/78, Crowther, 1870.

Women's Income and Property Rights.

If women's labour skills and the predominant division of labour both presented increasing economic opportunities for some women and forced many others into the labour pool from the mid century onwards, questions concerning women's income rights and the distribution of income arise. For example, to what extent did both free and slave women enjoy financial benefits from the changing economic environment, what were their income rights, in what ways did they use their income and what were the differences between free and slave women with regard to each?

In the early 20th century Fadipe set out the division of income from the processing and trade of palm produce between a husband and wife team, such that the wife kept the money from the palm nut and kernel oil sales.<sup>1</sup> Evidence strongly states that women also enjoyed significant economic independence in the 19th century not only keeping income derived from palm production but from most other work. Commenting on the obligations of a husband and wife in Yorubaland in general, in the early 1850's Bowen wrote the husband has "no claim on her property... Even during the continuance of the marriage relation, the woman is sole owner of her property and her earnings".<sup>2</sup> Again in 1870 at Ota the Rev. White explained

"according to the custom of the country the property of husband and wife are not blended together and considered common to both. The wife cannot claim the property of the husband nor can the husband claim the property of the

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<sup>1</sup> N.A. Fadipe, op.cit, p.80.

<sup>2</sup> T. Bowen, op.cit, pp.304-5 and similarly, p.343.



wife".<sup>1</sup>

However, as Robin Law pointed out, earlier on in the 19th century it was reported that the Alafin's wives, including the free born, were on the contrary obliged to hand over all their earnings to their husband.<sup>2</sup> Law suggests the possibility that this may indicate changes in free born women's right to their income or rights between royal wives and common women, possibly in response to the development of the palm oil trade. However, the sources reveal no specific evidence to indicate that this occurred, therefore it is difficult to account for the different reports. They may indicate differences in women's position between towns. Moreover, Clapperton's statement refers specifically to the ayaba; It is possible that the majority of common women in Oyo enjoyed a greater degree of economic independence within marriage than the ayaba.

Income from palm oil and other female industries were very lucrative.<sup>3</sup> In the early 1860's Burton estimated that one pot of black oil was worth at least 4 heads of cowries (which was equal 5s.4d. at a time when he also considered that a person could live

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2087/76, White, Ota, 23rd May 1870; Similar statements are made regarding Abeokuta by Burton, op.cit, p.81, and R. Campbell, op.cit, p.60.

<sup>2</sup> Law, 'Legitimate Trade...', p.208 referring to H. Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition...*, p.21. That the Alafin had rights to his wives property is supported to some extent by an incident recorded by the Lander brothers on their visit to Oyo in 1830. The Alafin Mansola gave the Badagri porters 2,000 cowries (3/6d) for their return expenses; however, he ordered his wives to supply the cowries. See, Lander, *The Niger Journal*, p.94.

<sup>3</sup> All value conversions of cowrie to £.s.d in the following sections have been calculated taking inflation into account and are derived from the values given for 1 head in Johnson and Hogendorn, op.cit, Table 9.4, p.140.

for a week on only 1 head of cowries (1s.4d.).<sup>1</sup> However prices varied considerably between markets. In 1872 it was reported that the price of one gallon of palm oil at Ikale market in the east was 7s.5d. (c.6 heads of cowries) while it was simultaneously sold at the nearby Ibo-Benin market for 1 shilling a gallon (c.just less than 1 head).<sup>2</sup> Similar variations in profit margins were recorded by Rowe in 1887 who stated that a pot of oil selling for 5 heads (c.2s.6d) at Orun market was simultaneously selling for 12 heads, more than double the price, at Lagos.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless profits rarely reflected the time, effort and labour needed to produce palm oil. Similarly, further north income from shea butter production remained low in relation to the total time and effort it took to manufacture. In 1929 in the Ilorin area it was estimated that a woman would make 3s.3d profit on every 28 pounds of butter produced, but that it would take her more than 52 hours to produce that quantity.<sup>4</sup>

Another profitable female trading item was cloth, especially home produced varieties. In 1887, at a time when Moloney estimated the cost of an imported plain grey baft to be 8 heads of cowries and a printed imported cloth at half that price,<sup>5</sup> home produced cloths of a good quality were selling at Orun for 20

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<sup>1</sup> R. Burton, *op.cit*, p.129.

<sup>2</sup> PRO, CO147/23, No.61, Enclosure in Goldsworthy to Glover, July 1872.

<sup>3</sup> PP, Vol.63, No.8, Enc.1, Rowe to Derby, 1887.

<sup>4</sup> H.B. Hermon-Hodge, *Gazetteer of Ilorin Province*, (1929), p.244. The exact time and yields quoted were; 78lbs of kernels valued at 6 shillings would yield 28lbs of butter valued at 9s.9d after 52 hours production time, a profit of 3s.3d. This estimation did not include the labour and time required for fetching wood and water.

<sup>5</sup> PRO, CO147/66, No.323, Moloney to Knutsford, Report on a Visit to the Eastern District, 1888.

heads of cowries each and 40 heads in Lagos.<sup>1</sup> Women's cloths generally brought in a greater profit than men's as Clarke related "The work by the females is much more tedious and requires a greater outlay of time for its performance but when finished is more desirable and brings a better market price".<sup>2</sup> Additionally, Alvan Millson stated in 1891 that the average wage of weavers in general was higher, at about 2d. (c.16 strings cowries) a day, than those engaged in the other stages of cloth production, namely cultivators, cleaners and spinners.<sup>3</sup>

One of the lowest paid jobs was portering. However, many women took advantage of the increase in demand for head-loading skills to transport trade items of all sorts over the period. The average pay for head-loading varied depending on the weight and value of goods carried and the distance travelled. In 1855 White reckoned that pay varied at Ota between 8 to 25 strings of cowries a day in proportion to the weight and number of loads and that it was "perhaps the lowest work done here".<sup>4</sup> At the time 25 strings was roughly equivalent to 1s.3d. It seems that charges varied considerably between trade routes depending on how well established the route was. As early as 1849 Rev. Muller reported

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<sup>1</sup> PP, Vol.63, No.8, Enc.1, Rowe to Derby, 1887.

<sup>2</sup> W. Clarke, op.cit, p.272.

<sup>3</sup> A. Millson, 'The Yoruba Country, West Africa', PRGS, 1891, p.287.

<sup>4</sup> CMS, CA2087/47, White, Ota, 3rd May 1855; Women that Mann hired as porters told him the average wage was 20-25 strings a day, CMS, CA2066/88, Mann, 31st July 1855; In 1858 D.J. May reckoned the average pay of a professional carrier was between 600-700 cowries or 5-11 strings cowries for a good day's journey, D.J. May, 'Journey in the Yoruba and Nupe Countries in 1858', JRGS, Vol.30, 1860, p.229; Alvan Millson, states 7d a day as a good wage if the profession was developed, A. Millson, 'The Yoruba Country, West Africa', PRGS, 1891, p.257.

that the cost of transporting a load from Badagry to Abeokuta was 1 head, 27 strings of cowries, much higher than reports from elsewhere within a 5 year period.<sup>1</sup> Muller anticipated an increase in carriage expenses which seems to be supported by James Johnson who indicated a rise in charges over a twenty year period when he related in 1877 that "In the early days... charges were not half so high" for carriers.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, higher charges could equally have resulted from cowrie inflation which became a factor from the mid century onwards.<sup>3</sup> Moreover charges seem to have been lower in the east and northeastern areas relatively uninvolved in supplying the products and services associated with 'legitimate' trade.<sup>4</sup> Overall though, substantial profits, estimated at between 200 - 500% by Clarke in the mid 1850's, could be acquired by enterprising women trading in palm produce, cloths and a number of other items.<sup>5</sup>

Bowen and White's statements on the distribution of income within marriage do not indicate the specific position of slave-wives, unmarried women or of female slaves in general. Other evidence suggests that women's rights to their income varied

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2072/8, Muller, 1st Jan 1849.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2056/50, J. Johnson, 21st Mar 1877.

<sup>3</sup> On cowrie inflation see, Marion Johnson and Jan Hogendorn, *Shell Money of the Slave Trade*, 1986. C.R. Johnson, a Wesleyan missionary complained in 1894 that to get 2 barrels of cement carried inland from Lagos it would cost £4.13s, "an enormous sum", WMMS, C.R. Johnson, 18th July 1894, Oyo.

<sup>4</sup> In 1858 D. J. May reckoned the average pay of a professional carrier was between 600-700 cowries for a day's journey or around 15 strings (he actually paid a carrier 800 cowries which was more than the going rate), 25% less than the charge on western routes at the same time. See, 'Journey in The Yoruba and Nupe Countries in 1858', JRGS, Vol.30, 1858, p.229.

<sup>5</sup> Clarke, op.cit, p.265.

depending on their status and where they lived. In 1858 Consul Campbell indicated that in the Lagos area slaves had access to an independent income and were able to save the price of their redemption, the women in particular from trading at the oil markets.<sup>1</sup> Increasingly, most slaves were allowed to work on their own behalf in their own time, as Campbell reported in relation to the slaves employed to cultivate cotton on farms in Abeokuta in 1857.<sup>2</sup> However, the standard practice seems to have been for owners to appropriate earnings from economic activities undertaken by slaves for their owners, while income generated by the slave in his/her own time was considered either entirely or partly the property of the slave. Indeed, as early as 1849, based on his experience of owner-slave relations in Abeokuta, Henry Townsend told the Select Committee on the African Slave Trade that it was common practice for slaves to give their owner a portion of their wages.<sup>3</sup> More specifically, James Johnson remarked from Abeokuta in 1880 that slave wives worked for themselves, although they were required to relinquish a portion of their earnings to their husbands, varying between 10-15 strings of cowries daily.<sup>4</sup> Likewise at the same time in Abeokuta some female slave owners allowed both their male and female slaves to work on their own account, with the proviso that they

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<sup>1</sup> PP, Vol 45, No.11, Campbell to Clarendon, 28th Mar 1858. Campbell also indicated that male slaves were given the means to acquire an independent income by their masters, see, FO2/20, No.43, Campbell to Clarendon, Nov 1857 and FO881/599, Campbell to Clarendon, Mar 1857.

<sup>2</sup> PRO, FO881/599, Campbell to Clarendon, March 1857; FO2/20, No.43, Campbell to Clarendon, Nov 1857.

<sup>3</sup> PP, Vol.6, Report of the Select Committee on the African Slave Trade, Evidence of Rev. H. Townsend, May 1849.

<sup>4</sup> CMS, J. Johnson, CA2056/55, Annual Report, 1880.

paid over a daily portion of their earnings of approximately 15 strings of cowries.<sup>1</sup>

One Itebu (in the south-east) missionary's journal relates the amusing exploits of a female slave, Agun, belonging to Chief Manuwa. Agun was described as wealthier than the other slaves and "more addicted to drunkenness and the love of money", suggesting that she too had access to her own income. Indeed, it was reported in 1879 that she was expected to pay damages of £4 to a trader for his salt, which Agun had caused to be lost overboard when her trading canoe collided with the salt trader's and overturned it.<sup>2</sup> Thus it would seem that at least in Lagos, Abeokuta and Itebu, some slave women and wives of slave origin did enjoy a degree of economic independence. Moreover, some female slaves were not treated any differently regarding rights to income than male slaves, although they were not allowed to retain all of their earnings as most free-born women were. Nonetheless there were examples of total dependence as in the case of Asatu, a slave-wife of the Balogun of Ikorodu (mentioned earlier) who produced and traded palm produce for him, stated "all the money I earned was taken by the Balogun".<sup>3</sup> As the

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, J. Johnson, CA2056/28, 2nd Aug 1879.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2011/117, Nathaniel Ogbonaiye, Journal extracts Oct - Dec 1879, 5th Oct 1879. On the 9th December 1879 Agun died apparently because she fell out of her canoe in a state of inebriation and drowned. For another example of Agun's exploits see the section on Debt in this Chapter.

<sup>3</sup> PRO, CO147/57, No.288, Enc.1, 28th Aug 1886. Also, PRO, CO147/40, No.75, Enclosure in, Griffith to Ussher, 1880. In this case brought before the Supreme Court of the Gold Coast, dealing with an accusation of slave holding by N.A. Palmer, a Sierra Leonian immigrant, a statement was made by another immigrant that Palmer's slaves worked regularly in farming, processing and trading for him, but "they discharge whatever duty may be assigned to them without any money reward whatever".

discussion so far has highlighted, many more women were making their own income from involvement in the palm produce and other industries. Men could circumvent established laws which gave their free-born wives exclusive rights to their income by acquiring slave wives and concubines who had no or less rights to their income and this fact may well have provided many men with an added incentive to acquire slave women.

### Spending Habits.

Most women invested considerable amounts of their property in propitiating various *orisa* (deities), sometimes with success and sometimes without. In 1855 the Rev. King reported from Abeokuta of one case when a woman told him she had spent more than 4 bags of cowries worshipping the deity Obatala, in addition to several heads of cowries and sacrifices of more than 7 goats and other things to the deity Elegbara, without success.<sup>1</sup> Similarly Rev. Cole met an old woman in Ikija in 1871 who said she had spent all her property in vain to propitiate her deities.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, in Ibadan a woman told Barber in 1853 that she had been an industrious woman, spending all her living in offering sacrifices to the *orisa* Esu, Obatala and Osun, but despite her industry she scarcely used to have two cloths in her possession due to the amount she offered to the *orisa*.<sup>3</sup> Women also used their income to become members of particular *orisa*

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2061/58, King, Abeokuta, 1st Oct 1855.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2029/8, Cole, Ikija, 26th July 1871.

<sup>3</sup> CA2021/4, Barber, Abeokuta, 4th Sept 1853.

cults. For example, devotees of Orisa Oko (the 'farm' deity) were required to pay heavy initiation fees of up to 200 bags of cowries in some cases to become full members of the cult.<sup>1</sup> At Abeokuta in 1852 King described how one aspiring female devotee named Ewusu was forced to postpone her full initiation into the cult because she could not save up her contribution of twenty bags of cowries despite a sustained effort to procure the money.<sup>2</sup> Finally, women spent some of their income on providing for provisions and presents at the annual Egungun and Oro festivals (this point will be discussed in detail below).<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, wealthy women could afford to patronise particular institutions or societies of their choice, shrewdly investing their assets to acquire both social and political influence. For example one Matilda Suada, described as the most opulent woman of Ikereku in Abeokuta, regularly gave donations to further the work of the Christian missions. On one occasion in 1869 she gave £20 towards the construction of a church and on other occasions her contributions were described as "often more than even some of the able men in Abeokuta".<sup>4</sup> Additionally, in 1874 the names of Madame Suada and another rich woman, Jemima Sekumade, appeared on a list of Abeokuta people who had made contributions toward

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<sup>1</sup> CA2061/66, King, Abeokuta, 23rd June 1860; CA2058/3, S. Johnson, Ibadan, 13th July 1874.

<sup>2</sup> CA2061/45, King, Abeokuta, 2nd April 1852.

<sup>3</sup> G3A20/1888, No.172, Meeting of Old men at Ake Church, 18th Oct 1888; CA2061/48, King, at Owu in Abeokuta, 24th Feb 1853 and CA2061/52, 18th Feb 1854; CA2019/9, Allen, Kudeti, 23rd May 1870.

<sup>4</sup> CA2029/20, Cole, Abeokuta, 21st Dec 1876.



mission work in Iseyin; both women had donated Croydon cloth worth 10 heads of cowries each.<sup>1</sup> Both Tinubu and Efunsetan invested considerable amounts of their money and resources in order to win and maintain the support of powerful male chiefs and hold onto their political and social status. Indeed, Johnson relates that Efunsetan's predecessor, Iyaola, lost her title specifically because she had lost her fortune and was no longer able to financially support her male political patrons.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Betsy Desola, a successful businesswoman of Abeokuta was reported to have "spent £30 besides providing sheep, kola-nuts, rum and other necessaries to receive the title of 'Iyalode' or 'mother'" of the Parakoyi Society (council of male chiefs who controlled commercial affairs) of Ake in 1878. In fact she herself maintained that she had invested much more of her property to influence the Parakoyi in her favour.<sup>3</sup> Upon the death of a woman described as having a great reputation in Iseyin in 1876 it was reported that "she used to voluntarily give the King a tribute of 20,000 cowries a year".<sup>4</sup> This was the equivalent of what was called 'one bag' or, *okekan* which was worth 10 heads of cowries or just under £1 at the time (between 12s.6d and £1).<sup>5</sup> The payment probably represented a symbolic or token gesture of

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2040/3, Fasina Foster, Iseyin, 2nd Sept 1874.

<sup>2</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, p.391.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2056/28, Johnson, J. 2nd Aug 1879; *The African Times*, 1st Mar 1879, Letter to editor from resident of Ake dated Jan 1st 1879 entitled 'The Abominable Parakoyi of Abeokuta'.

<sup>4</sup> CMS, CA2070/58, Moore, Iseyin, 18th Aug 1876.

<sup>5</sup> Marion Johnson, and Jan Hogendorn, *Shell Money of The Slave Trade*, p.117.

allegiance and deference on the part of the woman to the Aseyin while on her part she maintained the Aseyin's favour.

Luxuries were also purchased by women in the form of dress, jewellery and other forms of personal adornment. The Lander brothers noted that the prevailing fashion among most women in the Egbado district in the late 1820's was to wear carved ivory and wood pieces through the earlobe.<sup>1</sup> Bowen noticed that "both men and women are fond of ornaments" in the many Yoruba towns he visited between 1849 and 1856. Beads were an expensive and sought after item in pre-colonial Yorubaland.<sup>2</sup> In 1904 one bundle of beads was valued at £1.10s which was the equivalent of around 30 heads of cowries.<sup>3</sup> Based on his travels around much of Western Yorubaland from 1854 to 1858, Clarke noted that females in particular were "fond of ornament, such as beads, particularly coral".<sup>4</sup> Moreover, rings were worn on "the fingers, toes, arms and ankles, and girls... wear them around their loins".<sup>5</sup> Not only did women buy such rings, some regularly paid to have them refashioned. For example in the 1850's Clarke met a metal worker reshaping several copper and brass rings. When Clarke enquired what he was doing, the metal worker replied that he was changing the cut of the ring for a woman.<sup>6</sup> Make-up was also popular. Stone

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<sup>1</sup> R & J Lander, *The Niger Journal*, op.cit, pp.59-60.

<sup>2</sup> CA2058/8, S. Johnson, Ibadan, 18th Feb 1877.

<sup>3</sup> See T. Falola, 'The Yoruba Toll System', op.cit, p.84-5.

<sup>4</sup> W. Clarke, op.cit, p.244.

<sup>5</sup> T. Bowen, op.cit, p.300; Also see R.H. Stone, op.cit, p.32.

<sup>6</sup> W. Clarke, op.cit, p.244.

observed in the 1860's that at Abeokuta both men and women used antimony around the eyes, while the women also stained their fingernails, feet and hands with red camwood.<sup>1</sup> Women styled their hair in various ways and paid professional hair dressers to arrange and plait their hair into the latest styles.<sup>2</sup>

The adire cloth (hand-dyed cloth) industry enjoyed a boom from the mid-century onwards and the development of dyeing techniques promoted the development of more varied cloth patterns and women's fashion in general.<sup>3</sup> Home-spun cloths and adire wrappers were more expensive and of a better quality than the imported variety.<sup>4</sup> In the northern town of Ilorin the Rev Mann commented in 1855 on the difference in style between the majority of the population and females 'of rank', in this case the King's Moslem daughters, stating

"Breasts and arms are covered, a cloth is slung over the head, reminding me of the fashion of the east to cover the face, which is prescript of the Koran. The hair is platted in two tufts, which are tied under the chin, the hair of the

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<sup>1</sup> R.H. Stone, *op.cit*, p.32. Also see PP, Vol.63, No.6, Enc.2, Report by Henry Higgins and O. Smith, 10th Feb 1887, p.24; S. Johnson, *op.cit*, p.113.

<sup>2</sup> Anna Hinderer, *Seventeen Years...*, p.294; CMS, CA2084/1, Sunday, Ake, Abeokuta, 4th Jan 1880; S. Johnson, *op.cit*, p.101,125; P.A. Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, Vol.III, p.942.

<sup>3</sup> J. Byfield, Ph.D. Thesis, *op.cit*, pp.41-45; C. Keyes, Ph.D. Thesis, *op.cit*, *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> Country made cloths of a good quality were selling at Orun in 1887 for 20 heads of cowries each and 40 heads in Lagos at the same time; PP, Vol.63, No.8, Enc.1, Rowe to Derby, 1887. In 1888 Moloney estimated the cost of an imported plain grey baft of cloth to be 8 heads of cowries (5 shillings) and a printed imported cloth at half that price; PRO, CO147/66, No.323, Moloney to Knutsford, Report on a Visit to the Eastern District, 1888. by 1904 domestic cloths seem to have reduced in value being estimated at around 8 heads a piece (£20.10s for a bale of 50 pieces, so one piece = just over 8s = 8 heads). See, Falola, 'The Yoruba Toll system...', in *JAH*, p.84-5 for values of various goods in 1904.

back of the head is curled up in one ringlet".<sup>1</sup> By 1889 Major McDonald noted otherwise perhaps indicating a change over time or a difference in how strictly women adhered to Koranic prescription on dress codes; "From personal observation, I can state that the Mahomedan women are not veiled...".<sup>2</sup> Johnson stated that wealthy women wore more velvet cloth than women with a lower income.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, Caroline Keyes has argued that the quality of women's clothes remained considerably poorer than those of men in the 19th century. Particularly in Ibadan, she argues, the warriors and their soldiers were consistently better dressed than even the wealthiest women in the town. Keyes suggests that this indicates that women were generally more impoverished than men over the period.<sup>4</sup> However, one can also suggest, as this discussion illuminates, that women spent and invested their income in different ways than men (especially soldiers); for example, more money was invested in their trade and on their children. Therefore, a woman's appearance was not necessarily always a reliable indication of her relative wealth.

Female slaves in particular saved their earnings to pay heavy redemption fees for themselves and their children. In 1858 Consul Campbell explained of slaves in general that

"the acquisition of property, earned by their own labour and industry, has naturally led to the desire, on the part of many domestic slaves to purchase their own freedom from

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2066/88, Mann, Ilorin, 6th Aug 1855.

<sup>2</sup> PRO, CO879/33/Part 1, No.399-4, Enc, Report of Major McDonald to Salisbury, Ilorin, 21st Dec 1889.

<sup>3</sup> S. Johnson, op.cit, p.112.

<sup>4</sup> C. Keyes, op.cit, p.294-6.

their masters",

but more explicitly,

"this desire is strongly evinced by the women... more strongly so if they are mothers and have children living... it is the women that trade at the oil markets, and many of them by care and frugality soon amass sufficient cowries to pay a heavy sum for the redemption of themselves and their children".

Campbell further stated that the rates of manumission requested by the owners of female slaves were "at an exorbitant rate compared with the price formerly paid".<sup>1</sup> Some examples are recorded in the Lagos colonial dispatches; in a list of slaves redeemed up to Dec 1859, three of the female slaves paid their own redemption costs: Rombetah, an Ijesa woman paid 70 heads of cowries; Fardonekeh and her daughter, Ahdaroomo, also Ijesa women paid a collective 150 heads. An Oyo woman named Ohlomo was also redeemed for 100 heads which was supplied by her mother. In the same year a female slave belonging to the Balogun of Ilorin named Moneyakpa or Reki was redeemed. Moneyakpa's mother intended to purchase her freedom with her own property, but in the end a redemption price of 120 heads of cowries was supplied by one Mr. Turner.<sup>2</sup> Considering that Burton estimated in the early 1860's that the equivalent of 1 head of cowries was enough to keep a person for a week, these manumission fees were very hefty. However, evidence on male redemption prices at the same time suggests that male manumission costs were not much lower than

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<sup>1</sup> PP, Vol.45, Class B, No.11, Campbell to Clarendon, 28th Mar 1858.

<sup>2</sup> PP, Vol.46, No.11, Brand to Russell, 31st Dec 1859; PP, Vol.46, No.12, Brand to Russell, 18th Jan 1860. The 150 heads of cowries paid for Fardonekeh allowed her daughter to be redeemed in conjunction as laid out in the laws of the Slave Court which provided that children bought with the mother could be freed in this way, for which see, PRO, CO147/4, No.68, Enclosure, Didelot to Glover, 3rd Aug 1863.

those for females.<sup>1</sup>

The apparent increase in manumission fees perceived by Campbell is initially supported by similar observations by Townsend in 1849 who noted the start of a trend in higher prices both for slaves and their redemption fees in Abeokuta, which he suggested was partly due to the fact that less captives were available. Apparently the value of a slave had increased from around 30 heads to 60 heads and a typical example of an inflated redemption fee was anything from 50 to 70 heads.<sup>2</sup> Clearly the average redemption fee had all but doubled again by 1858. The rise in redemption costs for specifically female slaves noted by Campbell may have been further associated with the fact that owners were particularly reluctant to lose the labour skills of women as 'legitimate' trade expanded and thus tried to make it harder for women to liberate themselves.

Furthermore women spent their income in many ways that have been discussed previously: they were largely responsible for bringing up their children and defraying the cost of this.<sup>3</sup> Women in general, and women without children in particular, laboured to provide the costs of a respectable and fitting funeral. Women also reinvested their earnings in their business, buying the goods, materials and labour they needed for production and trade.

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<sup>1</sup> My calculations on two lists containing 21 registered manumission prices paid between 1857 and 1860 puts the average price of female redemption at 108 heads of cowries and the male at 101 heads. However, the most common value for a female was 120 heads, which suggests that this was an established price.

<sup>2</sup> PP, Vol.6, Report of the Select Committee on the African Slave Trade, Evidence of H. Townsend, 1849.

<sup>3</sup> In particular see, G. Marshall, (N. Sudarkasa) *Women, Trade and The Yoruba Family*, PhD. Thesis, Columbia University, 1964.

Some income went toward contributing to the *esusu* savings club, providing loans or indeed, paying them back. Moreover, toll and market duties, which are discussed in more detail below, claimed a part of income. However, this expense could be recovered by adding it to final selling prices.

### **Inheritance.**

Women's rights to property, land and titles through inheritance varied across Yorubaland over the 19th century. Most of the evidence on these issues dates from the later years of the 19th century and mainly states the theoretical principles on which laws were based. However, a few actual examples of inheritance in practice are recorded in earlier sources.<sup>1</sup>

As mentioned above nineteenth century Yoruba marital laws provided that a woman's income and property were independent of her husband's and neither had any claim on the other person's holdings.<sup>2</sup> Regulations governing marital property rights were carried over into the laws governing inheritance. Thus, just as a husband and wife's property was considered separate during their lifetime, in general a widow did not inherit from her husband unless he specifically bequeathed something to her (and vice versa).<sup>3</sup> However, in 1869 at Ibadan a Christian convert

<sup>1</sup> For a general picture of Yoruba lineage, descent systems and inheritance see, W.B. Schwab, *Continuity and Change in the Yoruba Lineage System*, 1962 and P.C. Lloyd, 'Agnatic and Cognatic Descent Among the Yoruba', in *Man*, 1966, pp.484-500.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2087/76, White, Otta, 23rd May 1870; Bowen, *Ibid*, p.304-5 and similarly, p.343. Regarding Abeokuta see R. Burton, *Abeokuta and the...*, p.81, and R. Campbell, *op.cit*, p.60. Islamic marital property arrangements are similar, (Sabini, J. *Islam: A Primer* p.108,112) except that a husband is obliged to support his family; the obligation is called *nafaqa*, see Anderson, p.370.

<sup>3</sup> A Report, pp.78,81,86-7,99; N.A. Fadipe, *The Sociology...*, p.143. Also see (continued...)

died. Apparently the man practised polygamy covertly. Hearing of his death, his former wives returned to claim their share of his property on the basis that they each had children by him; although the account does not make clear whether they might have been claiming on behalf of their children.<sup>1</sup> It may be that the Christian community adopted British marital ordinances introduced by the colonial government at Lagos to a limited degree. Unlike Yoruba law these practices gave married couples rights to each others property.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, in the above case one wife took a male slave as her inheritance from her husband. Additionally, apparently Muslim inheritance laws also disqualified women from inheriting from their husbands near the end of the century.<sup>3</sup>

In 1858, both the Ibadan authorities and the Alafin agreed that prevailing inheritance practices, which favoured brothers and sisters as the main and/or sole benefactors of a deceased person's property, were too harsh as they excluded children and other family members.<sup>4</sup> By the late 19th century one source confirms that practice now showed that children had established their right to inherit.<sup>5</sup> However, direct evidence from nearer the

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<sup>3</sup> (...continued)  
Kristin Mann, *Women, Landed Property...*, p.12.

<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2019/8, Allen, 29th Aug 1869.

<sup>2</sup> K. Mann, *Women, Landed Property...*, p.12.

<sup>3</sup> *A Report on the Yoruba*, op.cit, p.81.

<sup>4</sup> S. Johnson, op.cit, pp.236-7; Fadipe charts the same change in practice, op.cit, p.142.

<sup>5</sup> *A Report...*, p.86-7 stated "Ascendants do not inherit. Children inherit and failing that, brothers and sisters".



time indicates that changes in practice may have taken some time to be adopted.<sup>1</sup> With regard to the late 19th century A.B. Ellis asserted that

"When a man dies all the sons divide his property equally between them, the daughters have no inheritance in their father's house, but they divide between them the property of the mother".<sup>2</sup>

However, more reliable sources prove that Ellis's interpretation of the law was too narrow. Samuel Johnson relates that when the Alafin Adelu died in 1875 one of his wives, Alayoayo, "distributed her property among her relatives and her only son" before she committed the customary suicide.<sup>3</sup> Clearly in this case the son did inherit from his mother. Similarly, in Abeokuta the Rev. Cole related in 1872 that an ill woman "gave charge and will to her husband about her two sons and daughter in case of her death. She shared her property among her children and family".<sup>4</sup>

Additionally British, or at least western, legal practices seem to have influenced this area of inheritance. In one instance the Rev. Olubi visited a dying christian woman named Martha Yeole in Ibadan in 1873 who "had made a will to dispose of her meagre property".<sup>5</sup> In Islamic law however, daughters inherit half as much as sons and if there are no sons the women must share with

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2087/63, White, Otta, 5th Feb 1862. In this incident a man's property was inherited by his brothers, causing resentment among the dead man's sons.

<sup>2</sup> A.B. Ellis, *The Yoruba-speaking Peoples of The Slave Coast of Africa*, p.177.

<sup>3</sup> S. Johnson, *The History...*, p.397.

<sup>4</sup> CMS, CA2029/12, Cole, 15th Nov 1872.

<sup>5</sup> CMS, CA2075/28, Olubi, 5th Feb 1873.

a male relative.<sup>1</sup> However, as one Muslim pointed out in Ibadan in 1855, the Muslim community was still relatively small, so they tended to "conform" to Yoruba practices.<sup>2</sup>

However, in practice there were certain exceptions to these laws. In relation to wealthy individuals one late 19th century source stated that "If the property is a large one, it will immediately... come under the protection of the authorities of the town where such a person holds title in that town".<sup>3</sup> Moreover, Johnson related that if a person died without legitimate heirs, the property and estate also went directly to the crown.<sup>4</sup> These practices applied to everyone including women. Every effort was made to establish whether a rightful heir or responsible person existed in each case. On Efunsetan's death in 1874, her property was deemed the property of the state since she had no direct living heirs. The Ibadan authorities appointed her sister as direct manager of her estate; however, a more distant male relative, Omoko, was considered the ultimate guardian.<sup>5</sup> The fate of rich estates left by wealthy women often caused tension and disputes between powerful male authorities who struggled for

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<sup>1</sup> Sabini, *A Primer*, op.cit, p.113.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2049/111, Hinderer, Ibadan, 15th April 1855; Likewise even in the more Islamised town of Ilorin, Clarke considered in the late 1850's that the government "is so permeated by the Yoruba element that there is no essential modification" and laws were not enforced in the same way they might have been under a strong Islamic authority, W. Clarke, op.cit, p.258.

<sup>3</sup> *Report on The Yoruba*, p.86-7.

<sup>4</sup> S. Johnson, op.cit, p.331.

<sup>5</sup> S. Johnson, op.cit, p.393-4.

control of the wealth. For example, when a reputed rich woman of Ijanna named Abu died without heirs in 1861/2, the property was supposed to revert to the Oyo crown. However, at this time Ijanna [Iganna] was subject to the Are Kurunmi of Ijaye and he too claimed Abu's property. Existing tensions between the Alafin Adelu and Kurunmi were aggravated leading to the Ijaye war.<sup>1</sup>

One particular inheritance claim lasted no less than eighteen years in a protracted attempt to find a legitimate heir. The claim spanned two court cases and again clearly shows the way in which male authorities manipulated people and struggled for control of the fortunes of wealthy women. In 1871 a rich Egba woman based within the Lagos Protectorate named Louisa Ajatu was murdered by two men, apparently in connection with a dispute over her property. She left a rich estate worth £329.8.9 which was not claimed until 1887 by her sister Ayebomi. One year later Ayebomi herself died. Ayebomi lived in the Iwo quarter and so the Alake of Abeokuta instructed the Oluwo of Iwo to find any daughters that Ayebomi may have had and send them to him so that they could go to Lagos and claim the estate. Unknown to the Alake, a woman named Abiose (Ambose) reluctantly went to Lagos under the Oluwo's orders claiming to be Ayebomi's daughter. From the available evidence it appears that Abiose was in fact Ayebomi's niece and not her daughter. The Oluwo, G.W. Johnson and Abiose's brother, Akinrade were all involved in a scheme to put her forward as a

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<sup>1</sup> See, CMS, CA2069/4, Meakin, 15th May 1860; PP, Vol 63, No.6, Enc.2, Report by H. Higgins and O. Smith, 10th Feb 1887, p.36; S. Johnson, op.cit, p.331.

legitimate heir to the money, however, she wished her brother to assume full responsibility for the fortune. It seems that she may have been frightened not only of the responsibility but also by the intense interest the various rival male authorities had in the estate and by the possible pressure this would put her under if she were in control of the fortune. It is also likely that she was frightened by the ominous and suspicious death of the original holder, Louisa Ajatu. Nonetheless, the court decided in March 1889 that she was not entitled to the estate and the case remained unresolved.<sup>1</sup>

There is little direct evidence from the 19th century relating to women's succession to family headships. The 1910 report on the Yoruba maintains that a woman could not take over the headship of a family;

"But in cases where the elder male members of a family have perished in war or died from other causes, the senior female member of the family is in the domestic forum honoured with the obedience due to the head of the family"

and further that if the husband is absent or unable to manage his household this duty may devolve upon the senior wife.<sup>2</sup> Indeed missionaries reporting from towns engaged in war often commented that the headman, or *bale*, was absent from his compound for long

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<sup>1</sup> However, the Oluwo continued in his quest for administration of the estate. The details of this case are contained in PRO, CO147/20, No.35, Enc, 1871; CO147/61, No.428, Moloney to Knutsford, and Encs.7, 'Acting Queen's Advocate to Colonial Secretary', Enc.12, 'Madame Ayebomi to Moloney', 1887; CO879/28/355, No.33, Enc.7 Moloney, 1888; CO147/66, No.322, Confidential, 'The Abeokuta Authorities to Moloney', Ake, 1888; CO879/29/365, No.120, Enc.3, and No.131, 1889; CO147/71, Confidential, Judge Smith to Moloney, 31st July 1889 and Enc.1, 'Proceedings of the Court'. I am indebted to Kristin Mann who provided me with further details on this case from material she collected from the Supreme Court Records at Lagos: E. H. Roland, Civil cases in Supreme Court Lagos, Case 255, 24th Sept 1888, Ayebomi deed, Part 1, p.1; Case 252, Part 1, p.2; Case 8/279(4), 2nd Nov 1888, Ayebomi Deed, Part 2.

<sup>2</sup> A Report..., op.cit, p.77,81.

time periods in the warcamp.<sup>1</sup> In these circumstances senior women did assume control of family compounds. Hinderer described one such case in 1855 at Ibadan whereby a woman "through her rich son who is now in the war made herself master of the compound".<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, the report qualified female headship, continuing, "But she cannot represent any member of the family before a public tribunal... The eldest living male member of a family... must fulfil this office". The reason being that all females were confined indoors on occasions of state trials.<sup>3</sup>

According to the same source succession to public offices was limited to the male line also. However, methods of succession to titles varied from one area to another in the 19th century. The northern towns appear to have maintained a strict agnatic system. Indeed Johnson emphasised that no succession was possible through the female line to the Alafin title at Oyo or in the Yoruba country".<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, as Robert Smith has argued, Oyo-Igboho traditions relate that the Alafin Orompoto, who ruled in the first half of the 16th century, was a woman (contrary to Oyo traditions which maintain that Orompoto was a man), which suggests that female succession was in fact possible. On the other hand in the late 17th or early 18th century Omosun, the

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2049/110, Hinderer, Ibadan, 9th March 1855, Women in one compound said the bale had been at the warcamp for four years. Also see, CA2075/25, Olubi, Ibadan, 6th May 1870, visited 10 such compounds in one day; CA2069/4, Meakin, Oyo, 15th May 1860.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2049/110, Hinderer, Ibadan, 20th Feb 1855.

<sup>3</sup> A Report..., p.77,78. For more discussion of this see Chapter IV.

<sup>4</sup> S. Johnson, *The History...*, p.297.

daughter of Alafin Osinyago, although determined to succeed to the office of Aremo (Prince-elect), was denied her claim, apparently according to custom.<sup>1</sup> Both the Ondo and Ijebu were cognatic and titles could be passed on through the female line. However, at Agbatu, mid-way between the coastal Mahin area and Ondo it was reported that the town had never had a queen in its history and no man had ever been elected 'Kalashue' [titled ruler] on account of descent from his mother.<sup>2</sup> Women's access to political titles will be discussed more fully in Chapter IV.

Land and farms were similarly passed down to children of both sexes depending on the lineage system.<sup>3</sup> However, in relation to the Oyo-Yoruba Johnson qualified this further stating that if "the children are females, they will pass on to the male relatives, unless the daughters are capable of seeing the farm kept up for their own benefit".<sup>4</sup>

One additional aspect of inheritance that affected women was the law regarding widow inheritance.<sup>5</sup> In the last decades of the

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<sup>1</sup> *ibid*, p.173.

<sup>2</sup> PRO, CO879/58/580, No.56, McGregor to Chamberlain, 1901.

<sup>3</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, p.96; A Report, *op.cit*, p.85. For land and property inheritance and land rights see, P.C. Lloyd, *Yoruba Land Law*, 1962; K. Mann, 'Women, Landed Property and the Accumulation of Wealth in Early Colonial Lagos', *op.cit*; A.L. Mabogunje, 'Some Comments on Land Tenure in Egba Division, Western Nigeria', *Africa*, Vol.31, 1961, pp.258-69; S. Afonja, 'Land Control: A Critical factor in Yoruba Gender Stratification', in Robertson and Berger (eds), *Women and Class in Africa*. For a recent study of land tenure in Northwestern Nigeria see, I.M. Jumare, *Women and Land Tenure in the Sokoto Sultinate of Nigeria*, Paper presented at York University, Canada, Sept' 1996.

<sup>4</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, p.96.

<sup>5</sup> For a study dealing with widowhood among the Yoruba see, A. Copley, 'The  
(continued...)

19th century the custom was for the male children or the brothers of the deceased husband to inherit his widows. A younger widow could have children with a male guardian, except her own sons.<sup>1</sup> In 1886 Administrator Evans was told by a man that his sister, named Dowe, had been taken as a wife by the king of Porto Novo and had passed down to one of his son's when he died, being passed on again to another prince when her second husband died.<sup>2</sup> However, women could choose to return to their natal household or live elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> The law was similar in later years as Ellis suggested in 1894, stating "At the present time a widow (*iyale*) is not obliged to marry her deceased husband's brother... She usually goes to live with the relatives of her late husband".<sup>4</sup> Johnson explained the practice in similar terms, likewise stating that a widow was at liberty to refuse an offer of 're-marriage'.<sup>5</sup> Evidence indicates that the law on widow inheritance was much the same both in the west and northwest in the mid-1850s,<sup>6</sup> and much earlier in 1825/6.<sup>7</sup>

However, if a woman wished to decide her own fate, in some

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<sup>5</sup> (...continued)

Debate on Widow Remarriage and: Aspects of Moral Change in Nineteenth Century Bengal and Yoruba', *JICH*, Vol.7, No.2, 1979; For a detailed and recent study on the Igbo see, Chima J. Korieh, *Widowhood Among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria*, M.Phil Thesis, University of Bergen, Norway, 1996.

<sup>1</sup> A Report..., op.cit, p.99.

<sup>2</sup> PRO, CO147/56, No.258, Enclosure in Evans to Granville, Aug 1886.

<sup>3</sup> A Report..., p.99.

<sup>4</sup> A.B. Ellis, op.cit, p.186, also p.183.

<sup>5</sup> S. Johnson, op.cit, p.115.

<sup>6</sup> T. Bowen, op.cit, p.305.

<sup>7</sup> H. Clapperton, op.cit, Oyo, p.46.

towns certain qualifications had to be met. For example, in Abeokuta in 1864 the wife of a chief who was killed in war complained to the town authorities that she did not want to become the inherited wife of her husband's male relatives as the customary law dictated. She was granted exemption so long as she paid about 5 bags of cowries or £3.2/6, presumably to the male relatives.<sup>1</sup> This may have represented a refund of her bride-price, as it was customary practice to return it in order to annul a marriage. However, in another incident related by Allen at Oke-Aremo, Ibadan in 1879, a widow remonstrated with her relatives that she did not want to be taken as a wife by them but that she would rather live under her son's protection. Her relatives refused to go against the prevailing practice and the unhappy woman committed suicide.<sup>2</sup> In this case the woman may have been a slave wife since she seems to have had little control over her fate.

It is possible then that the status of a widow had bearing on her ultimate right to decline 're-marriage' through inheritance. Indeed for many slave wives the option to retire to their natal compound was simply not possible. In other respects both free-born and slave widows were governed by the same rules of practice which essentially denied them freedom over their own fate. In particular, the practice of 'voluntary suicide'<sup>3</sup> of

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<sup>1</sup> WMMS FBN11/Box 263 No.74, Sykes, C. Abeokuta, 4th Oct 1864.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, G3A20/1880/124, Allen, Oke-Aremo, 28th Sept 1879.

<sup>3</sup> The term for this was *abobaku* or 'those who die with the Oba'. See, Law, *The Oyo Empire*, Glossary.



females was upheld both in Oyo and in other Yoruba towns in the 19th century.<sup>1</sup> The practice required some of the deceased ruler's wives, both slave and free, (in the latter case usually his principal or favourite wife) to poison or otherwise kill themselves so that they could be buried along with their husband to serve him and augment his status in his afterlife.<sup>2</sup> However, chosen wives often employed various means of avoiding their fate. On more than one recorded occasion, in the early 19th century senior wives condemned in this way tried to avoid their death by bribing or manipulating powerful men to let them live.<sup>3</sup> Indeed according to the Lander brothers in 1830, a condemned widow of the chief of Ijanna actually gained the support of the Alafin himself to have the law waived in her case, however, the law was ultimately enforced by the people, perhaps indicating that the custom was so deep-rooted that in practice, as the colonial government later found out, official attempts at abolishing it would take a long time to successfully implement.<sup>4</sup> Johnson relates that since 1858 when Atiba abolished the forced suicide of the Aremo or Crown Prince, the custom had been dying out, however, that was "with the exception of women" and slaves.<sup>5</sup> Significantly, precedence was accorded to maintaining the custom

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2069/12, Meakin, Oyo, 20th April 1859, reported that eight of Alafin Atiba's wives took poison and were buried with him; cf. Anna Hinderer, *op.cit.*, p.195. who put the number at forty-two, probably an exaggeration.

<sup>2</sup> PP, Vol.40, No.35, Campbell to Clarendon, 20th Dec 1854; W. Clarke, *op.cit.*, p.257; PP, Vol.63, No.6, Enc.2, Report by H. Higgins and O. Smith, 10th Feb 1887, p.39; S. Johnson, *op.cit.*, pp.55-7.

<sup>3</sup> For example, S. Johnson, *The History*, p.397, relates the case of Alayoayo, the Alafin Adelu's wife.

<sup>4</sup> R. & J. Lander, *Niger Journal*, p.67.

<sup>5</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit.*, p.57.

in relation to women and slaves in particular, as an extension of the importance placed on these two groups of people as constituents and signs of status and wealth in life.

Moreover, some female Christian converts felt it would go against their values and conscience to comply with the custom of widow inheritance. For example at the Ikija mission in 1870 a female convert's husband died. The missionary Cole (a relative of the woman) notes that,

"after the funeral some attempt was made by the husband's relation to claim her as a wife in the husband's stead. But she totally refused and told them that being an old woman and a Christian, she could not have any husband again, whether heathen or christian: telling them that Jesus has told them in his holy word that he is a husband to the widow".<sup>1</sup>

### Debt.

Case after case of individuals being seized by creditors (termed 'panyarrying') seeking repayment of debts by bad debtors were reported to the consul at Lagos throughout the second half of the 19th century.<sup>2</sup> In 1866 the Rev A. Wilhelm considered that in the Oyo area "most people are in pawn and debt".<sup>3</sup> By 1888 the then Governor, Alfred Moloney, reported that panyarrying arising from outstanding debts in the eastern coastal area was a

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2029/6, Cole, Abeokuta, 29th July 1870.

<sup>2</sup> Consul Campbell informed the Earl of Clarendon in 1855 that most of the complaints he dealt with as Consul concerned the kidnapping and sale of free people over debt. The volume of work in this area had become so great that he asked the people to set up a committee among themselves to resolve disputes over debt. See, PP, Vol.42, No.8, Campbell to Clarendon, 2nd Aug 1855.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2011/31, Rev. Wilhelm, Oyo Station Report, 1866.

persistent problem and the cause of most disturbances in the area.<sup>1</sup> Certainly there is enough evidence in relation to pawning to raise loans for various reasons to indicate that debt was widespread.<sup>2</sup>

But how far did debt affect women in particular in Yorubaland during the period and in what ways? Unfortunately much of the evidence relating to debt does not specify the sex of either the creditor or borrower. However, in a sense by their very nature the systems and facilities for credit and loans described above put a borrower immediately into debt. Thus it is fair to say that at this level most women would have been affected by debt. Indeed in 1871 Akodu, the Seriki of the Egba forces explained to Glover that of his many wives that had escaped to Lagos "most of them are indebted in large sums of money to people here [Abeokuta]...".<sup>3</sup> It seems reasonable to suppose that Akodu's wives represented a small but typical proportion of the number of women that must have been in similar circumstances. The consequences of debt may be discussed by considering the following questions; to what extent was a woman responsible for her debts and in what ways were debts recovered?

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<sup>1</sup> PRO, CO147/66, Moloney to Knutsford, 1888.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2011/31, Report from Oyo Station by Andrew Wilhelm, 1866; PP, Vol 63, No.8, Enc, 2nd part of Report by H. Higgins and O. Smith, 20th June 1887. Both suggest that men commonly pawned themselves or a relative in order to raise the bride-price to get married. Also see CMS, CA2056/50, J. Johnson.

<sup>3</sup> PRO, CO147/20, No.36, Enc in Glover to Kennedy, 'Akodu, Seriki of Egbas to Glover', 1871.

Many 19th century sources agree on the point that a man was responsible for his spouse's debts while she was alive. Certainly, Seriki Akodu, who is mentioned above, emphatically stated that he was ignorant of the extreme debt that many of his wives were in, yet he was responsible for their re-payment.<sup>1</sup> Evidence for the later period would seem to indicate that little had changed in this regard over the years. Fadipe relates that "A man was held responsible in customary law for his wives debts".<sup>2</sup> In 1894 A.B. Ellis also maintained that "A man is responsible for any debts his wives may contract...".<sup>3</sup> Similarly a report referring to Yoruba laws and customs compiled during the last decades of the 19th century holds that a husband was liable for his wife's contracts or debts.

However, the report additionally states that in certain circumstances debt recovery required that the family of a bad debtor was responsible for their relative's debt, and not specifically the husband if the debtor was a woman.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the report further states that "women are considered to be under perpetual guardianship both as regards their person and their property".<sup>5</sup> Either the woman's husband or a senior member of her family were considered as her guardian. Thus, in some circumstances both a woman's husband and/or her family were liable for her debts. It is then possible to surmise that in the

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<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> N.A. Fadipe, *op.cit*, p.89.

<sup>3</sup> A.B. Ellis, *op.cit*, p.190.

<sup>4</sup> *A Report on the Yoruba*, *op.cit*, p.81,91.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, p.84.

eyes of the law a man was not wholly responsible for his wife's debts while she was alive. Depending on how responsible he felt for his wife's debts and his financial ability to pay them off, in some cases he may only have ensured, forced or helped his wife to meet her debts, defraying them or asking for her family's assistance only as a last resort. Indeed in at least one Yoruba town, Ota, customary law and practice held that a husband was not responsible for his wife's debts and vice versa.<sup>1</sup> The variation in practice is not easy to explain without further primary evidence; however, it could indicate a number of possibilities such as a change in practice over time and quite significant degrees of variation in practice between towns.

The situation was more clear cut regarding who was responsible for a woman's debts if she died. One 19th century observer stated that "succession to property entails the obligation of defraying the debts of the deceased".<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the report on the Yoruba states that "The heir must pay in full, all the debts of an estate, whether or not the estate is sufficient".<sup>3</sup> Therefore, as heirs to a woman's estate her sons and daughters or family usually inherited her debts and not her husband. Moreover, a man was not responsible for his living children's debts,<sup>4</sup> so he could not legally contract

<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2087/76, White, Ota, 23rd May 1870.

<sup>2</sup> A.B. Ellis, *The Yoruba-speaking Peoples of The Slave Coast of Africa*, p.177; P.C. Lloyd, 'Agnatic and Cognatic Descent Among the Yoruba', in *Man*, 1966, also maintains that in the past in both cognatic and agnatic groups, a woman's descent group were liable for her debts both in life and after death. A husband only claimed liability if he chose to. p.489,496.

<sup>3</sup> A Report..., p.86.

<sup>4</sup> A.B. Ellis, *op.cit*, p.190.

(continued...)

responsibility for the inherited debt by default. This evidence logically suggests that prior to the introduction of the new convention on inheritance in 1858 a woman's brothers and sisters contracted her debts when they inherited her estate. However, further evidence is needed to clarify this assumption.

Numerous actions could be taken to enforce repayment of a debt. In theory, the produce and profit of a woman's labour would eventually pay off her debt, even more so if she had borrowed capital using the *iwofa* system which allowed her to pay back the interest from the outset. However, debt became a problem when it was not repaid on time or the financial position of a woman became so weak that a creditor began to fear non-repayment. However, in most cases repayment procedures were enforced. One source from the late 19th century reported four main methods of recovering outstanding debts. A person (*Ogo*) was employed to heckle and pressurise the debtor into paying up. Samuel Johnson similarly noted the use of an *Ogo* or "licensed distrainer" as a particular method of debt recovery operating during the last half of the century.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the town authorities could issue a warning to the debtor's family to repay a debt by sending them a recognised staff (*Edan*).

Particularly long-standing debts were recovered in a more determined manner. Information supplied by Sierra Leonian

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<sup>4</sup> (...continued)

<sup>1</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, pp.130-31.

emigrants in the late 19th century indicates that an unsatisfied creditor had the right to seize either a debtor's property or a member of the debtor's family as a ransom until the debt was paid. However, the creditor had to notify the town authorities of his intentions and report to them with the property or person seized. This procedure has been called 'panyarrying'. Moreover, if the debt remained unpaid the authorities could sell the debtor into slavery, if the creditor so wished.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, when a person was in service as a regular *iwofa* it was illegal to sell him/her into slavery.<sup>2</sup> In one case it was reported by citizens of Abeokuta in 1865 that Mr. Henry Robbin sold a woman's son because she owed him an outstanding debt; however, it is not clear whether he sought the Alake's approval beforehand.<sup>3</sup>

The incidence of panyarrying seems to have been high in earlier years. Consul Campbell reported in 1855 that he was inundated with complaints about such cases; however, contrary to the later sources, he mentions that the main grievance related to panyarrying was that those seized were often not related to the debtor.<sup>4</sup> Whether this indicates a change in custom over time as to the status of the person held to ransom or that creditors flouted established rules about exactly who they could hold to ransom is unclear. However, in 1887 in the Ilesa area after a debt-related seizure the Owa informed Henry Higgins, the consular

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<sup>1</sup> A Report..., op.cit, p.91.

<sup>2</sup> PP, Vol.6, May 1849, Report of the Select Committee on the African Slave Trade, H. Townsend, Abeokuta.

<sup>3</sup> PRO, CO147/9, No.108, Glover to Cardwell, 1865.

<sup>4</sup> PP, Vol.42, No.8, Encl, Campbell to Clarendon, 2nd Aug 1855.

agent reporting the incident,

"that it was the custom of the country that if anyone owed a debt, the person to whom the debt was due, if he saw no likelihood of recovering it, simply seized the first woman or child he could find belonging to the debtor's village and held her in custody until ransomed by the payment of the debt";

He added that such a person was never sold into slavery.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, at least in Ilesa, the Owa suggested that non-family members could indeed be held to ransom but could not in fact be sold. It may be that in most cases the threat of enslavement was more common than the actual occurrence; the threat being sufficient to solicit repayment. For example, the Rev. King observed such an incident at Igbein, Abeokuta in 1855 whereby the local Ogboni (authorities) were deciding the case of a local woman who was demanding repayment of credit from a Sierra Leonian women whom she had brought from Lagos and threatened to sell if the debt was not recovered according to her rights under the law.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, it was recorded in the western coastal district of Yorubaland in 1880 that one creditor threatened to sell four women being held as ransom for a debt if the debtor did not pay up.<sup>3</sup> Women feature most prominently in the evidence as the victims of panyarrying arising from debt matters.

Some women adopted more *ad hoc* measures to recover their debts. Johnson related one incident at Oyo during the reign of

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<sup>1</sup> PP, Vol.63, No.8, Enc, 'Report on a Mission to Tribes Interior of Lagos' by H. Higgins and O. Smith, 20th June 1887.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2061/57, King, 21st July 1855.

<sup>3</sup> PRO, CO147/40, No.63, Griffith to Ussher, 1880.



Adelu (1859-75) whereby a woman took it into her own hands to recover a debt owed to her. The Alafin understood that the woman had broken into her debtor's premises to recover her property and thus ordered that the woman be executed.<sup>1</sup> Charles Young reported from Ondo in 1875 that Mrs Sunday, the local schoolmaster's wife, had run up an outstanding debt while trading with another woman. When both Mr Sunday and his wife were away on business elsewhere, the woman immediately took the opportunity to demand repayment. The woman refused to leave the mission premises until finally a government colleague of Mr. Sunday paid the debt on their behalf.<sup>2</sup> In another extraordinary incident at an Itebu market, a wealthy female slave called Agun demanded that the Osemawe (king) of Ondo pay a debt owed to her by an Ondo trader. Her master's officials then proceeded to take not only the £6.10s that the trader owed Agun, but a further £3 for themselves. Later Agun was punished for taking matters into her own hands and her master ordered her to give the £9.10s back.<sup>3</sup> Kristin Mann has highlighted the process whereby credit agreements increasingly became backed by landed property in colonial Lagos, showing that by the 1860's the practice of mortgaging landed property to secure commercial credit had become widespread.<sup>4</sup> One of Tinubu's major creditors, James Labulo Davies pursued repayment, forcing Tinubu to mortgage part of her landed property at Tinubu Square

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<sup>1</sup> S. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, p.400.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2098/12, Young, 14th Nov 1875.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2011/117, Extract from the journal of Nathaniel Ogbonaiye, 26th Oct 1879.

<sup>4</sup> K. Mann, 'Women, Landed Property, and the Accumulation of Wealth in Early colonial Lagos', *Signs*, Vol.16, No.4, 1991.

in order to meet the debt.<sup>1</sup> However, in most interior towns private ownership of land and property took longer to develop. Consequently so did this particular form of credit security.

Problems arising from debt were not always resolved amicably. Disputes over debts were common in the market. In 1888 the Ekiti authorities reported that the Ibadan and Ijesa trading women had recently quarrelled frequently at the Imesi-Ipole market over debts, while attempting to explain why they had blockaded the Ikirun road to the market.<sup>2</sup> In one instance it was reported from Sagamu near Ijebu-Ode in 1894 that a woman named Odubinewo had been "beaten senseless" by three women to whom she apparently owed palm-oil.<sup>3</sup> In some cases long-standing debts were simply written off. In 1853 Madame Tinubu was reported to have been deeply in debt to a trader, Mr. Sandeman, who had reluctantly let the debts go.<sup>4</sup> In 1856 her repayment record had not improved. It was estimated "that the quantity of palm oil owing by this woman to various merchants and traders exceeds in value £5,000", and further, "her largest creditors have long given up all hope of obtaining any portion of their claims from her".<sup>5</sup> Clearly strict laws, which usually involved the town

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<sup>1</sup> O. Yemitan, *Merchant and Kingmaker: Madame Tinubu*, p.24.

<sup>2</sup> PRO, CO147/64, No.192, Enc.3, The Owa, Ore and Others, in Moloney to Knutsford, 1888; CO147/66, No.329, Enc.2, Ekiti Authorities, in Moloney to Knutsford, 1888.

<sup>3</sup> PRO, CO879/41/475, No.11, Enc, Carter to Ripon, Sagamu, 1894.

<sup>4</sup> PP, Vol.41, No.1 and Enclosures, Fraser to Malmesbury, 20th Feb 1853.

<sup>5</sup> PP, Consular, Bight of Benin, Vol.43, Campbell to Clarendon, No.16, 26th May 1856.

authorities, regulated debt recovery and anyone deviating from these practices was not looked upon kindly. However, the evidence also indicates that many creditors still took matters into their own hands in order to force debt repayment.

Clearly, 'legitimate' trade and the exchange of goods it encouraged between Europe and Africa had opened up and stimulated profitable lines of work for those women who were able to respond to demand. The majority of women earned small to fair profits since they were restricted to processing and trading in palm produce on a small scale, most notably because of limited access to the amount of slave labour needed to produce on a larger scale, like Madame Tinubu. Nevertheless, the evidence indicates a distinct spread of polygamy among the general population over the course of the 19th century which would have given many more senior women greater access to the labour of junior co-wives, many of whom were slaves, and their children than they had previously enjoyed. Moreover, the many examples of wealthy trading women discussed above suggest that the number of women that were able to engage in the palm produce and other industries on a larger scale was greater than that which is normally suggested. In addition, it would seem that some slave women benefitted from a partially independent income, something which the evidence suggests they did not do in earlier years. On the whole women maintained their economic independence during the 19th century and most certainly profited from the demand for their labour created by the growth of the palm oil export trade and related industries. At any rate, there is no evidence in the

sources consulted to indicate that the income rights of those women who enjoyed such rights suffered. On the other hand, while men did not take steps to take over the palm industry at the expense of women, as they did in Ngwa, there is much to indicate that men employed various strategies in an attempt to gain some access to women's income over the period; an issue which will be explored in the next section.

Control and Distribution of Women's Income.

The foregoing discussion has highlighted the great economic independence enjoyed by Yoruba women in the 19th century and the various ways in which women acquired capital, spent and distributed their income, and handled their debts. It was shown that women generally held on to their income rights as they gained an increased share in income and profits in expanding industries, such as the palm produce export trade, pottery and the cloth and dyeing industries from the second half of the 19th century onwards. The discussion also outlined how many slave women began to acquire an independent income which they commonly used to buy their freedom. Established sexual divisions of labour within these growing industries largely benefitted women as demand for their gender specific skills grew and presented many more economic opportunities. Nonetheless, it is clear that all women did not enjoy fully equal income rights or spending opportunities, particularly if they were slaves. In addition, a number of further controls either existed or were created by men, both in government and in the household, whereby they restricted

and/or prevented women from working and earning, and in some cases ultimately gained a share of women's income. Some of these mechanisms, such as tolls and taxes, applied equally to men and women; however, many were either intentionally directed at women or operated in such a way that women were affected more than men.

### Production.

Hopkins's theory suggests that palm oil production was easily accessible to individuals or petty producers operating on a small scale partly because they "were occupations in which there were few barriers to entry". In particular, Hopkins stated that access to the abundant palm trees "was relatively unrestricted" and together with the low cost of processing this contributed to the rise of a new generation of small scale producers.<sup>1</sup> The last chapter identified these producers and processors mainly as women. However, from the 1870s general access to palm and other lucrative fruit-bearing trees also began to be controlled far more than it had been previously. Various restrictions were introduced in many towns over the period. In 1870 Glover reported that in the western coastal district recent disturbances had arisen over the ownership of land and palm forests. In Badagri on the south-western outskirts of Yorubaland in particular the disputes were between the chiefs, common men and women and the local political and religious authorities. Apparently the latter groups threatened the former with the punitive powers of an un-named 'fetish' if they harvested the

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<sup>1</sup> A.G. Hopkins, 'Economic Imperialism In West Africa: Lagos, 1880-92', *EHR*, Vol.21, 1968, p.588, and *An Economic History of West Africa*, op.cit, p.125.

trees, thereby establishing a monopoly on the trees and gaining financially from the sale of the produce.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, in 1878 James Johnson noticed that "At Ilaro a small scale palm oil is manufactured but unlike that in Egba, palm trees are common property. Everyone has a right to help himself out of them".<sup>2</sup> Apart from indicating that little control was exercised at Ilaro in the Egbado/Awori area, the statement clearly suggests that harvesting of palm trees was controlled by certain restrictions in the Egba area at the time.

Additionally in the more northern areas a change over time in rights to exploit lucrative trees can be detected. In 1872 an Ibadan delegation informed Glover that in the Oyo, Ogbomoso and the surrounding Ibadan area, oil palm and shea butter trees were abundant but neglected apart from a small scale domestic use.<sup>3</sup> By 1893, at least in the greater Oyo area, the palm trees were now being used to produce oil for the export market. Production had taken off to such an extent that the Alafin complained "all of it went to Lagos instead of being retained at home for consumption and therefore it was difficult to get oil in Oyo".<sup>4</sup> However, by 1900 events had taken a turnaround in the Oyo area. The Rev. Pinnock reported that no one would plant fruit trees because they knew that the chiefs would deprive them of the

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<sup>1</sup> PRO, CO147/17, No.27, Glover to Kennedy, 1870.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2056/52, Johnson, James. From Ilaro to Awayade, Aug-Nov 1878.

<sup>3</sup> PRO, CO147/21, No.14, Enc, Ibadan Residents to Glover, 1872.

<sup>4</sup> PP, Vol.64, Colonies, Nigeria, No.1, Report of the Lagos Interior Expedition, 1893, G.T. Carter to Ripon, 11th Oct 1893, p.16.

fruits. This would seem to indicate that the Oyo authorities had established some level of control over small scale producers planting trees specifically intended for export market production. Meanwhile, in the Ogbomoso area punitive religious cults were again brought into use as a means of control. The production of palm wine was forbidden apparently in the name of "the god of palm wine". In this case restrictions were justified as necessary in order to preserve the dwindling palm trees from being killed through the excessive incision-making required to extract the sap for palm wine production. However, the restrictions may also have been intended to preserve the fruit bearing ability of the remaining trees.<sup>1</sup>

In theory, the development of such restrictions would first hit the initial stage of production which was dominated by men, ie. cultivation and collection of palm nuts. However, all subsequent stages of the palm industry, which were dominated by women, would have suffered. Indeed the complaints of producers in Badagri and Oyo outlined above indicate that the restrictions did have some effect on the industry.

Thus by 1902 a Yoruba source reported that although most produce derived from forest land was entirely the property of the person using the land, both oil palm and kola trees were considered the property of the grantor, who would have been either a bale, chief or some other town authority. Moreover,

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<sup>1</sup> PRO, CO879/62/627, No.1, McGregor to Chamberlain, p.10,11, 1900.

restrictions on harvesting the nuts of these trees were particularly strict if the grantor was a chief (The exception seems to be at Ode-Ondo where kola trees belonged to the person who had planted them regardless of who granted the land). The source further implies that these restrictions may have been introduced by chiefs to maintain a monopoly on the production of lucrative palm and kola products in the era of 'legitimate' trade.<sup>1</sup> A late 19th century report similarly noted, "The ownership of fruit bearing trees remains in the owner of the trees, even though the use of the land is granted to another person".<sup>2</sup> The producer now had to come to some arrangement with the grantor in order to split the produce and/or profits acquired from 'protected' trees. These restrictions had the effect of both limiting the activities of small scale producers and allowing land grantors to tap into the income of those involved in the palm produce industry.

### Trade.

Over the second half of the 19th century certain town authorities (such as in Ijebu, Abeokuta and Ijaye) frequently closed their trade routes which linked both interior markets and interior areas with coastal ports.<sup>3</sup> These blockades were

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<sup>1</sup> 'A Native of Yorubaland', 'Native System of Government and Land Tenure in The Yoruba Country', *JRAS*, Vol.1, Part.3, 1902, p.315.

<sup>2</sup> A Report on the Yoruba, op.cit, p.85.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2049/110, Hinderer, 20th Dec 1854, Awujale prohibited the Ijebu Remo area from trading in palm oil with Lagos; PP, Vol.42, No,10, Campbell to  
(continued...)



introduced for various reasons, however, the general effect was to obstruct trade. Given that women made up the majority of palm oil traders the blockades may have particularly affected their mobility and income. In the Ijebu area, the Awujale went further, also prohibiting the production of palm produce during the blockades. In 1859 during one such period Mr. Williams reported that the Awujale was

"so firm is his determination to put down the oil trade, that he had already executed some persons who had been detected carrying palm oil to the markets clandestinely; that if he caught his own son transgressing this law he would take his head off, and, if his daughter, he would commit her alive to the flames".<sup>1</sup>

However, Brand reported that although the palm oil trade had indeed been adversely affected by the Ijebu ban, the towns of Abeokuta, Porto Novo and Badagri still supplied Lagos.<sup>2</sup> Likewise during the 1873 Ijebu blockade it was reported that strict laws were enforced not only on trade in palm and nut oil but on its production.<sup>3</sup> Further inland, it was reported in 1855 that the Are Kurunmi of Ijaye had placed a ban on all trade in palm oil from his town to Abeokuta.<sup>4</sup> Clearly then while women involved in the palm oil trade suffered severe losses in towns where bans were in operation, those in alternative supply towns may have enjoyed

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<sup>3</sup>(...continued)

Clarendon, 30th Aug 1855, Chiefs of Abeokuta have stopped trade between there and Lagos since March; PRO, CO147/6, No.2/38 and 92, Freeman, 1864, Abeokuta/Egba blockade on route to Lagos.

<sup>1</sup> PP, Vol.46, No.3, Campbell to Malmesbury, 5th Mar 1859.

<sup>2</sup> PRO, FO881/3621, Brand to Russell 1860, Report on Trade for Lagos 1859.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2029/14, Cole, 4th Sept 1873; PRO, CO147/28, No.71, Berkley, 1873.

<sup>4</sup> W. Clarke, op.cit, p.197.

a resultant increase in demand for their produce. Nonetheless repressive measures directly affected female industries and in some cases women were specifically singled out.

Isolated incidents of power abuse were also common, especially by the Ibadan *ajele*.<sup>1</sup> In one incident in 1859 just outside Ilesa, D.J. May reported that an Ibadan Ajele

"meeting a woman carrying a large calabash of palm wine... by virtue of his office at once appropriated it, to the chagrin and loss of the poor woman, and freely dispensed thereof to all who would, when she was permitted to carry the remainder to our halting and breakfasting place for our further refreshment."<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, attempts were made by male authorities to create more favourable terms of trade for royal women at the expense of others. For example, in 1859 the King and Chiefs of Porto Novo, just outside the south-western outskirts of Yorubaland, prohibited the trade of palm oil and issued a decree stating that oil producers must sell their oil at 5 heads of cowries to the King's wives. This price was considerably lower than the normal asking price. The royal women then sold the oil at double the price to coastal wholesalers. Thus, royal and privileged women earned inflated profits and maintained a monopoly in trade while common women in production were undercut. However, in this case the women producers hit back, countering the move by stopping oil production altogether, thus restricting the supply and forcing the decree to be annulled.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See, B. Awe, 'The End Of An Experiment: The Collapse of The Ibadan Empire 1877-1893', *JHSN*, Vol.3, No.2, especially p.227, and 'The Ajele System' in *JHSN*, Vol.3, No.1, Dec, 1964.

<sup>2</sup> D.J. May, *op.cit.*, p.219.

<sup>3</sup> PP, Vol.46, No.6, Campbell to Malmesbury, 5th April 1859.

(continued...)

Overall, it has been established that the palm produce industry was generally dominated by women, although in Ijebuland men also traded palm produce. Therefore it is reasonable to say that women were the most severely affected by such actions, and in particular, common women. Indeed, these developments in rights to harvest may be seen as part of the process of adaptation adopted by some slave-trading chiefs to mitigate against the effects of small scale competition and maintain their revenue during the commercial transition to trade in vegetable products and confirm Hopkins' original model.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, trade and industry was tapped to some extent by an established system of taxes and tolls. Tolls were a considerable and long-standing source of revenue for Yoruba authorities.<sup>2</sup> Richard Lander commented on the tolls and market taxes in operation in Oyo in 1827.<sup>3</sup> In the mid century Bowen noted that tolls in the western Yoruba towns were payable on goods and produce entering any town and were paid either in cowries or in kind.<sup>4</sup> Johnson remarked that in general

"market people have a fixed amount to pay, varying from 40 to 200 cowries, and farm people contribute a trifle from whatever they are bringing home...".<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>(...continued)

<sup>1</sup> A.G. Hopkins, *An Economic History...*, p.142-5.

<sup>2</sup> W. Clarke, *op.cit*, p.256; See T. Falola, 'The Yoruba Toll System: Its Operation and Abolition', in *JAH*, Vol.30, No.1, 1989 and 'The Yoruba Caravan System of the 19th Century', in *IJAHS*, Vol.24, No.1, 1991.

<sup>3</sup> Lander, *Records of Captain Clapperton's...*, Vol.II, p.223.

<sup>4</sup> T. Bowen, *op.cit*, p.318.

<sup>5</sup> S. Johnson, *The History...*, p.91.

(continued...)

Toll gates were situated at various points along town walls and they also sprung up in advantageous positions along trade routes.<sup>1</sup> Most traders, including women, had to pay although they took account of these expenses when they fixed the ultimate selling price on their goods.

However, either through privilege or ingenuity, some women did not pay these toll duties. In particular the Alafin's wives were exempt along all routes within the Oyo kingdom. In 1830 at Igun in South-western Yorubaland the Lander brothers revealed one mechanism employed by the Alafin to ensure his vassal and tributary towns complied: commenting on a party of around one hundred ayaba they noted,

"these royal ladies are distinguished from their country women only by a peculiar species of cloth, which is wrapped round their goods, and which no one dares to imitate on pain of perpetual slavery. This severe punishment is often inflicted, for, as the king's wives pay no tribute or turnpike dues whatever, and must besides be entertained by the chiefs of every town through which they pass, strong inducements are offered for others to attempt to deceive by using the forbidden cloth, and hence examples are necessary".<sup>2</sup>

The goods carried by royal wives were often the most expensive and sought-after trade items therefore the customs dues on the items would otherwise have been high. However, the ayaba traded on the Alafin's behalf,<sup>3</sup> therefore the practice did not

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<sup>5</sup> (...continued)

<sup>1</sup> W. Clarke, *Travels and Explorations*, p.256, for specific examples see, p.1,15,25; Gerhard Rohlfs, 'Journey Through Yoruba to the Coast by Lagos, 1866-7', (Rohlfs notes tolls at Share), in E. deVeer, and A. O'Hear, 'Gerhard Rohlfs in Yorubaland', *HIA*, Vol.21, 1994, p.92.

<sup>2</sup> R. & J. Lander, *The Niger Journal*, p.71.

<sup>3</sup> H. Clapperton, *Journal of a Second...*, p.21.

specifically benefit the women. Rather it was clearly intended to maximise the Alafin's revenue. Similarly, the confidential messenger of the Awujale of Ijebu-Ode, the *Agunrin*, wore a distinctive roughly textured Ijebu cloth called *saki* as a badge of office which, among other privileges, also exempted him from paying tolls.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, some foreign officials and travellers were granted exemption.<sup>2</sup> Enterprising people managed to avoid toll-duties by making trade journeys under the pretence of belonging to such parties of European travellers. The Lander brothers commented in 1830 that on the route from Ijanna to Oyo,

"Several strangers accompany us from town to town, in order to evade the duty which is exacted at the turnpike gates, by stating themselves to be of the number of our attendants"

and more explicitly that

"Women have also placed themselves under the protection of our men from Cape Coast castle, that they may enjoy the like advantage".<sup>3</sup>

Some women tried to use influential connections to avoid payment. For example, while on route to Ondo in 1882, Mr. Haastrup was joined by a trader, Madame Mamowolo and her large retinue. At Ibufamakin guards singled out Mamowolo demanding and receiving a toll duty of 6 bottles of gin. Again at Igbindo, Mamawolo was singled out for high charges, however,

"she refused paying the king's duty on her numberless goods... she thought she could very well get over it,

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<sup>1</sup> CO147/55, No.179, Moloney to Granville, 1886; PP, Vol.63, No.6, Enc.2, Part 1 of Report by H. Higgins and O. Smith, p.23, 10th Feb 1887.

<sup>2</sup> G. Rohlfis, *op.cit*, p.256; Anna Hinderer, *op.cit*, p.125.

<sup>3</sup> Lander, *op.cit*, p.83.

through the influence of Derin,<sup>1</sup> her uncle, but she was soon told that Derin is nobody in Ondo land".

She eventually handed over two valuable country cloths as payment for a duty of 16 heads of cowries.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, in Abeokuta, King reported in 1860 that female initiates of the cult of Orisa Oko were in the privileged position of being exempt from both taxation and tribute at toll gates.<sup>3</sup> Finally, Samuel Johnson noted that at Oyo during the rare Bebe festivals which could last up to three years no-one paid tolls or tributes.<sup>4</sup>

#### Politico-religious Sanctions.

The male-dominated societies of Oro, Elukun and Egungun<sup>5</sup> operated in such a way as to enable men to control and subordinate women, a topic which will be elaborated upon in greater detail in Chapter V.<sup>6</sup> This particular aspect of the male-

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<sup>1</sup> Derin was the Oni-elect (ruler) of Ife.

<sup>2</sup> PRO, CO147/48, Enc.7, Mr. Haastrup to Gov. Rowe, 'Journey to and from Ilesa', Feb 1882.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2061/66, King, Abeokuta, 23rd June 1860.

<sup>4</sup> S. Johnson, op.cit, p.163. The Bebe festival occurred very rarely and usually to celebrate a particularly long reign.

<sup>5</sup> On Egungun see, P. Morton-Williams, *The Egungun Society in South-western Yoruba Kingdoms*, Proceedings of the 3rd annual conference of the WAISER, Ibadan, 1956. For a recent study of women and male-dominated associations in Yorubaland see, Gabriele Weisser, *Frauen in Mannerbunden: Zur Bedeutung der Frauen in den Bunden der Yoruba*, MA. Thesis, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universitat, Munchen, Germany, 1992.

<sup>6</sup> This aspect of male dominated cults was/is not peculiar to the Yoruba. For a few examples from other West African societies see, G.B. Akenejola Eminefo, *The History of Ogori* (University of Ibadan Press, 1970), p.34; R. Law, *Legitimate Trade...*, op.cit, pp.26-8; P.V. Ottenberg, 'The Changing Economic Position of Women Among the Afikpo Ibo', in W.R. Bascom & M.J. Herskovits (eds), *Continuity and Change in African Cultures*, 1962; E. Tonkin, 'Women Excluded? Masks and Masquerading in West Africa', in P. Holden (ed), *Women's Religious Experience*, 1983; E. Isichei, 'On Masks and Audible Ghosts', in *JRA*, Vol.18, No.1, Feb 1988.

dominated secret societies/cults was part of their general and long-standing governing and policing function in many towns. However, Robin Law has raised the interesting proposition that men may have sought not only to maintain control over women through the exactions of the male-dominated cults as their economic independence increased from their involvement in the palm oil and other industries, but also to gain a share of the wealth that women thus acquired.<sup>1</sup> The contemporary evidence which suggested this development to Law is strongly supported by many other commentators and witnesses over the second half of the 19th century. Indeed some accounts provide information which extends and clarifies the argument further.

In the 1850's the Rev. Clarke specifically noted the exploitation of women's income that always accompanied the chaos at Egungun festivals, commenting "many persons make use of this imposition to secure money from the poor deluded women".<sup>2</sup> Egungun were men dressed in costume and masks. The nature of the masquerades as ritual/spiritual beings was complex, but put simply, they were believed to be the physical representation of the spirits of dead male ancestors. In 1888 at Ake, in response to a series of questions on Yoruba religion posed by the missionaries, a group of male elders related that "a great stress is laid upon spending much money in food and drink" at the yearly Egungun festivals.<sup>3</sup> The responsibility and cost of preparing this

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<sup>1</sup> R. Law, 'Legitimate trade...', op.cit, pp.208-210.

<sup>2</sup> W. Clarke, op.cit, p.284.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, G3A20/1888, No.172, Meeting of Old men at Ake Church, 18th Oct 1888.  
(continued...)

food and drink lay firmly with the women. Not surprisingly, Samuel Johnson stated that "These festivals are lucky times for the men, for on these occasions, the women are made to spend largely to feast 'deceased relatives', while the food is consumed by the men".<sup>1</sup> More concretely, in 1870 the Rev Allen observed the annual Egungun festival at Kudeti in Ibadan and noted the large volume of provisions provided by the women for the extensive gathering of hundreds.<sup>2</sup>

The missionaries were particularly aware of the exactions placed on women not only during the annual Egungun ceremonies, but also at Oro festivals. In 1853 and 1854 the Rev King witnessed many women busily bringing daily provisions to the hundreds of men engaged in the annual 7 day Oro festival at Owu in Abeokuta. In 1853 "many pots and calabashes of provisions and drinkables were daily conveyed into the grove". The following year

"hundreds of men flocked into the grove... to consume the enormous provisions brought by the deluded women" and further on this occasion it was expected that "every woman, however poor, must make it..".<sup>3</sup>

Likewise in Iseyin the Rev. Mann observed during the August Oro festival that it was a time for feasting, in particular on the

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<sup>3</sup>(...continued)

<sup>1</sup> S. Johnson, op.cit, p.30.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2019/9, Allen, Kudeti, 23rd May 1870.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2061/48, King, at Owu in Abeokuta, 24th Feb 1853 and CA2061/52, 18th Feb 1854.



new harvest of yams prepared by women.<sup>1</sup>

However, the overall burden placed on women at these times was tempered by many factors. In the case of the Egungun, Johnson noted that the women "made their offerings with cheerfulness, and with a sure expectation of blessing".<sup>2</sup> King writes in his journal that during the 1854 Oro festival among the Owu people at Abeokuta each of the women supplied food "either for her father or mother, many made it for both or more", and further that "... with uplifted voices, [they praised] their deceased parents, so as not to be disappointed of their request for children or wealth".<sup>3</sup> Clearly many women gladly contributed money and food in honour of and propitiation to their ancestors. Moreover, women may have considered their input as part reimbursement to the men for the considerable expenses that the upkeep and staging of the masquerades entailed (although, of course, they were not supposed to admit that they knew the masquerades were mortal men!).<sup>4</sup> In addition, the Egungun and Oro festivals were limited to about one week in each year. Not only did this have the effect of limiting the men's demands on the women but more importantly the women knew in advance when the festival would occur. Thus they could save and make allowances

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2066/91, Mann, Iseyin, 2nd and 3rd Aug 1856.

<sup>2</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit.*, p.30.

<sup>3</sup> King states that among the Owu, unlike the rest of the Egba who only honoured male ancestors on these occasions, female ancestors were included.

<sup>4</sup> M.T. Drewal, and H.J. Drewal, 'More Powerful Than Each Other: An Egbado Classification of Egungun', in *African Arts*, 1978, p.38, and especially p.99, n.29.

for the costs incurred by them. Nonetheless, clearly women were required to invest not only a considerable amount of money, but time and effort in these festivals. Although many women achieved great spiritual well-being from their contributions, ultimately, the participating men also gained great material blessings from their efforts.

In addition to these set occasions or festivals, both Egungun and Oro appeared throughout the year at other times, such as during funeral ceremonies<sup>1</sup> or state emergencies and public debates. Similar demands were placed on women on these occasions which resulted in women contributing time and money while the men enjoyed the fruits of their labour. The main difference was that women had no prior knowledge or warning of the appearance of Egungun or Oro on these occasions. Johnson wrote that during funeral ceremonies, in addition to the various presents and food women provided, the *Alagba* (Egungun official) received stringed cowries from the men and un-stringed cowries from the female relatives of the deceased. However, when the men were in private,

"the stringed cowries contributed by the men are there returned to each of them, being participators in the organised imposture that was being practised, the un-stringed cowries of their dupes, the women, are distributed amongst those who took part in the ceremony".<sup>2</sup>

Alternatively, in 1858, near the end of Alafin Atiba's reign at New Oyo, the Egungun imposed a curfew on women to mark the start

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<sup>1</sup> See, CMS, CA2067/2, Marsh, Abeokuta, 15th and 24th June 1845; CA2061/51, King, Abeokuta, 14th Dec 1853; CA2061/63, King, 29th April 1858.

<sup>2</sup> S. Johnson, *The History...*, p.139.

of the Bebe festival. On this occasion, for a limited time the Egungun attendants were allowed to seize any goats, sheep or chickens that they came across: significantly, these animals were usually the property of women.<sup>1</sup> In another incident at Ibadan in 1873 the Rev. Allen witnessed women mourning the apparent death of an influential chief during the Ijesa war. The women gave cowries to the men bringing the body into town. However, in reality the men had "cut a stump of banana tree outside the town and wrapped it with cloth to deceive the women". When Allen confronted the men they told him that although they knew it was wrong they could not resist an opportunity to deceive and exploit the women.<sup>2</sup> Clearly the men were motivated by the financial gain they would make and were aware that they were taking advantage of the women's apparent ignorance. Although this incident was not directly related to an Egungun funeral ceremony, it highlights the way in which men saw deaths and funerals as occasions when women could be easily exploited financially. Furthermore as discussed in Chapter II in relation to the inheritance cases of the women Ayebomi and Abu, male authorities also struggled with each other to gain control of wealthy women's fortunes upon their death.

Oro was an exclusively male, politico-religious cult.<sup>3</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> *ibid*, p.330.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2019/16, Allen, Aremo, 29th Aug 1873; Anna Hinderer gave a detailed account of the growing shortage of cowries in Ibadan in 1861 at the start of the Ijaye war. A. Hinderer, *op.cit*, p.238, *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> Some studies (Weisser, 1992) highlight the presence of at least one post-menopausal woman in the higher ranks of the Oro cult, a ritual priestess. The evidence for this always derives from 20th century accounts. None of the 19th (continued...)

the Egba towns, particularly Abeokuta, it operated as the punitive, executive of the Ogboni council, principally to announce and administer judicial and political proceedings in the town.<sup>1</sup> The male-only Elukun cult operated in a similar manner.<sup>2</sup> When Oro or Elukun was either seen or heard, all women and small children were expected to remain indoors under a strict curfew while men were not. Depending on the specific business of Oro, curfews would last anything from hours to days and in Abeokuta a regular curfew was enforced each night. It was on these unplanned-for occasions of Oro business, which were often frequent and un-announced, that men imposed most heavily on women's economic pursuits and mobility.<sup>3</sup>

Many observers commented on the consequences of this for women. At Abeokuta in 1851 Bowen witnessed that during the proceedings of a criminal trial "all business was suspended", and in particular the markets were closed.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the market

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<sup>3</sup> (...continued)

century accounts that I have consulted mention the role of women in the cult. This neither proves or disproves that they were admitted at higher levels in the 19th century.

<sup>1</sup> For general statements on the role of Oro in Abeokuta from the 1850s to 1860s see, R.H. Stone, *In Afric's...*, p.88; R. Campbell, *A Pilgrimage*, p.77; W. Clarke, *op.cit*, p.282; R. Burton, *op.cit*, pp.196-8. For actual examples of Oro used to administer justice, CA2061/38, King, Abeokuta, 20th Nov 1850, /54, 22nd Oct 1854, /56, 22nd May 1855; Bowen, *ibid*, pp.138,140-1; CA2087/52, White, Otta, 16th Dec 1856 and /76, 25th May 1870. In political meetings, CA2087/49, White, Otta, 7th Dec 1855 and CA2087/51, 11th Sept 1856; CA2061/62, King, Abeokuta, 13th June 1857.

<sup>2</sup> WMSA, Bickersteth to Freeman, Abeokuta, 14th Jan 1856.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Stone, *op.cit*, p.88 states that "During my two years residence in Abeokuta, the town was frequently given to Oro"; CMS, CA2061/51, King, 22nd Oct 1854, women confined with no prior warning; CA2061/56, 22nd May 1855, "Women and youths were abruptly forced to confinement".

<sup>4</sup> T. Bowen, *op.cit*, p.139.

women and food vendors abandoned their stalls according to Clarke who witnessed Oro curfews in the Egba area a few years later.<sup>1</sup> As mentioned earlier, the Abeokuta authorities imposed an Oro interdiction in 1858 which specifically "put a stop to the females trading which amounted to the whole trade nearly being stopped, the females being the working class in the country"; in this case the palm oil trade was particularly hard hit.<sup>2</sup> Thus women had to abandon every economic activity they engaged in around the town until the curfew was over and their mobility was restored. The general effect was, as Dr. E.G. Irving noted in late 1854, "not a woman (is) to be seen... no street cries of the vendors of agiddi, akara or yams and other good things".<sup>3</sup> Moreover, this particular effect was not peculiar to Abeokuta.<sup>4</sup>

A further obstruction was imposed on female carriers and traders in trade caravans both entering and leaving towns; Curfews both delayed and hindered their work. Hinderer commented on the inconvenience in 1851 after two days of confinement within Abeokuta: "the females of the caravan could not come out until today, on which account we shall not be able to move from here until tomorrow" and further, that incoming caravans containing

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<sup>1</sup> W. Clarke, *op.cit.*, p.282.

<sup>2</sup> PRO, FO84/1061, No.18, Acting Consul Lodder, 25th Dec 1858.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2052/18, Irving, Isadda (but referring to Abeokuta), Dec 1854 to Jan 1855.

<sup>4</sup> CMS, CA2056/51, J. Johnson, Oyo, 5th June 1877, All markets were disbanded in Oyo during this Oro festival; PP, Vol.63, No.8, Enc, 2nd part of report by H. Higgins and O. Smith, 20th June 1887, At Modakeke near Ife, in addition to all the markets closing, nothing was allowed to be sold in the streets.

women had accumulated outside the town walls to such an extent that the people numbered more than 4,000 in total.<sup>1</sup> Two years later female carriers accompanying Barber to Ofin had to remain outside the town walls while the men entered during an Oro period.<sup>2</sup> Similarly at Ofin in 1855 women travelling with Dr. Irving and his party were detained outside the town walls until an Oro curfew was over.<sup>3</sup> In 1858 at Ofin King reported that several women who had gone out to collect water remained trapped outside the town gates.<sup>4</sup> Finally, at Ondo too Young recorded that the women in a visiting party from Lagos in 1877 were required to wait behind the Ode walls until a curfew was lifted.<sup>5</sup>

Clearly immobility and loss of valuable productive time were two of the most debilitating affects suffered by women during Oro curfews. However, on these occasions compound industries, such as spinning, weaving, cooking and dyeing were not affected. In 1859 during a curfew at Abeokuta Campbell "sought and procured admission to two or three of them, and found the women engaged as usual in their varied occupations".<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, in a rare example of the reversal of the sexual division of labour, women used boys or men to carry out work on their behalf, thus limiting

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2049/103, Hinderer, Abeokuta, 17th May 1851.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2021/5, Barber, Ofin, 18th Dec 1853.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2052/18, Irving, Isadda, Dec 1854 to Jan 1855.

<sup>4</sup> CMS, CA2061/63, King, 19th Aug 1858.

<sup>5</sup> CMS, CA2098/18, Ondo, Young, 28th Oct 1877.

<sup>6</sup> R. Campbell, *A Pilgrimage to...*, p.77.

the full extent of curfews on their business and domestic chores.<sup>1</sup> Bowen gives this illuminating account of the men's attempts to undertake women's work during the Oro period he witnessed at Abeokuta in 1851,

"Now and then some poor fellow, with a pot of water on his head, slipped through the streets, as if ashamed, and crept into the closed house where his wife was to use the water in preparing his dinner. Several little boys, and some big ones, were seen with provisions, etc., to sell, but they had an awkward sheepish air about them, never attempting the usual cries of 'hot yams!' 'sweet sauce!' etc., and were clearly inadequate to the smiles and chat of the girls, whose places they were endeavouring to fill".<sup>2</sup>

Likewise in 1859 at Abeokuta Robert Campbell observed in the streets,

"a few men and boys were occasionally met, all looking as if discovered in the perpetration of some guilty action, because, forsooth, they were compelled to perform some office regarded, according to their customs, as proper only for women".<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, when Oro granted short reprieves from curfew for women so that they could obtain supplies and attend to other necessary work, King considered that the men did this

"rather for their own ease than from any regard to the women, in as much as the business of buying and selling the necessaries of life at such a time entirely devolves on them and the boys, when they are then obliged to go from one square to another to hawk and purchase them for the females".<sup>4</sup>

Clearly women could not rely on men to successfully tackle work that they lacked both the skill and enthusiasm to do. Women's income must surely have suffered. Additionally, these accounts

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2061/37, King, Abeokuta, 12th April 1850.

<sup>2</sup> T. Bowen, op.cit, p.139.

<sup>3</sup> R. Campbell, op.cit, pp.77-8.

<sup>4</sup> CMS, CA2061/37, King, Abeokuta, 12th April 1850.

not only give a fascinating and telling insight into Yoruba gender roles at the time, but suggest that as far as domestic chores and vending were concerned, such gender roles were entrenched to such an extent that men were not only embarrassed to perform women's work, but willing to make allowances so that they did not have to. Additionally, this supports the argument put forward in Chapter II, that men faced a further 'crisis of adaptation' based on surmounting problems of established gender ideology and skills associated with the sexual division of labour in palm oil production and trade during the transition era.

In some cases both men and women were subjected to the same politico-religious sanctions which both suppressed their political activity and impinged on their economic pursuits. In particular in 1858 King described the elite Elukun cult in Ijebuland as follows,

"the Eluku of Ijebu is very much different from that of the Egbas, every male young and old, without distinction in Abeokuta is permitted to go out when Oro or Elukun is out. But here it is quite the reverse, no man, except the genuine offspring of Ijebu is admitted into the secret, great as he may be. Besides Eluku has the executive power among the Ijebus, as Oro among the Egbas. Moreover, no stranger is permitted to be out when their Ogboni is in the streets, though he has been admitted into the secret in his own country".<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, curfews imposed by the Ijebu Elukun affected not only women, but also male slaves and non Ijebu visitors and residents. Indeed, King himself was detained outside the Ofin gates in 1858 with a party of women during the period of Elukun business.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2061/63, King, Ofin, 18th Aug 1858.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2061/63, King, 19th Aug 1858.



evidence logically suggests then that Elukun must have restricted the mobility and industry of all male slaves and non Ijebu men, whether they were farmers, weavers (men weave outside the compound), local or long distance traders etc. Additionally, the evidence implies that Elukun would impede industries carried out by male slaves on behalf of their male slave owners of Ijebu origin. However, if domestic slaves were working for themselves to any extent, Elukun curfews would directly obstruct that work. The fact that the Ijebu equivalent of Oro extended its repressive powers to include male slaves and strangers is interesting. As seen above, in the Egba area (and the Egbado towns)<sup>1</sup> Oro curfews were largely targeted at women. This was linked to the possibility that Oro was one mechanism whereby men could exercise some control over women's growing economic independence in the palm oil era. If one takes into account that men shared prominence with women in the palm produce trade in Ijebuland, making it the main exception to women's dominance in trade elsewhere during the era of the palm production, there may be a link with the fact that the Ijebu Oro equivalent, Elukun, was also an exception, in that it was directed against sections of the male population that were involved in 'legitimate' trade. The restrictive aspects of Elukun may well represent an attempt by the old elite of slave traders and the Ijebu middle-men to obstruct the activities of women (slave and free), slave men, and non-Ijebu who were independently involved in the palm oil trade within their territory, and to further control their economic

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2087, The journals of Rev. White, passim, Ota, 1854-79.

independence just as this aspect of Oro was evident in other towns as a limitation on women's economic activity.

Additionally, financial exactions associated with the Sango cult were directed at both sexes. Carter described a punitive aspect of the Sango cult at Oyo in 1895 thus;

"a very common mode of replenishing the Alafin's treasury is as follows: In case a chief or resident of Oyo should attain to any considerable wealth and build himself a large house, the Alafin takes a favourable opportunity for arranging to burn the premises; a number of slaves are sent to 'help put out the fire' which means that all the unfortunate man's property is looted and handed over to the Alafin".<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, Johnson wrote "the common people are deceived and imposed upon" in a similar way by Sango.<sup>2</sup> Law describes a similar method of politico-religious sanction used in Old Oyo whereby palace *ilari* (often Sango initiates), and Sango priests administered control over Oyo and its dominions.<sup>3</sup> The Sango cult maintained this aspect in many other Yoruba towns whereby the titled ruler, head chiefs and Sango priests (often one and the same thing) enjoyed perquisites associated with performing appeasement ceremonies after fires. However, the Sango priests did sometimes exercise discretion as both Samuel Johnson and Rev. Olubi noted.<sup>4</sup> In particular, Olubi tells of three compounds

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<sup>1</sup> PRO, CO879/45/509, No.4, Sir. G.T. Carter to Chamberlain, Oyo, 1895; Also See, Johnson, *ibid*, pp.34-6 on Sango at Oyo; W. Clarke, *op.cit*, p.281, for Sango in Yorubaland in general; R. Stone, *op.cit*, p.87.

<sup>2</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, p.35.

<sup>3</sup> R. Law, *The Oyo Empire*, pp.104,139-40.

<sup>4</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, p.35, relates that in the Oyo province allowances were made in the case of poor people: instead of the customary three payments of 11 heads of cowries, a goat and a slave demanded of the rich, a poor household pawned a family member to the Sango priests until they could afford to buy  
(continued...)

ruined by fire in 1869 at Ibadan. For their services in locating and removing the thunderbolts that were believed to be the cause of the fires, the priests asked for both money and goods. However, in this case Olubi writes that they did not charge much because the families were poor.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless women were always required to provide food for the Sango priests and visiting chiefs on such occasions. At Ijaye in 1855 Sango priests went to a compound after a fire to supply their services. While there, they enjoyed a feast cooked by some women.<sup>2</sup> Just as wealthy men were targets for Sango priests in Oyo, particularly wealthy women must also have been prime targets. Indeed, on no less than three separate occasions in 1874, Madame Matilda Suada had her house destroyed by fire and lost a considerable portion of her property. Madame Suada was described by the Rev. Cole as "a woman of no ordinary wealth".<sup>3</sup> It is possible that these fires were started deliberately, since they occurred within a four month period, which seems too often not to be suspicious. At any rate, whether arson was involved or not, the local chiefs (who were reported to have visited Madame Suada after a fire, although this is not directly related to the Sango cult) must have made a considerable revenue at Madame Suada's expense.

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<sup>4</sup>(...continued)  
him/her back.

<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2075/23, Olubi, Oke Ogunpa, Ibadan, 4th May 1869.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2066/87, Mann, Ijaye, 29th June 1855.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2029/15, Cole, Ikija, 26th Mar 1874, /16, 7th April 1874, /20, 21st Dec 1876.

It is difficult to determine exactly how much more income women as a whole gained as a result of new economic opportunities, however, the evidence indicates that many more wealthy large-scale female traders existed and that the majority of senior women would have enjoyed greater access to the labour of co-wives as polygamy became more widespread. The majority of slave women were also allowed to work on their own behalf and earn a partial income. Both slave and free and poorer and richer women spent their income in common ways such as to feed and cloth their children and on religious worship. On the other hand differences can also be seen in terms of income and status. Slave women used earnings to buy their freedom. Very rich and/or childless women were able to use their greater disposable income to invest in business and patronage, which most women could not, although they were better off from involvement in 'legitimate' trade.

The development of and/or greater emphasis placed on exactive and restrictive measures specifically directed at women by the male-dominated cults tends to suggest that women's income and independence was indeed increasing and that men were reacting to this. Moreover, the exactive measures of the male-dominated cults allowed men to circuitously tap into women's income and indirectly circumvent established income rights, which granted some women sole rights to their earnings.

Moreover, on a larger level the measures outlined above can be seen as part of an overall attempt by former slave traders -

who after all formed the executive of the Ogboni and Oro - to boost their income as it diminished over the transition period. In the latter case, exactions may have occurred whether women as a group were wealthier than previously or not. Indeed, one of the cases cited above explicitly states that even the poorest of women had to contribute to an Oro festival in 1853.

Further evidence suggests that women's enhanced economic independence changed the balance of power between the sexes to the extent that men responded by using the cults to exert greater control over women and maintain their subordination. These particular changes can be seen as part of a wider response by men to maintain a patriarchal system during a time of great social upheaval and deteriorating social and gender relations. Attempts were also made to maintain dominance and control over slaves of both sexes. These points, will be developed in greater detail in the last chapter; however, the next chapter will first look further at how women were involved in politics and to what degree and in what ways their wealth affected their involvement.

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## &lt;&lt;&lt;::&gt;&gt;&gt; CHAPTER IV &lt;&lt;&lt;::&gt;&gt;&gt;

## POLITICS.

Studies of the pre-colonial political history of Yoruba women are still relatively few and far between.<sup>1</sup> The major weakness in many of the studies that do address the topic is an over reliance on early 20th century intelligence reports, ethnographic accounts and oral traditions. In many cases the details of and variation in women's political activity are lost and many unfounded generalisations tend to endure. This approach has provided a static and ultimately speculative and unsatisfactory historical account of women's political involvement and representation. The use of such sources is perhaps unavoidable to a certain extent most notably in studies of pre-19th century history and in areas that lack 19th century evidence. Indeed, the opening discussion of women's pre-nineteenth century political involvement is necessarily largely based on later sources since very few informative and reliable pre-19th century written sources exist on this particular topic.

However, material contained in the missionary and colonial archives provided valuable historical evidence on both the

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<sup>1</sup> See, J.R.O. Ojo, *The Position of Women in Yoruba Traditional Society*, University of Ife Seminar papers, 1979; O.O. Bamigboye, *Women in Yoruba Palaces: Past and Present*, Paper delivered at Conference 'Women in history', Uni of Calabar, 1992; Nina Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilised: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1960*, (Institute of International Studies, 1982), Chapter One; Bolanle Awe, 'The Iyalode in the Traditional Yoruba Political System', in Alice Schlegel (ed), *Sexual Stratification: A Cross Cultural View*, (1977); LaRay Denzer, 'Yoruba Women: A historiographical Study', *IJAHS*, 27, 1994, No.1.

political and social scene in many Yoruba towns which allowed some reconstruction of women's political position in the 19th century. The evidence provided an insight into women's actual role in political systems and in key political events as they happened, not only revealing the processes by which women gained a voice in and/or influence on politics, but crucially, the ways in which women were limited from participating and how these restrictions were overcome.

As discussed in Chapter III rich women were often perceived by the missionaries as influential figures in their community and in the wider political and social arena. These perceptions were based on first hand experience and observation of how women used money, key products and status as social tools to cultivate relationships with powerful social and political figures. In particular, wealth and achievement became key factors for some women in securing and maintaining political titles and applying political leverage in the 19th century.<sup>1</sup> The following discussion attempts to provide a historical account of both titled and common women's involvement in the political development of Yoruba towns, their access to political power and influence and the ways in which that influence was achieved and circumscribed.

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<sup>1</sup> See K. Barber, 'Money, Self-realisation and The Person in Yoruba Texts', in J. Guyer, *Money Matters*, op.cit; S. Barnes, 'Ritual, Power and Outside Knowledge', *JRA*, Vol.20, No.3, 1990; Ann O'Hear, 'Political and Commercial Clientage in 19th century Ilorin', *AEH*, Vol.15, 1986.

The Pre-nineteenth Century.

Oral traditions indicate that some women held a high profile in the political systems of the early Yoruba kingdoms although the majority of women had very limited access to political representation. Nonetheless, the evidence indicates that in some towns women became queens. Of the numerous, famous and oft-quoted examples of pre-19th century female rulers a few will suffice: In Ijesa in the north-east, six female rulers are listed by the Ilesa historian J.O. Oni, the last female ruler, Yeyeori, is cited as 18th in the list of Ijesa rulers.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in the north-west, Dassa traditions recall that two out of twenty six recorded rulers were female due to a non discriminatory hereditary system.<sup>2</sup> Ife traditions also suggest the existence of at least two female rulers, Luwo Gbagida and Bebooye.<sup>3</sup> Information relating to Oyo Igboho indicates the possible reign of a female Alafin, Orompoto, at some time during the first half of the 16th century.<sup>4</sup> Additionally both Iyayun, the mother of Alafin Kori and Adasobo, the mother of Ofinran, took the throne temporarily until their sons reached maturity.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J.O. Oni, *A History of Ijesaland*, p.57; L. Denzer, 'Yoruba Women in History: From Pre-Colonial Times to Independence', *IJAHS*, Vol.27, No.1, 1994, p.7.

<sup>2</sup> N. Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilised*, (University of California Press, 1982), p.3; R. Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, (2nd edition, 1976), p.84.

<sup>3</sup> N. Mba, *op.cit*, p.3; L. Denzer, *op.cit*, p.7.

<sup>4</sup> Mba, *op.cit*, p.3; Smith, *op.cit*, p.42. Samuel Johnson holds that Orompoto was a man, being the brother of the previous Alafin, Egunoju (Johnson, *op.cit*, p.161). However, Oyo Igboho tradition holds that Orompoto was a woman, see R. Smith, *op.cit*.

<sup>5</sup> S. Johnson, *The History*, p.156; R. Law, *The Oyo Empire*, p.71,131.



The Ondo, who have a bilateral system of descent, traditionally relate that the town was considerably augmented by one of the Alafin Ajaka of Oyo's wives, their two children and a large body of her friends and followers. Alternative accounts maintain that it was her daughter, Pupupu who founded the town.<sup>1</sup> These conflicting stories may possibly be reconciled if one views these traditions together as representations of the long term consolidation and growth of Ondo over two generations from the arrival of Ajaka's wife's party. Finally, not all Yoruba towns have a history of female rule, for example, the Agbabu, situated north-east of Lagos, never had a queen in their entire history and furthermore no male could be elected Kalashue (king) through descent from his mother.<sup>2</sup>

In particular royal women seem to have had much influence in the political affairs of the coastal port of Lagos. Lieut. Gov Lees noted in 1879 in a report on Lagos based on oral testimony that in the late 16th century, at the time of the first Benin invasions on Iddo island, as Lagos was then known, the Olofin (ruler) "had as his principal wife a woman of strong character, whose fame was scarcely, if at all, exceeded by that of her husband; her name was Adjaye".<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the Lagos Erelu title was created during Oba Akinsemoyin's reign in the 1760's for

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<sup>1</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, p.25; R. Smith, *op.cit*, p.74.

<sup>2</sup> PRO, CO879/58/580, No.56, McGregor to Chamberlain, 1901.

<sup>3</sup> PRO, CO879/15/178, Info on Settlement of Lagos, translated by Lieut. Gov Lees, 1879, p.4.

Kori, his sister. Kori had supported Akinsemoyin in his bid for the throne and continued to be a prime political mover both maintaining his position and settling rivalry between her two sons for succession to the throne when Akinsemoyin died. The title was part of the Akarigbere group of Idejo (white-cap) chieftaincy titles. The Erelu Kori title was occupied, if possible, by the Oba's sister, who was also known as the 'Iya-Oba' or 'Mother of the King'.<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting to note that some traditions and myths associate female rulers with important and progressive changes. For example, during the reign of Luwo Gbagida sometime in the late 18th century it is said that the construction of an extensive system of paving commenced.<sup>2</sup> Alafin Orompoto is said to have considerably strengthened the Oyo army against its enemies by initiating the increased use of a mounted cavalry consisting of up to 1000 horsemen.<sup>3</sup> Another noted progressive female leader was Yeyenirewu, the fifth Ewi of Ado-Ekiti in the north-east, who apparently enjoyed a long reign in the early 16th century and is said to have considerably expanded her kingdom.<sup>4</sup> Although the oral traditions that many of these details are based on are far from clear, they at least convey positive representations of

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<sup>1</sup> T. Folami, *A History of Lagos, Nigeria*, p.115,116; N. Mba, *Women in Lagos Political History*, p.244.

<sup>2</sup> N.A. Fadipe, *The Sociology of the Yoruba*, p.209. According to Fadipe, Luwo Gbagida "passed into tradition as a hard task mistress. The Ife womenfolk in particular had no love for her as she was reputed to have driven them hard and to have begrudged them the usual holidays".

<sup>3</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, pp.161-2; R. Law, *op.cit*, p.43; R. Smith, *op.cit*, p.42.

<sup>4</sup> L. Denzer, *op.cit*, pp.7-8.

women in positions of political authority.

It is widely asserted in secondary sources that the occurrence of female rule had died out by the 19th century, however, this belief may not be entirely true. In the eastern town of Akure it was reported that the third female ruler to take office was Amaro who reigned briefly between 1850 and 1851.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the British officers Wormal and Wilkes reported that the town of Ojo, west of Lagos, had been ruled by a Queen Aronke who wore a low crown. Aronke was then succeeded by her daughter, Abinron, only to be deposed in 1866, not through the actions of the town's male authorities, but at the insistence of Lieutenant Glover, Governor of the West African Settlements including Lagos.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless by the 19th century women no longer became queens in most towns with a tradition of female successional rights. Relatively few authors have suggested reasons for the almost total disappearance of female rulers towards the late eighteenth and into the nineteenth century, if not before. Nina Mba considers that women were not in fact excluded from the titles by law, but does not offer any reason why women disappeared as rulers in the years to follow. LaRay Denzer has suggested that politics became more 'fluid' following the early foundation and expansion of Yoruba Kingdoms and that women may have found it easier to gain political status, only to find that

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<sup>1</sup> Simi Afonja, 'Power and Authority..', op.cit, p.143-4.

<sup>2</sup> NNAI, CSO 26/4, File 29979, Intelligence Report on the Central Awori Group, Acting District officers Wormal and Wilkes, 1935 (I am grateful to Caroline Sorensen-Gilmour, who gave me a copy of this report from her research material collected at the Ibadan National Archives).

later, when the political systems became more entrenched, "the dominant tradition of male leadership prevailed".<sup>1</sup> Certainly, in areas such as Ondo where women clearly played an important part in the establishment and early consolidation of the settlement, a bilateral descent system developed and women were incorporated early into the system of rule.<sup>2</sup> In Oyo, constitutional changes resulted in a dis-continuation of the practice whereby the mother of a junior Alafin stood in for him until he was old enough to reign, as in the case of Iyayun and Adasobo.<sup>3</sup>

However, it is suggested here that political changes associated with a shift in power from the monarchy to the civil and war chiefs combined with increasing warfare in the late 18th and into the 19th century may have been significant mitigating factors reducing the maintenance of female succession, particularly in towns where a male-dominated council of chiefs selected an heir to the throne. Alternatively, female succession may have been withheld as a self-defensive response by the monarchy itself in order to secure what was perceived, according to gender roles, to be a more credible male voice in political debates and decisions on military affairs. The development of new and more meritocratic polities in the context of the growth of

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<sup>1</sup> L. Denzer, *op.cit*, p.9.

<sup>2</sup> S. Afonja, *op.cit*, p.145.

<sup>3</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, pp.48-9,63; R. Law, *op.cit*, p.71.

both the export and internal economy and militarism during the 19th century were also major factors stimulating changes in women's political role which will be discussed more fully below.

Very little is known about the political position of non-royal women in the pre-19th century: one consequence of the general monopoly that the official court historians had (have) over recording and handing down accounts of political events and dynastic chronologies. Nonetheless detailed accounts of non-royal women are sometimes preserved particularly if they are involved in innovative and significant political events. Such is the previously mentioned case of Fajimilola, a trader and reputed doctor from Egun, who earned her place as the first common woman to be given a political title during the reign of Akinsemoyin of Lagos in the 1760's. The Faji chieftaincy title, named after its first holder, was part of the Abagbon or war chiefs, the 4th group of Idejo or 'white cap' chiefs of Lagos. According to oral history Fajimilola became a wealthy slave trader. She was given land at Lagos at Isale Ako and later at another location.<sup>1</sup> The Faji title was not based on birth right and was independent of the Erelu title which co-existed with it. Indeed the Faji chieftaincy is one of the earliest examples of a merit based female title granted on the basis of personal economic achievement.

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<sup>1</sup> See, CMS, CA2087/44, White, 27th Aug 1854; Folami, *A History of Lagos, Nigeria*, p.131,2; S. Barnes, 'Ritual Power and Outside Knowledge', *JRA*, Vol.20, No.3, 1990, p.267, n.

The Nineteenth Century: A Voice For All?

In the 19th century many towns had female chieftaincy titles. Among the most prominent were; the *Lobun* in Ondo; the *Arise* in Ilesa; the *Erelu* in Ota and Ijebu; the *Iyalode* in Ibadan, Abeokuta, and Oyo; and in Lagos the *Erelu* and *Faji* titles. Most of these titles were hereditary and/or confined to royal women and had existed previously. The main 19th century advancement was the modernisation of the Oyo *Iyalode* title in the successor states of Ibadan, Ijaye, and Abeokuta.<sup>1</sup> Perceptions of the duties associated with the title vary somewhat, perhaps reflecting the scope of the position and indicating that the role may have varied between towns and over time.<sup>2</sup> However, the position was generally held by a woman who was considered to be the figurehead and representative in government of the market women in particular and all townswomen in general. These new polities generally did not maintain a legitimate monarchy as part of their political systems. Government lay in the hands of both civil and war chiefs. Access to chieftaincy titles for both sexes was based on achievement and people of any ethnic origin could vie for the positions. Although innovative in their competitive nature, contrary to popular belief, merit based titles for women were not entirely a 19th century creation: both the *Eyelobinrin*

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<sup>1</sup> See, B. Awe, 'The *Iyalode* in the Traditional Yoruba Political System', in A. Schlegel (ed), *Sexual Stratification*, 1977.

<sup>2</sup> Some of the perceptions of what the title meant are 'mother of the town' (A. Hinderer, *Seventeen Years*, p.110); 'Queen of the ladies' (Johnson, *The History*, p.77); 'mistress of the street' (A.B. Ellis, *The Yoruba Speaking Peoples...*, p.166; 'mother in charge of external affairs' (B. Awe, 'The *Iyalode...*', op.cit, p.145). Nonetheless the word translates as 'mother of the market' (S. Barnes, *The Politics of Support and Protection*, p.10).

title of Akure,<sup>1</sup> dating from around the first half of the 16th century, and the Faji chieftaincy in Lagos which was initiated in the 1760's, among others were not restricted by ethnic or social status.<sup>2</sup> A further development in women's access to political positions was initiated at New Oyo where, in the early 19th century, the Alafin's centralisation process brought many more slave women into positions formerly held by royal women, while the palace hierarchy was further elaborated by the creation of many more functionary and ritual roles also filled by slave women.

However, holding a title was not always an avenue to participation in the legislative and administrative processes of government. In many cases women's potential political power was restricted and tempered both by inherent weaknesses in their positions and limitations imposed by the dominantly male authorities which affected not only women with titles but the rest of the female population also. In particular, as discussed previously, many town authorities used male-dominated secret cults to impose curfews on those sections of society that were deemed subordinate and/or insubordinate (namely women, children, slaves and certain ethnic groups). Such curfews were also imposed whenever important political and judicial affairs were discussed and/or administered. On one level the evidence seems to challenge

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<sup>1</sup> Simi Afonja, 'Women, Power and Authority in Traditional Yoruba Society', in Dube, Leacock and Ardener (eds), *Visibility and Power*, (OUP, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> T. Folami, *A History of Lagos, Nigeria*, p.131.

Samuel Johnson's oft-quoted assertion that the Iyalode had a voice in the council of the chiefs through which "the women of the town can make their voices heard in municipal and other affairs".<sup>1</sup> However, on another level the position of Iyalode as spokesperson for her townswomen may have been developed in the south-western towns as a direct consequence of the fact that the majority of women were undergoing increasing exclusion from participation in political affairs due to the increasing restrictions imposed by the male-dominated political cults.

Moreover, as Simi Afonja has pointed out, previous studies have tended to draw too many comparisons between the Iyalode (and other 'open' titles) and the elite Erelu, Lobun and Arise titles which were in fact very different both in nature and scope. As outlined below, in militaristic and commercially expanding towns the Iyalode ultimately exercised more influence on and input into political and social affairs than her royal sisters.

Oyo.

Following earlier constitutional and civil conflict in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, legislative and executive power was consolidated within the palace at New Oyo, weakening the position of the civil and provincial chiefs. From the establishment of New Oyo in 1836 the development of women's representation and activity within the palace system indicates a heightened profile for females.<sup>2</sup> Although female *ilari* (palace

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<sup>1</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit.*, p.77.

<sup>2</sup> S.O. Babayemi, *Topics on Oyo History*, 1991; O.O Bamigboye, *Women in*  
(continued...)



slaves) held a high profile within the palace at Oyo-Ile<sup>1</sup> further transfers of duty from royal women and civil female chiefs to *ilari* heightened their presence in the capital. For example the Oyo Iyalode lost some control of the King's market when a female palace official called the Eni-Oja was appointed as market head assisted by her two female attendants, the Olosi and the Aroja.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, situations like that which occurred in the late 18th century whereby Alafin Abiodun posted one of his wives and her friend in Gudugbu as his political representatives and tribute collectors were not repeated and loyal allies or *ilari* were used as *ajele* (resident political representative) instead.<sup>3</sup>

The only detailed written source describing the various female offices and their associated duties within the palace at New Oyo is Samuel Johnson's *The History of The Yorubas*.<sup>4</sup> Johnson gives details relating to high ranking female positions, female *ilari* and *ayaba* (King's 'wives'). Depending on their office, these women were in direct working contact with male *ilari* and eunuchs, palace and provincial officials, members of the royal family and in some instances the Alafin himself.<sup>5</sup> The *ayaba* had

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<sup>2</sup> (...continued)

Yoruba Palaces: Past and Present, paper presented at conference of the 37th Congress of Historical Society of Nigeria, Calabar, 1992.

<sup>1</sup> See, R. Law, *The Oyo Empire*, p.67-71; Clapperton witnesses two such palace slaves performing their duties in 1826, Clapperton, op.cit, p.52.

<sup>2</sup> S. Johnson, op.cit, p.66.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, pp.274-75. For *ajele* in Oyo see, R. Law, *The Oyo Empire*, pp.110-13.

<sup>4</sup> See, *ibid*, pp.63-67.

<sup>5</sup> Apparently women were initiated as *ilari* in equal numbers to the men and acted as 'mothers' to the male initiates which meant that they could guide and  
(continued...)

always been in a strategic position to assert influence over members of the royal family as in 1789, when several of the late Alafin Abiodun's wives successfully pressurised his nephew and successor Awole to eliminate Jankalawa, one of the late Alafin's political enemies.<sup>1</sup> This influence continued from c.1836 as in the mid-1870's when Adelu's principal wife Alayoayo, supported the Aremo in his bid to take his father's throne: according to Samuel Johnson she had all of the Alafin's treasures at her disposal, the village of Awe and half of Oyo serving her.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Governor Carter witnessed the key role that a certain elderly lady played in state proceedings when he met the Alafin at Oyo in 1893. Carter explained how she acted as a go-between, transmitting everything that was said to the Alafin and his responses via a eunuch.<sup>3</sup> Although Johnson describes the protocol and organisation of the Alafin in state he does not mention the use of a female go-between.<sup>4</sup> However, Babayemi explains that each eunuch and male political functionary had a personal 'mother' (who was an ayaba) through whom he approached the Alafin.<sup>5</sup> Clearly this was what Carter had witnessed.

The earth cult, Ogboni played an important part in government at New Oyo. Only one woman, the Obagunte, was

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<sup>5</sup> (...continued)

counsel them. See, S.O. Babayemi, *Topics on Oyo History*, 1991, pp.98-117.

<sup>1</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, pp.190-91.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, p.396.

<sup>3</sup> PP, Vol.64, No.1, Carter to Ripon, 11 Oct 1893.

<sup>4</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, pp.52-4.

<sup>5</sup> S.O. Babayemi, *Topics in Oyo History*, p.98.

permitted into the Ogboni chamber. The position of Obagunte was innovative at New Oyo since it is almost certain that the Ogboni did not exist in its excessively political form at Oyo-Ile.<sup>1</sup>

Johnson relates that the Obagunte was

"not regarded as having a very high position although she represents the king in the Ogboni house on ordinary occasions, her work being strictly connected with that fraternity. She enters the Ogboni chamber on all occasions and acts in the King's name, reporting to his majesty the events of each sitting. Whenever the king wishes to entertain the Ogboni she has to undertake that duty".<sup>2</sup>

Johnson's evidence indicates that the Obagunte was not a privy member of the Oyo Ogboni, but rather that she was merely a functionary whose title and duties, although associated with the Alafin, were not perceived as being as important as those of the male council members. As an extra insurance against possible disloyalty the Obagunte was selected from among the palace slaves or *ilari*.

Moreover, Leo Frobenius suggests a further, later change in the position of women within the Oyo Ogboni from the 19th to the early 20th century. He commented in 1910 that very old women were admitted as members of the Oyo Ogboni but that these women "were not real members in the days gone by", but officials appointed by the Ogboni council whose duties included "spying, eavesdropping and if called upon, handing the poisoned cup to the

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<sup>1</sup> L. Frobenius, *Voice of Africa*, Vol.I, pp.172-3 and J.A. Atanda, 'The Yoruba Ogboni Cult: Did it Exist at Old Oyo?', in *JHSN*, Vol.6, No.4, 1973.

<sup>2</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, p.66.

person destined".<sup>1</sup> Not only does the information supplied by Frobenius corroborate Johnson's earlier description of the relative political impotence of the Obagunte, but it strongly suggests that at some time in the late 19th or early 20th century select women were incorporated into the Oyo Ogboni as bona-fide council members. These changes may have been associated with the process of re-building and organisation of the political administration of the palace after the bombardment of the capital in 1895 by the British colonial forces under Captain Bower, during which time women once again served to bolster the Alafin's position.<sup>2</sup>

Palace women used the scope and privileges associated with their positions to secure authority and influence over others. The Lander brothers provide a rare early account of a woman who attempted to use her wealth indirectly to manipulate the outcome of a political decision in her favour: After the death of the Governor of Ijanna in 1830 (then subject to Oyo), one of his wives refused to comply with her customary obligation to commit honourary suicide and be buried with her husband,

"It is understood that she has bribed a few of the most opulent and influential inhabitants of Jenna [Ijanna/Iganna] with large sums of money, to induce them to overlook her dereliction from the path of duty, and that by their representations she has obtained the tacit consent of the King of Katunga [Old Oyo] to live out the full term of her natural life".

However, she eventually died as "the people for many miles round... have risen to enforce the laws of the country against

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<sup>1</sup> L. Frobenius, *op.cit*, Vol.I, p.173.

<sup>2</sup> S.O. Babayemi, *Topics in Oyo History*, pp.117-19.

her.<sup>1</sup> Bribery and patronage were not specifically female strategies: In 1830/31 the Aremo Adewusi of Oyo also unsuccessfully attempted to avert the course of custom by bribing many chiefs to support him in his decision not to commit honourary suicide when his father the Alafin Majotu died.<sup>2</sup>

In particular, palace women were granted much envied privileges over both non-palace women and men. For example, the Eni-Oja enjoyed considerable perks from her position as market head.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, as mentioned previously, in 1830 in South-Western Yorubaland, the Lander brothers commented on a party of around one hundred ayaba staying in their lodgings. As wives of the Alafin the ladies paid no customs or toll-pike duties on their trade goods and had to be accommodated and fed by the authorities in each town they passed through.<sup>4</sup> The goods carried by royal wives were often the most expensive and sought-after trade items, in this case natron, valuable cloths, salt, beads and other European goods: the customs dues on the items would otherwise have been high. Critically however, as both Clapperton and Richard Lander noted in the 1820's, the profits made by the ayaba were handed over to the Alafin.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the ayaba's labour,

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<sup>1</sup> J. & R. Lander, in R. Hallet (ed), *The Niger Journals of John and Richard Lander*, p.64.

<sup>2</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, p.216, for a similar incident see pp.397-98.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, p.66.

<sup>4</sup> R & J. Lander, in Hallet (ed), p.71.

<sup>5</sup> Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition*, p.21; R. Lander, *Records of Captain Clapperton's Last Expedition*, p.197.

income and spending were controlled in order to minimise outlay and maximise the Alafin's revenue.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, although the ayaba did not make any profit from the official sale of goods, they could do so by selling their own wares.

Similarly one must exercise caution in assuming that palace women gained significant real political power by virtue of their titles. In particular, the increased use of female functionaries within the palace reflects a strategic move on the part of the male royal authorities to appoint both women and slaves of both sexes in many positions as a device to ensure a loyal and submissive staff surrounding the Alafin. In this sense, women were used because of their perceived powerlessness.

#### **The Ancient Settlements.**

As established above, Ondo, Ijebu, Ijesa and Ife had a similar history of female rule and/or foundation by women and each maintained a prominent role for royal women in their polity. Although the primary sources consulted did contain fragments of information regarding royal women there were few references to or accounts of the female titles and their title-holders in the 19th century. Therefore the following section is necessarily based largely on secondary sources which were in turn based largely on oral data.

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<sup>1</sup> S.O. Babayemi points out that ayaba were instrumental in gathering revenue and food for the upkeep of the palace., Babayemi, op.cit, pp.116-117.

Ondo.

With respect to Ondo, the paramount female chief was called the Lobun and was elected from within the royal lineage. Nina Mba, referring to the work of Ulli Beier, suggested that the Lobun chieftaincy title created in Ondo was introduced to compensate Ondo women for the disappearance of female Oba since the reign of Pupupu; however, the evidence does not support this view.<sup>1</sup> In the first place the Lobun was appointed from within royal ranks and the position was not open to common women, therefore it is problematic to argue that the title compensated Ondo women in general. Rather, the title was developed or created to specifically compensate royal women since it was they who had lost out. The development of an all-female council of chiefs in Ondo that had some access to the male council has been linked with the continuation of ancient Ondo practices maintaining a high female representation and involvement in government.<sup>2</sup> On a more practical level Robert Smith has suggested that the high profile of women in Ondo politics may simply have derived from the Ondo system of bilateral descent.<sup>3</sup> The Lobun was invested with considerable status. She was instrumental in the installation of a new Osemawe<sup>4</sup> and dominated, both in rank and executive power, the female council of chiefs which stood counterpart to the male council.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> N. Mba, *op.cit*, p.11,12.

<sup>2</sup> R. Smith, *Kingdoms of The Yoruba*, p.53.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, p.53,95.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, pp.74-5.

<sup>5</sup> B. Awe, *op.cit*, p.154.

(continued...)

However, the Lobun's real power must not be overestimated. In practice her potential influence was seriously circumscribed by the male chiefs. In the first instance, the Lobun was not elected by the female council but by the male.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, in one vital sense the office of Lobun was open to their control and manipulation. The male chiefs were more likely to appoint a woman whom they considered would not pose a potential threat to either their own position or to the smooth-running of the political system. Furthermore, the Lobun was required to observe a number of taboos. The most restrictive of these placed the Lobun under an almost permanent curfew indoors and forbade her to farm.<sup>2</sup> It is significant that the Lobun's mobility was restricted and she could not engage in farming at a time when female chiefs in other towns owned extensive farms and travelled freely around Yorubaland enabling them to both accumulate wealth and use it to wield political influence. Overall then the dominant male authorities effectively circumscribed the Lobun's power for although the Lobun could adopt various methods to display her dissatisfaction or opposition to government policies,<sup>3</sup> it is significant, as Awe states, that there is hardly any historical record of the Lobun leading opposition against the Ondo authorities.<sup>4</sup> Of course this could equally reflect parallel

<sup>5</sup>(...continued)

<sup>1</sup> N. Mba, op.cit, p.11.

<sup>2</sup> See, T. Falola, *The Place of Women in Pre-colonial Yoruba Economy*, p.140; Mba, *ibid*, p.12.

<sup>3</sup> She could refuse to carry out the ceremonial and ritual duties expected of her, notably, since she alone was charged with ordaining a new Osemawe to office, in theory, she could obstruct his installation.

<sup>4</sup> B. Awe, op.cit, p.155.

(continued...)



interests and agendas and/or successful negotiation between the Lobun and her male counterparts.

### Ijebu.

Among the Ijebu, mid-19th century political developments resulted in a loss of executive power for the Awujale, although he did still retain a strong symbolic power. The secret Osugbo cult elders and the Ipampas (elders in charge of commerce) gained the upper hand in the legislation and administration of government, thus bolstering their political power.<sup>1</sup> As a titled chief it is asserted that the Ijebu Erelu benefitted from this altered balance of power, participating in government affairs through the council of chiefs, the Osugbo.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the Rev. James Johnson met three or four female elders of the Iperu Osugbo in 1892.<sup>3</sup> However, the Osugbo maintained an elite membership based on social status: slaves were excluded as were all other non-Ijebu by birth.<sup>4</sup> Therefore the Erelu title was not open to non-Ijebu women, as the Iyalode title was open to other ethnic groups in Abeokuta and Ibadan.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, all women were

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<sup>4</sup>(...continued)

<sup>1</sup> E.A. Ayandele, *The Ijebu of Yorubaland, 1850-1950*, (Heinemann Educational Books, Nigeria, 1992), p.6. As among the Egba, each Ijebu town had its own Osugbo council (WMSA, H.J. Ellis, Sagamu, Ijebu-Remo, 8th Nov 1893. Ellis writes that each of the 11 towns in Sagamu has its own Osugbo big men).

<sup>2</sup> B. Awe, 'The Iyalode..', p.153.

<sup>3</sup> Rev. J. Johnson and H.J. Ellis, *Two Missionary Visits to Ijebu Country, 1892*, (Ibadan, 1974), pp.17-18.

<sup>4</sup> CMS, CA2061/63, King, Ofin, 18th and 19th Aug 1858.

<sup>5</sup> The Ibadan Iyalode Efunsetan was an Egba.

targeted by the Osugbo executive, the Eluku, and had to remain indoors under a strict curfew when political debate took place as James Johnson's account of a public meeting in 1892 at Ogeru suggests.<sup>1</sup> It is not surprising then that in contrast to the Ibadan Iyalode, as Awe again notes, there are no recorded instances of the Ijebu Erelu having opposed the government.<sup>2</sup>

### Ijesa.

Ilesa oral traditions maintain that the Arise title took its name from the first woman to hold the position. The woman apparently devised a military strategy that helped the Ijesa defeat their Nupe invaders and her contribution to the town's success in war was recognised with the creation of the title. However, the position was always filled by the Oba's principal wife.<sup>3</sup> The Arise had a similar role to that of the Lobun. One colonial official noted in 1898 that in Ilesa the leather trousers worn as regalia by the king belonged to the Arise, she alone decided which of the chiefs would become the new King, her decision was indisputable and further that "she is accordingly much befriended by all the different chiefs".<sup>4</sup> Clearly, the Arise held considerable potential power. This situation seems to have been adopted in Ipetu-Ijesa, however the female chief there was

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<sup>1</sup> James Johnson (& Rev Ellis), *op.cit*, p.31.

<sup>2</sup> B. Awe, *op.cit*, p.153.

<sup>3</sup> B. Awe, *The Iyalode in the Traditional Yoruba Political System*, pp.154-157.

<sup>4</sup> PRO, C0879/52/550, No.314, Gov McCallum to Chamberlain, 1898.

called the Esemue.<sup>1</sup>

Ife.

Finally, Mba contends that Ife adopted the Iyalode title from Oyo. Until then, the main women in charge of the market were titled the Ojumu and Yeyeloja.<sup>2</sup> However, the evidence suggests that the title may have been developed under the influence of the Ibadan version; Ife had been subject to Ibadan's power between 1855 and the 1880's and the first Iyalode, Molomo, was not appointed until 1880 by the Oni-elect Derin Ologbenla.<sup>3</sup>

### Abeokuta and Ibadan: A New Order?

Abeokuta.

Abeokuta did not have a town-wide ruler, each quarter maintained its own Oba, however, in 1854, the position of Alake, the leading Oba, was revived.<sup>4</sup> Each of the town-quarters was also ruled by its own Ogboni council and an association of trade chiefs named the Parakoyi.<sup>5</sup> The Ologun (war chiefs) also

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<sup>1</sup> J.O. Ogunjulugbe, *The History of Ipetu-Ijesa*, (Ibadan University Press, 1993), pp.27-32. The Esemue (Oba Obinrin or female King) was head of all women chiefs and was (is) involved in appointing a new Oba.

<sup>2</sup> S. Afonja, 'Women, Power and Authority', op.cit, p.147.

<sup>3</sup> R. Smith, *Kingdoms*, p.206; S. Afonja, *ibid*, p.144.

<sup>4</sup> WMMSA, Thomas Champness, Abeokuta, 5th Dec 1861. Champness considered that each quarter in Abeokuta "has its own rulers and though residing in Abeokuta, manage their own affairs without much interference on the part of the king.."; Also see, R. Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, p.183. Fadipe relates that in later years in some states all the principal associations were represented on the Ogboni, such as hunters, traders and even the women's guild. N.A. Fadipe, *The Sociology of the Yoruba*, pp.207-8.

<sup>5</sup> See, A. Pallinder-Law, *Government in Abeokuta 1830-1914: with Special Reference to the Egba United Government, 1898-1914*, Ph.D. Thesis, Goteborg University, 1973.

exercised considerable power and were usually elder members of both the Ogboni and Parakoyi. Essentially the Ogboni was a politico-religious secret society based on earth worship which the Egba possibly brought with them from Ile-Ife.<sup>1</sup> The council was the political and judicial seat of power among the Egba; however, they exercised their decisions through the male-dominated secret societies/cults of Oro and Elukun.<sup>2</sup>

Many 19th century observers considered the Egba Ogboni to be a male-dominated society.<sup>3</sup> However, there is evidence to suggest that this was not always the case and that membership basis varied over the 19th century in Abeokuta. In the early 1860's Robert Campbell explicitly stated that Ogboni membership was open to all men, women and children except slaves.<sup>4</sup> This indicates that wider membership eligibility was based on status and not on sex. This otherwise solitary assertion is supported by the opinion of various witnesses who considered the higher members of the Ogboni to be a social elite, and as such concerned with maintaining a desired social status within their ranks and among their general numbers.<sup>5</sup> In theory then, women of freeborn

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<sup>1</sup> S.O. Biobaku, *The Egba and their Neighbours*, p.4; J. Ajayi, *The Christian Missions in Nigeria*, p.110.

<sup>2</sup> WMMS, Bickersteth, Abeokuta 1856; Fadipe, *op.cit*, p.245.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Bowen, *op.cit*, pp.318-9; W. Clarke, *op.cit*, p.258; PRO, CO879/27/345, No.16A, Moloney to Holland, 1887. All of the above sources liken the Ogboni to a free-mason's institution clearly indicating that they perceive it as male-dominated.

<sup>4</sup> R. Campbell, *A Pilgrimage...*, p.41.

<sup>5</sup> PP, Vol.6, Report from the Select Committee on the African Slave Trade, evidence of Rev. Henry Townsend, 1849, p.61 states, "they always endeavour to get  
(continued...)

status were admitted to the general level of the Ogboni whilst both slave men and women were excluded. Moreover, one or two select women (usually post-menopausal) called Erelu were admitted into the Ogboni council of chiefs. Thus the evidence would seem to be at odds with the established wisdom that all women were excluded from participating in the society, except at council level. However evidence relating to the actual day-to-day functioning of the Ogboni reveals possible explanations as to why this 'myth' of female exclusion may have prevailed. Firstly, it seems that many of the people who wrote about the Ogboni in the 19th century did not make it clear whether they were referring to the Ogboni council as opposed to the lower and more widespread membership level. Secondly, and more importantly, further evidence relating to how the Egba administered political and judicial decisions, in particular using Oro and/or Elukun, reveals how, in practice, Ogboni membership was not a guarantee of representation or participation in political matters for women.

In particular, as discussed at various points earlier, Oro was used by the Ogboni to impose curfews on pre-determined sections of society when they held public political meetings, administered judicial decisions, wished to declare a state of emergency or required public order.<sup>1</sup> These curfews were

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<sup>5</sup> (...continued)

persons of standing into this system of theirs, which they call 'Oboni' (sic)"; W. Clarke, *op.cit*, p.258, states, "judging from my knowledge of the membership, I should think it rather an aristocratic institution consisting for the most part of men of worth and influence".

<sup>1</sup> R. Campbell, *op.cit*, p.77-8.

maintained by a strict penalty of death on anyone who was discovered breaking the law. As early as 1849 the Rev Henry Townsend made this revealing statement about a public assembly he attended in Abeokuta which was called by the Ogboni to pass a law on kidnapping among the Egba:

"there was a vast assembly of people, not merely the chiefs, not merely the Oboni [sic] people, but all persons whatsoever, except females, who expressed their approbation or otherwise at the various speeches made by the chiefs".<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, women were absent from the meeting. Captain Jones reported a similar exclusion of women from public debate when he described the mass meetings held by the Egba to decide upon military affairs. Moreover, he explicitly noted the use of Oro to impose the curfew on women.<sup>2</sup> In many other recorded instances in which political or judicial matters were discussed and/or implemented in Abeokuta women were driven indoors, while in others, youths and young children were also targeted.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, Oro curfews applied to all women irrespective of rank or title. Indeed, the rule was so strictly upheld that when in 1845 one of wives of Abeokuta's founding father, Seriki Sodeke, broke an Oro curfew, even she was not spared.<sup>4</sup> Therefore even the Iyalode, other high ranking women and possibly female members of the

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<sup>1</sup> PP, Vol.6, Report of the Select Committee, H. Townsend, 1849, p.61.

<sup>2</sup> PP, Vol.47, No.32, Captain A. Jones, Report on the Capabilities of the Abeokutan Army, 1861; Also reproduced in Ajayi and Smith, Yoruba Warfare, pp.132-3.

<sup>3</sup> For examples of the Ogboni using Oro to exact curfews while administering justice see, CMS, CA2061/54, King, 22nd Oct 1854; CA2061/56, King, 22nd May 1855; CA2061/62, 13th June 1857.

<sup>4</sup> CMS, CA2067/5, Marsh, Abeokuta, 15th June 1845 and CA2067/2, Marsh, 24th June 1845.

higher council could not participate directly in public debates administered by the Ogboni. Thus it can be seen that female membership at any level of the Ogboni was merely a token gesture on the part of the male-dominated council since, in practice, Oro was always used to exclude all women from participating publicly in political affairs.

However, certain women were able to participate in political and military affairs in Abeokuta despite the limitations. Most prominent among them was the Iyalode. Possibly the most well-known of the 19th century Iyalode was Madame Efunroye Tinubu, Iyalode of Abeokuta. She perhaps best epitomises what could be achieved by any woman holding the title during the century. A combination of intelligence, confidence and wealth enabled her to become one of the major actors in coastal politics in the second half of the 19th century.<sup>1</sup> Madame Tinubu was installed as Iyalode of Abeokuta in 1864, in recognition of her contribution to the town's defense during the second Dahomian invasion that year. She assumed office at a time when the political and economic environment proved particularly conducive to her influence. However, Tinubu had been a major political actor in Abeokuta, Lagos and Badagri for many years prior to her appointment as Iyalode. The early political structure in these towns was of a more fluid and factional nature than it was elsewhere. Factionalism rendered the political systems more open

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<sup>1</sup> See, O. Yemitan, *Madame Tinubu: Merchant and Kingmaker*, 1987; S.O. Biobaku, 'Madame Tinubu' in *Eminent Nigerians of the Nineteenth Century*, 1960. The missionary King thought her "a woman of acute judgement", CMS, CA2061/50, King, 17th Aug 1853.

to manipulation with the result that Madame Tinubu was in a better position than her counterparts elsewhere to actively participate in achieving the political environment she desired.<sup>1</sup>

She achieved her aims largely through using her immense wealth<sup>2</sup> to both buy political and social favour to support financially male political figures who could exercise legitimate power on her behalf or in her interests and eliminate or weaken her enemies. In the early 1850's she backed Akintoye as a contender for the Obaship of Lagos. Subsequently accused of planning to depose the Oba Dosumu and assassinate the British Consul at Lagos, Tinubu was expelled from the coastal town in 1856 and re-settled at Abeokuta.<sup>3</sup> While there she continued to consolidate and expand her social, political and economic connections. Many people looked upon her as an influential mediator and proponent of social justice; a position which was promoted not only by her family and supporters but by herself.<sup>4</sup> Again, in 1870 she backed and lead an unsuccessful faction of male chiefs attempting to have Oyekan installed as Alake of

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<sup>1</sup> See, S. Barnes, *The Politics of Support* and C. Sorensen, *The Badagri Civil War 1851-54*, both being papers presented at ASUK Biennial conference at Stirling University, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2029/8, Cole, Abeokuta, 2nd July 1871; CA2056/52, J. Johnson, 1878; M. Delaney, *op.cit.*, 1859/60, p.79.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2061/50, King, 17th Aug 1853; PP, Vol.43, 1857, Class B, Enclosures No.5,16. For first-hand accounts of some of Tinubu's political manoeuvres at Lagos see, PRO, FO84/950, No.39, Campbell to Clarendon, Lagos 1854; PP, Vol 41, No.1, Enclosures, Fraser to Malmesbury, 20th Feb 1853.

<sup>4</sup> See CMS, CA2029/12, Cole, 26th Jan 1873 and CA2075/42, Olubi, Annual letter, 26th Nov 1874 for examples.



Abeokuta.<sup>1</sup> Not dissuaded, she continued to support Oyekan until he was appointed Alake in 1879.<sup>2</sup>

In a similar fashion other wealthy Egba women used their money and material goods to secure titles and thus influence. In 1878/9 the Egba Saro<sup>3</sup>, Betsy Desola bought the title of 'Iyalode of the Parakoyi'. It is unclear exactly when the Ake Parakoyi established an Iyalode title or exactly how much influence the title conferred in the association of trade chiefs. Nonetheless, James Johnson bitterly reported in 1879 that Betsy,

"would not spend her money for the progress and advancement of Christ's own religion, but gladly took £1.10s., sheep, kola nuts, rum, and other necessaries, to receive the title 'Iyalode'. She forgot all that had been preached and explained to her these twenty and odd years. She is now preparing against the day that 'Olori' and 'Asipa',<sup>4</sup> with their followers, will visit her. No doubt the expenses on that day will amount to £2.10s. to £3 to show her new dignity".<sup>5</sup>

Many more women in Abeokuta found other ways to challenge the patriarchal order and make their voice heard and influence the political course of events as will be discussed in the forthcoming section on Women and War.

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<sup>1</sup> PRO, CO147/18, No.99, Chiefs and Elders of Abeokuta to Glover, 1870; PRO, CO147/115, Enc, Letter from chiefs and elders of Abeokuta to Glover, 1871.

<sup>2</sup> A.K. Ajisafe, *History of Abeokuta*, (1924), pp.138-39.

<sup>3</sup> Saro was a name used to denote the Sierra Leonian repatriates.

<sup>4</sup> 'Olori' was a trade chief's title and 'Asipa' was a war chief's title adopted from Oyo.

<sup>5</sup> *The African Times*, 1st Mar 1879, p.28, in letter to editor titled 'The Abominable Parakoyi of Abeokuta' dated 1st Jan 1879, Abeokuta; CMS, CA2056/28, J. Johnson, 2nd Aug 1879.

Ibadan.

Due to the political dominance of the war chiefs in Ibadan the Ogboni did not attain the political power it did among the Egba and Ijebu. Indeed, as Henry Higgins reported in 1887, it was not concerned with maintaining an elite membership and was mainly confined to administering judicial decisions and criminal justice.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, the Iyalode participated in a political council in the early 20th century in Ibadan. Fadipe reports that in 1912 "in the absence of the Bale, the head of the state, owing to indisposition", the Iyalode "presided... at a mass meeting".<sup>2</sup> It is not clear whether the Iyalode undertook the Bale's full responsibilities on this occasion or if the role was restricted. The Iyalode title was first used among the successor states when it was conferred upon Iyaola sometime prior to the mid-1850's. Anna Hinderer, who became close to Iyaola, perceived the position to be one of a mediator or adjudicator. In 1854, upon discovering the existence of the title in Ibadan, Anna Hinderer enthused,

"These Yoruba people have some very nice arrangements about their form of government. I found out that there was an Iyalode or mother of the town, to whom all the women's palavers (disputes) are brought before they are taken to the King. She is, in fact, a sort of Queen, a person of much influence and looked up to with respect".<sup>3</sup>

In the competitive political arena in Ibadan, Iyaola gained her

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<sup>1</sup> PP, Vol.63, No.6, Enc.2, Part 1 of Report by H. Higgins and O. Smith, 10th Feb 1887, p.33, Ibadan; FO881/5622X, Precis of Info on Lagos and Neighbouring tribes, Cptn R.E. Darwin, Feb 1888, p.58. For examples of Ogboni administering justice see, CMS, CA2075/22, Olubi, 29th Aug 1868 and CA2075/27, Olubi, 23rd July 1872 (At the Ogunpa market he sees a man tied to a post who had been beheaded by the Ogboni's for murdering his aunt).

<sup>2</sup> N.A. Fadipe, *The Sociology of the Yoruba*, pp.207-8.

<sup>3</sup> A. Hinderer, *Seventeen Years*, pp.110-111.

title on merit; however, she gained that merit by her success in business and the use of her resources to fund the town's war efforts and back powerful warriors. Her position thus remained precarious unless she could maintain her wealth and use it to foster influential social and political contacts. This fact was painfully evident when, in the late 1860's (possibly later), she was deposed and succeeded in the post by Madame Efunsetan following some business misfortunes which diminished her wealth.<sup>1</sup>

Madame Efunsetan became the most famous Ibadan Iyalode due to her economic success and her participation in Ibadan affairs. Like Tinubu and Iyaola, Efunsetan used her wealth to financially back male power-brokers and military chiefs so that they would represent her interests at a higher level. However, Efunsetan became so influential among the male chiefs that by 1874 she was the principal force backing a faction opposed to the Are-Ona-Kakanfo, Latosisa, and his aggressive, trade-disrupting foreign policy. Efunsetan felt powerful enough to publicly protest to the Are, showing disregard for her official duty as Iyalode by refusing to publicly support him in his Ado war campaign.<sup>2</sup> Shortly afterwards, in May 1874, she was deposed on the pretext that "She was accused of being too severe with her slaves, and

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<sup>1</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, p.392. Some traditions hold that Efunsetan was given her title by Basorun Ogunmola in 1867 and some by Are Latosisa in 1872 (B. Awe, *Efunsetan Aniwura: Owner of Gold*, p.66). The former seems more likely since she was assassinated in 1874. Two years seems too short a time period for her to have made such an impact on Ibadan history.

<sup>2</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, p.391.

many acts of inhumanity were said to be perpetuated by her".<sup>1</sup> Her title was transferred to her Otun (right-hand officer) and predecessor, Iyaola. Under Latosisa's orders and within two months Efunsetan was assassinated.<sup>2</sup> Iyaola held on to her title for a considerable time, at least until 1886 when Henry Higgins was introduced to her at Ibadan shortly before her death. On this occasion she was still fulfilling her duties as Iyalode, greeting him on behalf of the townswomen of Ibadan.<sup>3</sup>

Various other Iyalode titles developed at Ibadan, possibly in a similar manner to the adoption of the title by the Parakoyi in Abeokuta. Perhaps the most fleeting was that which designated Anna Hinderer as the Iyalode Fun-fun (White Iyalode) in 1854.<sup>4</sup> Iyalode Iyaola called Anna this, perhaps in an attempt to establish a common bond between them. This is a good example of one of the strategies that Iyaola would have employed to secure influential contacts. In 1880 Olubi mentions the existence and, interestingly, the assassination of two women named Aiyejenku and Iyapo, who were apparently also Iyalode in Ibadan, although the account does not clarify whether the women were Iyalode in particular associations or on a town-wide basis. Certainly there

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2058/2, S. Johnson, 1st May 1874. It was said that Efunsetan was "very rich, owning some 2,000 slaves in her farms alone exclusive of those at home". Samuel Johnson, *op.cit*, p.393.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2058/2, S. Johnson, 1st May 1874 and 30th June 1874; CA2058/3, 6th July 1874. Also see, B. Awe, *Owner of Gold*, p.70. Latosisa and some Egba chiefs were implicated in her murder.

<sup>3</sup> PP, Vol 63, No.6, Enc.2, Part 1 of report by H. Higgins and O. Smith, 10th Feb 1887, p.34 (Report entry date 1st Sept 1886).

<sup>4</sup> A. Hinderer, *Seventeen Years*, pp.110-111.

is little record in other sources of their names in relation to the town-wide title.<sup>1</sup> In Ibadan's vassal towns too, Iyalode existed and exerted influence. In Modakeke, which had a resident Ibadan Ajele, the Iyalode's son was the Seriki.<sup>2</sup> At Eruwa in 1893, Gilbert Carter met the Iyalode or "head woman of the town" who had organised a clean-up of the town for his arrival.<sup>3</sup> The last Ibadan Iyalode of the 19th century was Lanlatu who played a prominent role in the negotiations between the Ibadan chiefs and the British colonial officers to end the stalemate of the Yoruba wars and to disband the war-camps at the end of the century.<sup>4</sup>

However it is perhaps evidence of the working limitations of the Iyalode's position in Ibadan that although she was obliged to represent the interests of women, she found that this could only be achieved in practice through the male chiefs. Ultimately, the male chiefs outnumbered her in council and they were under no obligation to satisfy women's interests unless they found that they were complementary to their own or it proved expedient to do so. In addition it would be naive to assume that the Iyalode always acted primarily as a representative of the townswomen. The

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, G3A2/0/1880-81, Olubi, half year to 1880, 1st June 1880.

<sup>2</sup> PP, Vol.63, No.8, Enc, 2nd part of Report by H. Higgins and O. Smith, p.74, 20th June 1887.

<sup>3</sup> PP, Vol.64, Colonies Nigeria, Sir Gilbert Carter, Lagos Interior Expedition p.9, 1893.

<sup>4</sup> In 1893 she is named as a titled chief of Ibadan and is a participant and a witness to the agreement signed between the Ibadan authorities and Acting Gov. George Denton to end the war. See, S. Johnson, *The History*, p.637,656.

evidence suggests that Efunsetan acted in her own interests, as an independent, influential business-person and titled chief, who found her resources continually stretched and valuable trade disrupted by the policies of the Are's faction. In this instance she was not alone in her opinion and she found allies from among the male chiefs. However, be that as it may, the majority of traders in Ibadan society were female and in this sense the women of Ibadan may have found little problem in relating to the opinions and struggles of their Iyalode.

Other examples.

Among the Egbado people in the south-west each town was governed by an Ogboni council in much the same way as among the Egba, however, the executive politico-religious cult was called Oloru and not Oro. The Oro cult was also adopted from the Egba form, but was less powerful among the Egbado than Oloru.<sup>1</sup> The Rev White who was stationed at Ota for many years gave this description of the Oloru society as it operated in 1870,

"the Oloru is believed to be a certain god who takes cognizance of the affairs of the town and interferes in punishing with death or banishment grievous offenders, but which in reality is a political party appointed by the authorities to put their sentence into execution, and in order to inspire the people with awe they make the women and the uninitiated part of the men believe that they are not mere men but some celestial being".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2087/49, White, Otta, 7th Nov 1855. Evidence indicates that an Oro-type masquerade was also used to impose curfews to maintain public order in Oyo-Ile, see H. Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition*, 1825, p.22.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, White, CA2087/76, 25th May 1870.

In theory the women of the Egbado town of Ota were politically represented by the Erelu, who was described as 'Queen of the Ladies' by the Rev White in 1865. At this time the Erelu was a wealthy, influential woman named Koroko.<sup>1</sup> However, like the Abeokuta Iyalode, the Erelu could not publicly participate in political debates or the administration of justice when Oloru (or Oro) upheld a curfew, such as in 1855 during political conflict between the quarter chiefs in Ota. On this occasion the Rev White relates how Oro was summoned to exclude all females while "the whole of the male inhabitants assembled to talk over the present matter".<sup>2</sup>

In the Egbado town of Ijanna, the previously mentioned wealthy woman named Abu was also very active in the political scene, not only in her own town but between states. Around 1860 Ijanna was subject to Ijaye. Abu had chosen to accept this and openly sought the favour of Ijaye's ruler, Kurunmi, giving him a regular tribute payment. Her political affiliation was not popular and in particular she made an enemy of an Ijanna chief named Okefo. Okefo enlisted the aid of the new Alafin of Oyo, Adelu, to try and put an end to the dispute between Abu and himself and regain his authority and pride. Abu refused to hand over either her property or allegiance to him and she was

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2087/68, White, 25th Sept 1865. Koroko was still the Erelu in 1870.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2087/49, White, 7th Dec 1855.

assassinated.<sup>1</sup> Even in death she continued to influence political events; Since she had died without any heirs, a bitter dispute developed between Kurunmi and Adelu over which of them held the rights to Abu's vast property. The struggle aggravated existing political tensions between the two until Ibadan (allied to Oyo) attacked Ijaye and destroyed it in 1861/2.<sup>2</sup> Abu provides another graphic example of the way in which wealthy women used their money to 'buy' political allegiance and influence in a system which otherwise restricted their political involvement.

In the coastal port of Lagos, as mentioned in the discussion of the pre-19th century, the positions of Erelu and the merit-based Faji chieftaincy originated in the late 18th century. However, by the 19th century Opu-Olu, a senior royal woman, became Erelu Kori during the reign of her brother Eshilokun and continued in that position when her nephew, Idewu reigned between 1833-5. As with her predecessors, the position conferred the duty to be 'Iya-Oba' (mother of the King), leader of the townswomen and the sole female member of the Lagos Ogboni.<sup>3</sup> Like Tinubu, her rival, Opu-Olu used her great wealth and social position to exploit the factional nature of Lagosian politics at this time. She backed both Eshilokun and his predecessor Kosoko in their bids for the throne. It is not clear whether the Faji chieftaincy

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2069/4, Meakin, letter to the secretary of CMS Oyo, 15th May 1860.

<sup>2</sup> PP, Vol.63, No.6, Enc.2, Part 1 of Report by H. Higgins and O. Smith, 10th feb 1887 (entry date in Report, 3rd Sept 1886), p.36; S. Johnson, op.cit, p.331.

<sup>3</sup> S. Barnes, *The Politics of Support*, p.3, n.1,2.



title was also occupied during this time. In his history of Lagos, T. Folami lists three Faji title holders, none of which seem to have been active in the 19th century. Folami suggests that the title remained vacant when the need for war chiefs diminished in times of relative peace; however, this explanation is dubious since wars were frequent throughout the 19th century. Likewise there is little information as to whether the Faji title-holder may have had equal access to the Ogboni and its affairs as the Erelu did.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, as in the earlier example of Oyo and many other Yoruba towns women could gain important positions within the political and social infrastructure in ritual roles. In particular, ritual power was another element that women could manipulate to secure a political voice. In 1889 Major Claude MacDonald arrived at Ilorin to negotiate for the Emir Alihu's signature on a treaty declaring peace with Ibadan, and remarked,

"An old woman who I had remarked on previous occasions as holding a prominent place at the meeting, and who always attended on the King... From subsequent enquiries discovered that she was the head fetish woman of the heathen armies of Borgu, which, many years before had been defeated by the Ilorins. She was taken prisoner on this occasion, and had ever afterwards been treated with the greatest respect by the Ilorins, and was considered even by the Mohammedan aristocracy as a great fetish woman, and held that position at court".<sup>2</sup>

Indeed the woman's power and fame seem to have been well known as early as 1850, before her capture by the Ilorin army.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> T. Folami, *op.cit*, p.132.

<sup>2</sup> PRO, CO879/33, Part 1, No.399. Major Mc Donald to Marquis of Salisbury, (No.4, Enc.1) Ilorin, 1889.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2049/100, Hinderer, Oct 1850. Hinderer gave this retrospective  
(continued...)

Mockler-Ferryman, who accompanied MacDonald, later produced a somewhat enhanced version of the 1889 meeting that nonetheless backs up MacDonald's account. Apparently the woman advised Alihu in no uncertain terms that if he signed the paper the, "white strangers will convey the writing to the accursed Ibadans, who will cut it up and eat it, which as thou knowest, will assuredly give them a power over the Ilorin kingdom, against which it will be impossible to fight..."<sup>1</sup> Clearly, the woman made full use of her reputation, position and perceived supernatural knowledge to influence the Emir and the assembly, or, indeed to shrewdly back him in his reluctance to sign the treaty, which remained unsigned.

Although some of these women are among the most well known women involved in Yoruba politics in the 19th century, many less recognised women have been uncovered in the sources. Evidence suggests Tinubu and Efunsetan were certainly only typical of many more successful and politically influential businesswomen of the day. As seen in Chapter III numerous references are made throughout the sources to rich and well-respected women, unfortunately, the information recorded in various cases is not

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<sup>3</sup> (...continued)

account of her exploits: "The Tapas and some other heathen towns about ten years ago made war against Ilorin, but were repulsed. A Tapa woman, a famous sorceress, whose brother was then killed by the Ilorins, and whose spirit of revenge seems still to be kindled, is said to be at the head of a great army of the same people making war upon Ilorin again this season. According to the latest accounts which I had about it from the chief here, they have already got up; their female general is so famous for her witchcraft that traders from the interior who know her, say, she was sure to conquer wherever she would go".

<sup>1</sup> Mockler-Ferryman, *Up the Niger: A Narrative of Major Claude MacDonald's Mission to the Niger and Benue Rivers (1889)*, 1892, pp.208-10.

as detailed or abundant as it is for example, in Tinubu's case. However, enough information is given to suggest that many more wealthy women enjoyed and exercised great influence and gained respect in their respective towns.

Overall it would appear that the individual, wealthy women wielded greater influence in towns such as Ibadan and Abeokuta, where titles were based on merit, power was more diffuse and traditional rulers held less executive power. Although the new systems were patriarchal, women's role in the new social order was being socially and politically recognised and encouraged. Much of the wealth that these women had was earned from trading in domestic slaves, weapons and 'legitimate' products: thus their ability to exert political influence to some extent derived from a purely new set of conditions in the era of abolition, 'legitimate' trade and militarism.

Significantly, the more meritocratic systems of Ibadan and Abeokuta offered status and influence to women by putting a new emphasis on the 'traditional' productive and supportive roles of women, reinforcing the ideal of Yoruba womanhood. Paradoxically, it was often the case that in many other ways the women who attained status in this system did not conform to other aspects of the ideal of womanhood. For example they lived largely independently of men and family, they were often childless and they consistently defied and challenged male authority. Moreover, in Lagos, Badagri and Abeokuta the factional nature of politics facilitated the influence of the Iyalode, Erelu and women in

general since they were presented with more options to back factional heads who might act on their behalf.

Nonetheless, the restrictive measures applied by the male dominated cults of Oro, Elukun and Oloru on behalf of the Ogboni and Osugbo societies in the Egba, Egbado and Ijebu areas clearly circumscribed the vast majority of women, (if not titled women also) from participating in political debate. Perhaps this contributed in some way to the development of women's high profile and political mobilisation through informal mechanisms. Barnes has stressed the context of the family and the marketplace and the religious sphere as a focus for women's economic mobilisation and political influence. Ritual and ceremonial titles and duties, such as those mentioned in relation to the Sango cult at Oyo and the Nupe priestess at Ilorin, also conferred some influence and privilege.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, as the following section will illuminate, the majority of women were active in many ways in shaping the character and history of the Yoruba Wars.

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<sup>1</sup> Barnes, 'The Politics of Support...', op.cit and 'Ritual, Power...', op.cit.

Women and War.

If the preceding sections have perhaps concentrated too heavily on the political position of titled and privileged women, this section will focus on a more widespread participation of women in 19th century politics, namely their contribution to the wars that persisted throughout Yorubaland during the period.<sup>1</sup> The Yoruba wars began with the destruction of Owu in c.1817 and the collapse of Old Oyo in the 1830s.<sup>2</sup> Many of the displaced people of Oyo dispersed south to resettle in both pre-existing and new towns, such as Ibadan (established c.1829), Abeokuta (c.1830) and New Oyo (c.1836). Abeokuta suffered an almost continuous threat of attack from Dahomey to the west from the 1850's to the 1870's: two main wars being fought in 1851 and 1864. Abeokuta was further embroiled in conflict with the British in 1865, with Ibadan, and with the Ijebu in 1892. Finally, Ibadan - the most militaristic state - was almost constantly at war, the main battles being in 1840 with the defeat of Ilorin at Osogbo, then between 1861-3 with Ijaye and from the late 1870's to 1892 with the Ekitiparapo coalition.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Funso Afolayan, 'Women and Warfare in Yorubaland During the Nineteenth Century'; T.M. Ilesanmi, 'The Yoruba World View on Women and Warfare', both in T. Falola & R. Law, (eds) *Warfare and Diplomacy in Pre-colonial Nigeria: Essays in Honour of Robert Smith*, 1992. Afolayan's historical study is both interesting and comprehensive and although it is perhaps too reliant on both secondary sources and Johnson's *The History of The Yoruba*. Nonetheless, most of her work seems to be backed up by the Colonial and missionary sources that I have consulted.

<sup>2</sup> On which see, J.A. Atanda, 'The Fall of the Old Oyo Empire: A Reconsideration of its Cause', in *JHSN*, Vol.V, No.4, June 1971; R. Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, Chapter 10, p.155, 1976 and R.C.C. Law, 'The Owu War in Yoruba History', in *JHSN*, Vol.VII, No.1, Dec 1973.

<sup>3</sup> J. Ajayi and R. Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century*.

Belligerent towns set up war-camps which became semi-permanent towns in which warriors, soldiers, slaves, women and children resided during the campaign period. Some of these camps existed for so long that they developed both the population and character of a regular town. Gerhard Rohlfs estimated in 1866/67 that the Oyo-Yoruba war-camp contained approximately 20,000 people, of which only a third seemed to be in military service.<sup>1</sup> Henry Higgins observed during his tour of the Ekitiparapo war-camps in 1887 that both the Ijebu and Ibadan camps had well established populations of men, women and children who had become such permanent residents that both monthly and daily markets were convened.<sup>2</sup> Similarly when Mockler-Ferryman and Major Claude MacDonald visited Ofa, the Ilorin war-camp, in 1889 it had been settled for around 12 years and was estimated to contain more civilians than fighting men. In particular, he noted the women busy weaving and grinding corn.<sup>3</sup>

Food, water and many other vital goods needed for the upkeep and efficiency of an army were predominantly produced and supplied by the female population. On this point the bulk of 19th century evidence contradicts N.A. Fadipe's later assertion that

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<sup>1</sup> Gerhard Rohlfs, *op.cit*, p.91.

<sup>2</sup> PP, Vol 63, Colonies, Africa, No.6, Enc.2, Part 1 of report by H. Higgins and O. Smith, 10th Feb 1887, p.26,27,44,46. Indeed, Ibadan and other northern traders came down to Oru once a month in caravans escorted by Ibadan troops to trade with the Ijebu, who were to all intents and purposes their enemy in war, PP, Vol.63, No.26, Enc.10, S. Johnson to Moloney, 21st May 1886.

<sup>3</sup> Mockler-Ferryman, *Up The Niger*, 1892 (1889), p.199 and p.204, n.2; PRO, CO879/33, M Ferryman to Major MacDonald, Ofa, 1889. Ferryman estimated a population of 7,000, of which 2-3,000 were soldiers and cavalry. The remainder were women and children who added to his overall impression that Ofa was like "a regular town".

there was no commissariat for Yoruba armies.<sup>1</sup> In his 1860 report on the organisation and capabilities of the Abeokuta army, Captain Jones stated clearly that women acted as the commissariat.<sup>2</sup> This was backed up by many eye witnesses during Abeokuta's many skirmishes and wars with Dahomey.<sup>3</sup> Women performed the same function in other towns such as Ijaye in the early 1860's,<sup>4</sup> while older men sometimes helped the women and girls maintain supplies.<sup>5</sup> In particular, some astute business-women made a profit out of the constant demand for food and other goods at the camps. Captain Jones's report highlights the acumen of the wives of the wealthier chiefs who traded in the camp markets, raising and lowering the price of particular produce in accordance with how scarce it was.<sup>6</sup> Samuel Johnson frequently acknowledged the great risks that women often endured while delivering vital provisions to their soldiers:<sup>7</sup> risks that he witnessed first hand when he reported in 1888 that "the Ilorins

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<sup>1</sup> N.A. Fadipe, *op.cit*, p.240.

<sup>2</sup> PP, Vol.47, No.32, Enc, Captain A. T. Jones, "Report to the Officer Commanding the 2nd West India Regiment, Sierra Leone", 1861; Also in Ajayi and Smith, *Yoruba Warfare*, p.134.

<sup>3</sup> Wesleyan Missionary Notices, 1864, Vol.XI p.117, Extract from Appendix to Iwe Irohin, 22nd Mar 1864, p.120; CA2/029/19, Cole, 3rd April 1876.

<sup>4</sup> R.H. Stone, *op.cit*, p.175.

<sup>5</sup> R. Smith, *Warfare and Diplomacy...*, p.43.

<sup>6</sup> PP, Vol.47, No.32, Enc, Captain A. T. Jones, "Report to the Officer Commanding the 2nd West India Regiment, Sierra Leone", 1861; Also in Ajayi and Smith, *Yoruba Warfare*, p.134.

<sup>7</sup> See, S. Johnson, *The History*, p.315. In his account of the 1851 war between Abeokuta and Dahomey he states "In the thick of the fight, with bullets flying right and left, the Egba women could be seen in the ranks of the fighting men with water, mashed eko (a cooling drink), refreshments and encouragements..". Also CMS, G3A20/1880-81, S. Johnson, Journal for quarter ending June 1880, entry 27th Feb 1880 (on the insecurity to life and property for the trading women using the Ofa-Modakeke route). Also, PRO, CO147/8, No.35, Enc.6, Melville Maxwell to Glover, Ibadan, 25th Mar 1865.

are hovering about in the fields around Inisa making it difficult for the women and unarmed men to get supplies to the famished troops".<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the spiritual needs of fighting men were also provided for by the many women who believed in various deities and offered, in return for a few cowries, to propitiate them in order to ensure the men's safety and victory.<sup>2</sup>

A view which has endured in oral traditions and has been widely accepted in later written works is that women dominated the trade in ammunition.<sup>3</sup> However, much of the 19th century evidence does not support this belief. A report on the laws and customs of the Yoruba produced at the end of the 19th century claims that "When the men are engaged in battle, the women supply them with ammunition".<sup>4</sup> Certainly, eye witness accounts testify that women brought ammunition to men in battle but the majority did not 'supply' in terms of actually buying arms and ammunition. The few that did so were rich, large scale traders, or had powerful connections such as: Madame Tinubu the Iyalode of Abeokuta, who bought for and supplied not only her own forces but controversially also those of Ijaye;<sup>5</sup> Madame Omosa of Ibadan, Basorun Ogunmola's daughter, who in 1884 was among the first to buy Snider rifles and cartridges at inflated prices from the

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<sup>1</sup> CO147/65, No.256, Enc, Correspondence on Interior Affairs, Rev. S. Johnson to Moloney, 1888.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2/077/11, 22nd March 1855.

<sup>3</sup> See, B. Awe, *op.cit*, p.67.

<sup>4</sup> A Report, *op.cit*, p.76.

<sup>5</sup> M. Delaney, *op.cit*, p.78; A.K. Ajisafe, *History of Abeokuta*, p.119; S.O. Biobaku, *Eminent Nigerians*, pp.37-38.



Ijebu at a time when money was scarce in Ibadan;<sup>1</sup> and Madame Efunsetan, the Iyalode of Ibadan who also had her own captains of war and war-boys.<sup>2</sup> Although more women must have been involved in the arms trade the sources are largely silent as to their existence and identity.

Rather, much evidence strongly indicates that it was men who dominated trade in war goods. In particular, Abeokuta was largely supplied by the male authorities at Lagos, both colonial and indigenous, as well as by Egba sympathizers from among the Sierra Leonian community.<sup>3</sup> Sierra Leonian men also sold arms to other forces depending on where their allegiances lay.<sup>4</sup> Many of the head war chiefs in other towns bought and oversaw their own supplies such as Balogun Ibikunle of Ibadan, whose *oriki*, or praise poem, asserts that in the 1850's he was "A stockist of bullets and gunpowder"<sup>5</sup> and Ayorinde, also of Ibadan, who supplied the bulk of the ammunition for his raids from Benin.<sup>6</sup> Ogunsigun, the Seriki of Itebu, sent his own aids to towns such

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<sup>1</sup> Apparently she procured a few for her nephew Kongi, who was head of the house. S. Johnson, *The History*, p.492.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, p.393.

<sup>3</sup> PP, Vol.90, No.61, Encl, Reduction of Lagos, Commodore Bruce to Secretary of Admiralty, 1st Nov 1851; CMS, CA2011/17, Letter dated 30th Jan 1855, Olowogbowo, Lagos, From Sierra Leonians and Emigrants to Dr. E.G. Irving for Alake and people of Abeokuta; PP, Vol.41, No.47, Campbell to Clarendon, 15th Feb 1855; PP, Vol.63, No.6, Glover to Newcastle, Enc.1, Basorun and elders of Abeokuta, 6th Nov 1863.

<sup>4</sup> CMS, CA2049/110, Hinderer, 31st Oct 1854.

<sup>5</sup> B. Awe, *Militarism and Economic Development...*, p.67. Johnson relates that Ibikunle went on to become one of three senior war chiefs in Ibadan in early 1860's, see Johnson, *A History*, p.373.

<sup>6</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, p.321-2; Benin was one of Ibadan's chief sources of supply. See, PP, Vol.63, Colonies: Nigeria, No.1, Enclosure 2, Moloney to Rowe, 12th May 1881.

as Epe and Ijebu-Igbo to procure powder and told Higgins in 1887 that he had spent so much money providing powder and guns that he was in debt for almost 2000 bags cowries.<sup>1</sup> Men also feature more prominently than women as middlemen in the arms trade such as Paseda of Ikorodu, who was alleged in 1865 to be a regular customer buying powder from the Lagosian men Talabi, Ojo-Oligun, Ajose and Kosoko of Lagos; Osi, the Balogun of Ikorodu, bought powder from Osodi, also of Lagos and may have further supplied Ogunmola of Ibadan, whom he maintained close relations with;<sup>2</sup> and finally, an Ijesa ex-slave named Gureje (whom Henry Higgins met at the Kiji-Mesi warcamp in 1887) was a middleman in the arms trade.<sup>3</sup>

The social implications of militarism, recurrent warfare and insecurity were complex: some changes being unprecedented. While the permanent nature of war-camps provided a degree of security and routine for those living in them, they affected the sexual and social composition, stability and way of life in many established towns. Settlements were often depleted of able-bodied men. In 1858 D.J. May noticed that there was "a great paucity of men" at Iwo but offered no explanation as to why this might be.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> PP, Vol.63, Parts 1 and 2 of Report by H. Higgins and O. Smith, p.53,75, 10th Feb and 20th June 1887.

<sup>2</sup> PP, Vol.63, No.18, Enc.6, Ikorodu Camp, Ogundipe to Glover, 31st Jan 1865; For Osi's friendship with Ogunmola see, PP, Vol.63, No.8, Encl.1, Gov. Rowe to Derby, Memo on War existing between Ibadan and interior Tribes, 1887.

<sup>3</sup> PP, Vol.63, No.6, Enc.2, Part 1 of Report by H. Higgins and O. Smith, 10th Feb 1887, p.47.

<sup>4</sup> D.J. May, *op.cit.*, p.130.

It is plausible that many of the men had been incorporated into the Ibadan forces since by the time May arrived in Iwo it had been subjugated by Ibadan.<sup>1</sup> Likewise Ilesa was severely depopulated both before and after it was defeated by Ibadan in 1870.<sup>2</sup> Additionally however, as Higgins noticed in 1886, the town consisted predominantly of women and children, because all of the younger men and some of the women had gone to the warcamp, Esa-Egure.<sup>3</sup> Finally, on one preaching trip in Ibadan alone Olubi found that in 10 compounds most of the headmen (Bale) were in the warcamp during their battle with Ilesa in 1870.<sup>4</sup> In Ibadan, Ota and Abeokuta men were often reluctant to enlist in long campaigns for the very real fear that their farms would be neglected or ravaged:<sup>5</sup> a fear that was realised by a friend of the Rev Allen in Ibadan who returned from the Ilesa war in 1873 to find his farm decimated.<sup>6</sup> As mentioned previously, the requirements of warfare took many bale and household heads away from their compounds for long periods of time and in some cases senior women acted as compound heads in their stead; a development which did not generally occur under peace-time conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> See Akintoye, 'Economic Background to the Ekitiparapo', p.41; B. Awe, 'The Ajele System', p.156-7.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2019/9, Allen, 8th June 1870; CA2075/25, Olubi, 8th June 1870.

<sup>3</sup> PP, Vol.63, No.8, Enc 1, Part 2 of report by Higgins and Smith, 20th June 1887 (entry dated 1886).

<sup>4</sup> CMS, CA2075/24, Olubi, 6th may 1870.

<sup>5</sup> WMMS, Champness, No.1, 7th Jan 1862, Abeokuta; CA2/087/65, White, 28th Sept. 1962.

<sup>6</sup> CMS, CA2/019/14, Allen, 16th april 1873.

Ultimately, warfare and the disruption it caused had a considerable effect on the sexual, generational and social division of labour in many areas. In Ibadan, many more women, children, aged and slaves increasingly manned and ran the farms.<sup>1</sup> Occupational aspirations and social status were further affected.<sup>2</sup> During a visit to Ibadan in 1877 James Johnson commented that because war was the principal occupation and promised importance and social position,

"All less exciting employments are subordinated to this and sometimes despised. War titles are thought much of and private men confer on their dependants such as the government confers upon its officers".

He added that "Boys have their many little associations about the town with officers bearing the same titles. Everything around them helps to develop and strengthen the war element".<sup>3</sup> In particular, boys were under great influence to follow a military career<sup>4</sup> and the many that did developed a heightened sense of being dominant, protective and aggressive.<sup>5</sup> Johnson illuminates

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2058/5, 11th Aug 1875 & CA2058/6, S. Johnson, 27th Dec 1876; CMS, CA2049/112, Hinderer, 26th Oct 1855. Also see, B. Awe, *The Ajele System* in JHSN, Vol.3, 1964 & *The End of an Experiment: The Collapse of The Ibadan Empire 1877-1893* in JHSN, Vol.3, No.2, 1965.

<sup>2</sup> See Hinderer, CMS, CA2049/104, 4th Oct 1851, CA2049/116, Half Yearly Report to April 1859, Ibadan.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2056/50, J. Johnson, Feb to April 1877. Samuel Johnson relates that during the term of Basorun Ogunmola in Ibadan (c.1862-1867) he had favoured warriors far more than farmers or traders which was clear from the differential punishment given to both groups for certain crimes. See, Johnson, *The History*, p.375.

<sup>4</sup> Many young boys and men from other towns were also attracted to a military career at Ibadan probably because their system incorporated and rewarded younger men by merit, unlike many other military hierarchies. For examples see, CA2069/12, Meakin, 24th April 1859 and S. Johnson, *The History*, p.438. Awe gives the additional examples of Ogedengbe of Ilesa and Fabunmi of Oke Imesi, in 'The Ajele System', op.cit, p.57.

<sup>5</sup> The impact of war on youth is illustrated strikingly by Giuseppe Bottai, who fought in the 1st World war "For us, to make war and to become men was the same thing. War and youth exploded simultaneously..one cannot avoid puberty, war  
(continued...)

the emerging gender identities that were being shaped by the exceptional militarism of societies like Ibadan, reporting that prior to Basorun Ogunmola's administration in Ibadan which began in 1866, "no young man or youth could be seen out of doors unarmed with some weapon or another; it was considered effeminate to go about without any" and further that "To spend a good day out without wounds and bruises to show for it was not considered manly".<sup>1</sup> Indeed even aspirations to political titles were affected to some extent; Ogunmola is reputed to have turned down an appointment as Bale of Ibadan, claiming it was an effeminate title since it had nothing to do with war.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, one of the main features of the yearly and prominent Ogiriyān (Ogiyan) festival in Ibadan, may have specifically encouraged boys and young men in particular to develop and show-off their courage as they fiercely whipped each other around the ankles and feet.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile the material, emotional and spiritual support provided by the female population, reinforced and amplified the supportive roles that women and girls normally performed in society. This general situation was similar, if not heightened in the war-camps where, as Higgins pondered when he witnessed thousands of people

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<sup>5</sup> (...continued)

has been our puberty": From the diary of Guisepe Bottai in B. Wanrooij, 'The Rise and Fall of Fascism as a Generational Revolt', *JCH*, Vol.22, No.3, July 1987.

<sup>1</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, p.374.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, p.365.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2021/11, Barber, Ibadan, 2nd Sept 1855; CA2075/43, Olubi, Annual letter, 28th Dec 1875. Oroge highlights that this cult may have "promoted war-like qualities among the populace" of Ibadan. See, E.A. Oroge, 'Iwofa: A Historical Survey', *op.cit*, p.82. The Ijaye and Ikereku townships in Abeokuta also celebrated a similar feast involving whipping. See, CMS, CA2061/50, King, 18th Aug 1853; CA2029/14, Samuel Cole, 10th Sept 1873; CA2084/1, Sunday, Ake, 31st Aug 1879. Similarly, Babayemi asserts that during the Egungun festival in Oyo, under the auspices of the age grades, all able-bodied young men engage in physical and martial training which involves mass flogging. See, Babayemi, *Topics in Oyo History*, p.35.

disband the Ibadan camp, Kiji, in 1887, "many of them had grown up having been brought there as children and where others had children born to them, so that to numbers the place must have become almost a home".<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, the threat of enslavement, bereavement and destitution constantly plagued the population. However, women were particularly vulnerable to these dangers. Some towns were better protected than others: in those that were defensively weak and often attacked, the women, children and elderly were regularly forced to neglect their households and occupations and seek refuge in the out-lying forests and farmlands. In Ota annual desertions lasted up to 5 months: women and children constituting the majority of those uprooted. The Rev. White lamented in 1865 that the constant upheaval and rumours of war had left the town confused, anxious and superstitious, one manifestation of these anxieties being an increase in witchcraft accusations which were predominantly levelled against women.<sup>2</sup> Even in the war camps themselves, imminent attacks sometimes made it necessary for vulnerable groups to evacuate in order to avoid capture or death.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, it was the women and children who most often fell victim to marauding troops and kidnappers. Olubi reported

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<sup>1</sup> PP, Vol.63, Colonies, Africa, Part 2 of report by H. Higgins and O. Smith, p.67, 20th June 1887.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2/087/67, White, 5th march 1865; for previous occasions see CA2/087/52, White, Ota, 1,2,3rd Oct 1856 and CA2/087/65, White, 25th March 1863.

<sup>3</sup> PRO, CO147/8, No.32, Glover to Cardwell, 14th Mar 1865. In one unfortunate instance Chief Mosaderin sadly confided in Henry Higgins in 1886 that two of his wives had been shot dead by Ibadan troops in the middle of his warcamp: for which see PP, Vol.63, No.8, Enc, part 2 of report by Higgins and Smith, p.62, 20th June 1887.

on the high proportion of sick, aged and defenceless Ilesa women and children captured by the Ibadan forces in 1870.<sup>1</sup> As Ibadan concluded its victory over Ijaye in 1862, the Rev. White who was based at Ota highlighted the plight of the many dispossessed women of Ijaye reporting,

"a good many of the Ijaye women were exiled from their homes and dispersed about different places, Abbeokuta, Lagos, and this place, seeking some means of subsistence. Today all of a sudden some 20 of them rushed into our premises begging for protection..."

The women claimed that the Egbas were capturing them in the streets and selling them to Okeodan for ammunition.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, many women, such as the one that sought refuge at the Hinderer's Ibadan mission in 1854, found themselves practically destitute when their husbands and families were killed or captured.<sup>3</sup> It was no wonder that in 1879 as the Are was publicly promoting subordinate officers in Ibadan, one old woman, a veteran of decades of war and militarism, in her wisdom opined "see how they gather together to receive their Death Warrant, and they call it a title!".<sup>4</sup>

It is interesting to consider the attitude of both the Egba soldiers and Western missionaries to the Amazons, the female warriors, of Dahomey since they in turn illuminate Yoruba

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2075/24, Olubi, 8th June 1870. Also see, J. Iliffe, *Poverty in 19th century Yorubaland*, (1984) and *The African Poor*, (1987). Anna Hinderer also notes the case of an Efon woman and her daughter who were displaced, kidnapped and separated in the 1854 Ibadan-Efon war, Hinderer, *Seventeen Years...*, p.143.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2/087/63, White, Ota, 9th Jan 1862.

<sup>3</sup> A. Hinderer, *op.cit.*, p.101,2.

<sup>4</sup> CMS, CA2/058/11, Johnson, 2nd Jan 1879.

perceptions of gender roles both in war and in society in general in the 19th century.<sup>1</sup> Johnson recalled accounts of the first Dahomian invasion of Abeokuta in 1851, stating that when the men discovered that they were being overcome by many women who fought bravely and skilfully, they redoubled their efforts out of shame.<sup>2</sup> Clearly the Egba men felt that their masculinity was threatened by their encounter with the Amazons: not only was it thrown into self-question, but their perception of women's gender role in war was also challenged. Similarly, Rev. David Hinderer's ideas about the role and place of Yoruba women are thrown into relief by his experience of the same battle: while considering the many Amazons who had died in the battle he lamented,

"Disgusting heart-piercing scene! Poor things! who were destined to be nursing mothers of happy families under their native roofs, the only happiness an African woman by nature is seeking after, the only object of all her prayers to her numberless deities and that monster of cruelties; the king of Dahomey perverting all social comforts, all natural feelings, and nature itself makes her the first object of slaughter in his bandit wars".<sup>3</sup>

In reality however, as Robin Law has argued, the Amazons were committed soldiers who denied their femininity and considered themselves to be men, paradoxically adopting traditional stereotypes associating courage with masculinity and cowardice with femininity to berate their male counterparts.<sup>4</sup> However, Egba

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<sup>1</sup> See, R. Law, 'The 'Amazons' of Dahomey', in *Paideuma*, Vol.39, 1993. For 19th century accounts of Amazons in the two main Abeokuta/Dahomey wars see S. Johnson, *The History*, pp.313-317 (1851 war) and Wesleyan Missionary Notices, Vol.XI, 25th May 1864, Appendix to 'Iwe Irohin', 22nd March 1864, p.117 (1864 war).

<sup>2</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, p.315.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2049/101, Hinderer, 4th March 1851.

<sup>4</sup> See, Law, *op.cit*, p.258.



women were also prepared to challenge established gender perceptions and fight on occasion themselves.<sup>1</sup> During the 1864 Dahomey battle a first-hand account informs of the women, "Many of them armed themselves with swords, and kept near the walls, in case their assistance should be required".<sup>2</sup> Likewise in 1873, when Abeokuta was under threat of attack, the Anglican Missionary Schoolmaster, William George reported that the women ran to the camps with their guns to assist the men.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, it is interesting to note that many of the Dahomian Amazons were in fact Yoruba women captured and/or sold into slavery in Dahomey and incorporated into the King's army.<sup>4</sup> Samuel Johnson further highlights the presence of women as ritual functionaries on the battlefield.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, like the Amazons, the Egba women used traditional gender stereotypes both to motivate and castigate the male troops, as Thomas Champness the Wesleyan missionary observed in 1862 as Dahomey prepared to attack Abeokuta:

"oh the noise the women made calling upon the men to go out and fight... If perchance the females saw any man lingering in the town, they belaboured him with their tongues, until

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed Egba women had a history of being prepared to fight in battle: traditions about the Owu war contend that the women collected and used stones to throw at the enemy when the town was besieged., CA2/075/29, Olubi, 21st Nov 1873.

<sup>2</sup> Wesleyan Missionary Notices, 1864, Vol.XI p.117, Extract from Appendix to Iwe Irohin, 22nd Mar 1864, p.120.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2041/6, William George, Kempta, 3rd April 1873.

<sup>4</sup> T. J. Bowen witnessed the redemption of an Amazon of Iketu origin in Iketu market in 1851, "who had been captured when a girl, and enrolled in the king's army of Amazons. Her parents found her out, and were delighted with the opportunity of purchasing her freedom, but she said, "No; I will go back to my master". See, *Adventures and Missionary Labours*, p.149. Also, Edna Bay, *The Aftermath of the Overseas Trade in Slaves: Transformations in Gender and Ethnicity in Dahomey*, unpublished paper, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> S. Johnson, op.cit, p.349 relates that the young woman who carried Are Kurunmi of Ijaye's calabash of charms into battle before him during the Ibadan-Ijaye War 1860-62 was seriously wounded at one battle.

he was glad to go to the wall, they would call him 'coward', 'woman', or any thing else they could think of".<sup>1</sup>

It has been established that women were both affected by and actively involved in warfare. The most wealthy and influential women such as the Iyalode contributed both moral and financial aid to her town's war efforts, organised the townswomen in their collective war efforts and publicly backed her town's civil and war chiefs.<sup>2</sup> The rest of the female population contributed much time and effort in producing, carrying and trading in vital supplies and actively supporting their forces. However, despite the vital roles that women performed, much of the 19th century evidence supports the fact that women were denied access to officially express their opinions and exert influence on military decisions by being largely excluded from direct participation in war debates and matters of state security.

Fadipe contends in the early 20th century that proceedings at councils of war "were of a democratic character".<sup>3</sup> However, much of the discussion in earlier chapters has clearly shown that in some towns democracy was largely limited to men. General public debates were off-limits to women and children in most Yoruba towns in the 19th century, as Giambattista Scala, the Italian Consul of Lagos observed in the case of Abeokuta. Scala

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<sup>1</sup> WMMS, Champness, No.21, 31st March 1862.

<sup>2</sup> J.F.A. Ajayi and R. Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the 19th Century*, p.39,87; S. Johnson, *op.cit*, p.391. On one occasion the opulent women of Ibadan were ordered to contribute slaves to the military to sell for ammunition and powder (the order was later revoked) see, CO147/46, No.124, Enc 3, Extract of letter from Mr. Scott, CMS Ibadan, 1881.

<sup>3</sup> N.A. Fadipe, *The Sociology of The Yoruba*, p.240.

stated in 1858, "On such occasions only men are admitted; even though there are no doors or guards, women and children would be chased away and severely punished if they dared to enter".<sup>1</sup> Similarly in 1856 at Ota the Rev. White observed that only the chiefs and male population of the town divisions assembled at a public meeting convened for discussions with British consular agents about the threat of an attack by Kosoko.<sup>2</sup> As discussed in detail in previous sections of this chapter, the enforcement of a strict curfew on women and children was usually initiated and sanctioned by the largely male council of chiefs (called the Ogboni among the Egba and the Osugbo among the Ijebu) under the auspices of their executive, the exclusively male cult of Oro (Elukun among the Ijebu).<sup>3</sup> Without exception, all women were forced indoors on pain of death when any important social and political matter was discussed.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the Ijebu Elekun, additionally put all non-Ijebu under curfew regardless of sex.<sup>5</sup>

It was the opinion of various 19th century observers that the intention of the curfew on women and children was simply to ensure that debates could be conducted in silence.<sup>6</sup> Critically however, it had the effect of excluding women from participating

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<sup>1</sup> Giambattista Scala, 'Memorie' (unpublished, edited by Robert Smith), p.124; A Report, op.cit, p.82.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2087/51, White, Ota, 10th and 11th Sept 1856.

<sup>3</sup> Refer to Chapters III & IV where the nature and effects of these Oro curfews have been discussed at length.

<sup>4</sup> R. Campbell, op.cit, pp.77-8.

<sup>5</sup> CMS, CA2061/63, King, Ofin, 18th Aug 1858.

<sup>6</sup> James Johnson, *Two Missionary Visits*, p.31; R. Burton, op.cit, p.198.

in and influencing political affairs in general, including military matters. The Rev. King witnessed the use of Oro at Abeokuta in 1857 to exclude women from a public debate which resulted in the townsmen deciding to go to war against Aibo, near Ketu<sup>1</sup> and Captain Jones explicitly described the operation of Oro curfews on women during war debates in Abeokuta in 1861.<sup>2</sup>

However, in Ibadan the Ogboni did not develop a prominent political role in government. They confined their role to that of a state judiciary and there is very little evidence to suggest that women were subject to curfews enforced by male only cults unless in connection with enforcing the law on a woman accused of a crime. Indeed, in the Ibadan warcamp in 1881 two consular agents noted that both men and women were invited to a public meeting to hear them speak.<sup>3</sup>

Nonetheless women employed various unofficial strategies in order to shape events and affect military affairs such as forming pressure groups and singing popular politically-opinionated songs. The forces based at the town walls relied on their townswomen to raise an immediate alarm by shouting and singing in the streets in order to alert them of imminent attacks and boost morale, as many eye witnesses reported in relation to the threatened Dahomian attacks on Abeokuta in 1851, 1860, 1863 and

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2061/62, King, 13th June 1857.

<sup>2</sup> PP, Vol.47, No.32, Enc, Captain A. Jones, Report on the capabilities of the Abeokutan Army, 1861; Also in Ajayi and Smith, Yoruba Warfare, op.cit, pp.132-3.

<sup>3</sup> PRO, CO147/48, No.40, Enc.2, Mr Kester and Mr. Wilson, Account of a Journey on a Mission into Yoruba Country, 1881.

1873<sup>1</sup> and on Ijaye from Ibadan in 1860/1.<sup>2</sup> Indeed even officers of the highest rank who showed any signs of cowardice were brought to account by the women: as Stone noted during Ijaye's war with Ibadan in 1860-62,

"The conduct of the Bashorun on the battlefield had been so wanting in courage that the women of Ejahay [sic] began to make songs about him. To prevent a breach between him and the Bashorun, Areh ordered these songs to cease".<sup>3</sup>

Likewise the women of Ibadan created and recited songs that pressurised the Ibadan war chief Ibikunle, a native of Ijaye, into battle with his own people.<sup>4</sup> Finally, as British forces prepared to enforce the break up of the Yoruba war-camps in 1892, one witness informed that "A very large number of native women waited upon the Governor and entreated him, as only women, mothers and sisters could, to deal gently with the Ijebus".<sup>5</sup>

Overall, former studies have placed greater emphasis on the role of titled, famous women in politics, which clearly reflects the limitations of the evidence popularly used for such studies. Nonetheless, it is clear that both the missionary and other sources contain information on the role of the majority of 'common' women in politics and war over the period. It is hoped

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<sup>1</sup> T.J. Bowen, op.cit, pp.117-8; S. Johnson, *The History*, p.314; PP, Vol 47, Townsend to Brand, 1860, p.4; Wesleyan Missionary Notices, Champness, Letter extract, 1st April 1863; CMS, CA2061/39, King, 1st march 1851; CA2/029/12, Cole, Ikija Abeokuta, 14th and 21st March 1873.

<sup>2</sup> R.H. Stone, op.cit, p.162,231.

<sup>3</sup> R.H. Stone, op.cit, p.182. Basorun and Are were military chieftaincy titles.

<sup>4</sup> Funso Afolayan, op.cit, p.78.

<sup>5</sup> PRO, CO879/36, No.145, Rev James Johnson to Secretary of the Aborigines Protection Society, May 1892.

that these first-hand accounts have provided greater insight into women's actual political involvement and re-addressed a balance, weighted too heavily in many ethnographic and secondary sources in favour of presenting a theoretical and idealised picture of women's political history.

For example, in her influential study of the political position of Yoruba women in the 19th century, Nina Mba concludes,

"Yoruba women... were allowed formal direct participation in the political process through the institution of Iyalode... they were involved in judicial processes affecting the whole society; they effectively controlled their own affairs and were also involved in executive responsibilities covering the whole society. Though women did not have representation and authority in the Yoruba political system equal to that of men, there was no sex segregation in politics as such, and sex was not used as the basis of political role differentiation".<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, the evidence and conclusions of this chapter have clarified this and similar popular, romantic images of the Iyalode and other titled female chiefs as vehicles through which the majority of women could express their political voice; contrary to Mba's conclusions it is clear from the evidence that in practice the male dominated politico-religious cults such as the Ogboni and Oro did work to exclude women from the political system on the basis of sex and they seriously restricted women's ability to participate in political and judicial decisions which affected the whole of society.

On the other hand the evidence also shows how many women, in different situations, challenged this under-representation,

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<sup>1</sup> Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilised*, op.cit, p.13.

manipulated the system and cultivated relationships to play a more active role in many political events: in some cases even more so than men in officially sanctioned, executive political positions. In particular, wealthy women established, cultivated and manipulated relationships with powerful men and other people, not only in the political arena but also in the social arena to achieve influence and mobility in a political system which was essentially reluctant to involve women in any decision making at any level. However, it is also clear that when such titled women overstepped the boundaries of their position, as prescribed by the male authorities, they were not tolerated for long as the common cases of assassination testify to.

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## &lt;&lt;+&gt;&gt;+&gt;&gt; CHAPTER V &lt;&lt;+&lt;&lt;+&gt;&gt;

## SOCIAL CHANGE &amp; GENDER RELATIONS.

From the discussion in preceding chapters it has become clear that Yoruba society was being affected and shaped by various forces which either intensified during, or were unique to the 19th century. Among these forces were Christianity, Islam, militarism, colonialism and increasing commercialisation. The role that women played in these developments and the particular effects that these events had on women's lives have previously been discussed and highlighted. It is apparent that one of the most prominent contributions that women made in the period was to the economic development of Yorubaland. In particular they constituted the majority of the labour force, both free and slave, that supplied the skills that made the economic transition from the export of slaves to vegetable products possible. They also provided many of the food processing and trading skills that sustained growing populations in urban and rural settlements rapidly expanding with refugees, slaves and immigrants over the 19th century. In addition, women developed other industries such as dyeing and pottery-making to meet growing demand for these products at the time.

It has also been shown that free-born women held rights to the income they generated from this increase in economic activity while many slave women retained an income too. Nonetheless, there have been glimpses throughout the study of the tensions that both



women's position stimulated by them, had unleashed on Yoruba society as a whole. In particular, relationships between owners and slaves, men and women, husbands and wives and by implication, between male owners and slave-wives, either altered, adapted or crumbled under the forces of change. In some cases these shifts were rapid in others they were not. Changing gender and dependency relations manifested themselves in various ways. In chapter II the general development of a crisis among slave owners who increasingly felt that they had less control over their slaves was touched upon. This crisis affected female slave owners as well as men, however, men were particularly aggrieved by the increasing incidence of slave women running away; specifically because these women were often concubines who took their children with them. This chapter is devoted to looking further at changes in gender relations, how they were expressed and the ways in which men and women responded to them.

#### Social Control of Women.

In chapter III and IV it was shown that women's increasing economic independence was checked to some extent by the predominantly male authorities and by men at a more local or household level. It was also shown how women and many slaves were excluded from the political and judicial processes in their towns by certain facets of the Oro cult. These aspects of the male dominated cults were part of the more general functions that Egungun and Oro performed in maintaining social and legal order and control in Yoruba towns. Nevertheless, specific functions of

Oro were purposely directed at women. William Clarke commented on the perceived purpose of these functions in the 1850's stating that the females,

"must be kept in subjection or there is but unhappy life for the males. Thus the men feel that they have had shrewdness enough to conjure some system by which from year to year they can keep the depreciated, enslaved, weaker sex in a subordinate position".<sup>1</sup>

Likewise, in the Ijebu area two missionaries gained the same impression of Oloru, commenting, "the god's power is often appealed to by the men to fill the women with dread and enable men to exercise undue authority over them as a presumptive right".<sup>2</sup> Clarke reported that "Another system which has the same object in view, and which accomplishes it most successfully, is the Egungun".<sup>3</sup> In particular, as Burton noted, Egungun were "intended to keep slaves, women and children in a state of due subjection".<sup>4</sup> Everyone had great respect for their ancestors, especially the dreaded Egungun masquerades. Clarke described the exact methods employed in the 1850's such that,

"if a man's wife becomes uncontrollable, or offer any resistance to her husband, he has but to call to his assistance one of these woman terrifiers and his success forthwith becomes complete. If she dares resist, the Egungun gives her a drubbing not soon to be forgotten and takes his exit with the thanks of the victorious husband".<sup>5</sup>

In 1861 in Osiele, Abeokuta, the Rev. Moore described an incident in which the Egungun of a woman's father had been used to prohibit the woman's daughter from continuing with her mission education. Moore reported that the Egungun made the woman

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<sup>1</sup> W. Clarke, op.cit, p.283.

<sup>2</sup> Revs. J. Johnson and E.H. Ellis, *Two Missionary Visits to Ijebu Country*, p.32.

<sup>3</sup> W. Clarke, op.cit, p.283.

<sup>4</sup> R. Burton, op.cit, p.196; A.B. Ellis, op.cit, p.107.

<sup>5</sup> W. Clarke, op.cit, p.284.

"prostrate herself before him when she has been there to make sacrifice to him and asked with a great rage who has permitted her to send the girl to school, and told her that if she dares again to send the child to school she will fall into great trouble and the child shall die".<sup>1</sup>

However, Egungun may not have been exclusively utilised by men to control those whom they considered insubordinate. For example, in 1855 in Ibadan, Hinderer reported the case of a young girl of around 14 years old who had been flogged and severely beaten by a man specifically contracted for the purpose by her mother.<sup>2</sup> It is possible that the man was an Egungun, employed in exactly the same manner as Clarke describes above regarding men.

Burton considered that while Egungun represented the 'domestic police', "Oro personifies the public police". He further seemed to be particularly impressed by the Egba system which he considered had successfully developed "the power of religion as a substitute for police or gendarmerie", but which also incorporated "the method of doing what the eastern proverb declares to be impossible - of curbing a certain member of a certain sex".<sup>3</sup> As mentioned earlier, Oro achieved this compliance by imposing a blanket death sentence on any woman (and any slave in Ijebuland), irrespective of rank, caught outdoors during a curfew imposed while the Oro functionaries performed their business. In Abeokuta, William Marsh reported in June 1845 that Oro functionaries had never broken this rule, no ransoms or pardons had ever been granted to women caught breaking the ban. Indeed, Marsh recounted events earlier that month when the wife

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2070/47, Moore, Osiele, 19th July 1861.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2049/110, Hinderer, 18th Mar 1855.

<sup>3</sup> R. Burton, *Abeokuta and the Cameroons Mountain*, op.cit, p.194,199.

of Abeokuta's founding father, Sodeke, had gone into the streets during an Oro curfew in connection with Sodeke's funeral rights and, despite her social position, was instantly put to death.<sup>1</sup> Similarly in 1858, Giambattista Scala, the Italian Consul who was then at Abeokuta, reported the execution of an old woman who had broken an Oro curfew.<sup>2</sup>

Nonetheless, a fair body of evidence strongly suggests that these particular systems of social control could not always be maintained to have the degree of effect that men desired. As mentioned in Chapter III, the extent, frequency and unpredictable timing of many of the curfews together with the fact that they hampered the economic pursuits and mobility of women increasingly agitated women. Indeed, Bowen noticed in the early 1850's that on one occasion when the townswomen of Abeokuta had been confined by Oro for 36 hours, it had caused the women to feel "ill at ease" and restless. He concluded with the prediction that the days of Oro were numbered.<sup>3</sup> More concretely, in relation to Oro's overall role, King reported from Abeokuta in 1850 that "we trust that the time of its natural death is not far off. Gradually it is less terrifying by making it so frequently, its dread is gradually wearing away," and more specifically that the women secretly voiced their antagonism towards the restrictive, exploitative aspect of the cults. In particular he overheard some women asserting "we are quite tired of this nonsense of 'pakoko pakoko'

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2067/5, Marsh, Abeokuta, 15th June 1845; CA2067/2, Marsh, Letter dated 24th June 1845.

<sup>2</sup> Giambattista Scala, 'Memorie', p.110.

<sup>3</sup> T.J. Bowen, op.cit, p.138.

[nightly, secret Oro] every evening".<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, most women were privately aware that the Oro and Egungun masquerades were mortal men although they were not permitted to express such knowledge.<sup>2</sup> The implication of this knowledge is that the women knew they were being tricked and terrorised into temporary seclusion and ultimate subordination, which may have further weakened the hold of the cults over women. Thus it is suggested that the punitive aspects of these cults were over-exploited to the extent that they induced feelings of disaffection and contempt among women for the authority of the cults and, by implication, those who dominated in and administered them, i.e., men. They tended to increase gender tensions and hence disputes (or from the male perspective, insubordination of women), rather than achieving the conformity that men desired. Consequently these methods of control were ultimately counter-productive and negatively affected gender relations both in the household and in wider society.

Clear indications of the weakening control of the male-dominated cults are available. Burton, who reported from Abeokuta in the early 1860's, asserted that "the older hands declare that... Oro is not nearly so powerful as in their day...".<sup>3</sup>

Certainly, by that date at least one major incident had occurred

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2061/37, King, Abeokuta, 12th April 1850. 'Pakoko' means a secret play held at night like the Oro or to go about something in a secretive, cunning manner.

<sup>2</sup> R. Campbell, op.cit, p.77; S. Johnson, op.cit, p.30.

<sup>3</sup> R. Burton, op.cit, p.203.

in which an Imo woman had broken a curfew in Itori quarter in Abeokuta. Moreover, she had been pardoned in an unprecedented departure from convention; the Itori Oro officials did demand the woman's life but the incident was complicated by the fact that the woman was being protected by the Imo Ogboni since she had been used as a pawn in a conspiracy led by some of them against a man named Agodo.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, it was the male-dominated Ogboni members that instigated this departure from custom and not any defiant stand on the part of the woman herself.

A similar incident occurred at Oyo in 1877 in which a woman was protected by the male authorities of her township who believed that the charge of breaking the curfew levelled against her was malicious. The men defied the *Jabata*,<sup>2</sup> when he tried to claim the woman. It was reported that "he was not prepared for this... and contrary to all precedent and the history of Oro in the Yoruba country [meaning Oyo in this case] he was forced to beat a shameful retreat". The Alafin commuted the sentence to a fine of 5 bags of cowries which was to be paid to the Oro priesthood. It was reported that this incident "surprised many, and well it might, for who had ever heard of a woman publicly accused of seeing Oro, be the charge true or false, escaping death and the *Jabata* returning home as empty handed as he had gone out?". James Johnson, the missionary reporting the event, considered that this episode had seriously discredited Oro and considerably weakened

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2061, King, Abeokuta, 24th Feb 1856.

<sup>2</sup> Strictly speaking, the name *Jabata* is of a town in the Oyo area; the masquerade may have been an Oro official from this town.

its power.<sup>1</sup> Overall it may be suggested that both of the women concerned in these cases, and by implication women in general, benefitted from what were essentially political struggles between men that resulted in a departure from the strict application of a death penalty on any woman breaking Oro curfews.

'Husband and Wife Palaver'.

In the domestic realm, subordination of women and slaves was further instilled by a certain degree of domestic violence. Clapperton felt able to remark in 1826 that Yoruba men were kind to their wives and children.<sup>2</sup> This may well have been generally true; however, Clapperton did not witness private relations between husbands and wives, slave owners and slaves and men and women in other household relationships in enclosed compounds; therefore his opinion cannot be taken as an accurate indication of marital or domestic tensions and how they were dealt with at the time. In the early 20th century Fadipe considered that, "People have come to expect occasional quarrels between husband and wife and even occasional exhibitions of temper on the part of the husband. They also expect a certain amount of bullying of his wife by a husband".<sup>3</sup> Although Fadipe maintained that, "A man is not allowed to ill-treat his wife", he conceded that "A certain amount of free hand is allowed".<sup>4</sup> The use of violence by a father,

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2056/51, James Johnson, Oyo, 5th June 1877. Samuel Johnson's account of the Alafin Atiba notes that one of his wives was initiated into the Egungun mysteries and on the eve of his Bebe festival she was permitted to be outdoors during a curfew imposed by Egungun, see S. Johnson, op.cit, p.330.

<sup>2</sup> H. Clapperton, op.cit, p.36.

<sup>3</sup> N.A. Fadipe, op.cit, p.102.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, p.101.

brother or other figure of authority was also accepted as a legitimate method of controlling and punishing women, children and slaves by both male and female authority figures.<sup>1</sup> Further evidence from the 19th century supports the suggestion that domestic violence, particularly in marital relations, was both socially acceptable and sanctioned at an earlier date. On the other hand it was not socially or officially acceptable for a woman to be violent towards her husband, especially among the higher classes.<sup>2</sup>

What constituted a "free hand", as Fadipe called it, evidently often amounted to severe abuse. The journal of Anna Hinderer, who was based in Ibadan for nearly seventeen years provides many, often harrowing, first-hand accounts of cases of marital and familial disputes involving physical violence toward women and girls.<sup>3</sup> Typically harsh cases involved the women being restrained by chains or ropes, beaten and refused food and water. In one case the Rev. Mann reported from Ilorin in 1855 that a woman who had long escaped her abusive husband in Ibadan had suffered such bad beatings from him that the wound marks were still visible on her arms some time later.<sup>4</sup> It was explained to the Rev. Stone, who resided in Ijaye in the 1860's, that it was

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<sup>1</sup> See, CMS, CA2049/110, 18th March 1855 & CA2049/112, 15th Oct 1855, Hinderer, Ibadan; CA2061, King, Kesi/Abeokuta, 6th Oct 1855.

<sup>2</sup> For example King Manuwa of Itebu had a quarrel with one of his wives and when he attempted to beat her she fought back. A human sacrifice was made to appease the orisa for her actions or to "wipe out the stain". See, CMS, CA2011/117, Ogbonaiye, 4th Dec 1879, 6th Dec 1879 and PRO, CO147/40, No.29, Griffith to Ussher, 1880, which seems to be a report of the same incident.

<sup>3</sup> For examples see, A. Hinderer, *Seventeen Years...*, op.cit, pp.83-84,131-33,225.

<sup>4</sup> CMS, CA2066/88, Mann, Ilorin, 5th Aug 1855.



normal for a husband to whip his wife in order to control and stop brawls.<sup>1</sup> In one case of physical abuse brought to the Hinderer's attention in 1860 the indignant husband of a beaten wife justified his actions, explaining,

"I tell you, you no understand the business at all. White people no understand husband and wife palaver at all. I tell you, in this country, if man no flog his wife now and then, she no 'spect him at all, no 'spect him one little bit".<sup>2</sup>

In theory, marital disputes were mediated by the families of those involved or the bale [head of the compound]. If this proved unsuccessful, the matter was referred to a district chief and ultimately the town ruler.<sup>3</sup> However in practice, when missionaries remonstrated with a higher authority to intervene in marital disputes it was often the case that the chief or ruler proved reluctant to interfere. For example when Stone sought the mediation of the Are Kurunmi in the case of a woman called Offeekee (Ofiki) who was often harshly whipped by her husband, the Are revealingly replied "Is she not the man's wife?".<sup>4</sup> This suggests that the Are believed that the quarrel should be privately resolved and physical abuse was a legitimate method of controlling and punishing wives: thus why should he need to interfere? To some extent then town authorities endorsed physical punishment as a customary part of marital affairs. Indeed, Kurunmi himself was noted for being physically abusive to his wives and slaves. In other towns too titled men subscribed to the same values and practices governing behaviour as the majority of other

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<sup>1</sup> R.H. Stone, *op.cit*, p.100.

<sup>2</sup> Anna Hinderer, *op.cit*, p.225.

<sup>3</sup> N.A. Fadipe, *op.cit*, p.107.

<sup>4</sup> R.H. Stone, *op.cit*, p.59,106.

men in their town (or indeed acted as an example) with regard to controlling their wives and other females under their authority.<sup>1</sup> In Abeokuta, the famous war chief Ogundipe maintained a reputation for being particularly volatile.<sup>2</sup> In 1882 the case of Owode, one of Ogundipe's wives, was discussed at length by both the missionaries and colonial officials. It was reported that Ogundipe had punished her for something by cutting off her eyelids and slashing both her cheeks and ears. Owode sought refuge at Lagos and was treated in the colonial hospital for her injuries. Nonetheless, Ogundipe remained determined to have her returned to him. He considered that he had good reasons for his actions and revealingly remonstrated with the missionaries, "all the Christians keep their wives from going too far". Clearly he considered that he was not accountable to anyone for his actions and that the affair was a private matter between Owode and himself.<sup>3</sup>

Ogundipe's assertion hints that Christian Yoruba men were also concerned with keeping their wives in line, although he does not specifically mention quite how they achieved this. Stone sought to contrast the apparent acceptance of physical punishment in Yoruba male-female relationships with current notions of what was socially acceptable in Christian teaching on marital

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Johnson provides two accounts of alleged cases of extreme cruelty committed by Princes at Oyo toward their wives. See, Johnson, *op.cit.*, p.329,399.

<sup>2</sup> J. Peel, 'A Comparative Analysis of Ogun...', pp.12-13.

<sup>3</sup> PRO, CO147/49, No.79, Rowe to Earl of Kimberley, 'Affairs of Abeokuta', April 1882; Enc.1, Alatise Ogundipe to H. Robbin, Ikija, 4th April 1882; No.93, Rowe to Earl of Kimberley, April 1882.

relations.<sup>1</sup> In particular he noted that the wife of one of the Christian Yoruba teachers, aware of how her husband was expected to behave toward her, "seemed to take great pleasure in worrying her husband because he could not punish her as the heathen men punished their wives". Apparently, after the man did beat her on one occasion, he apologised to Stone for behaving in such an "unmanly way", as he expressed it.<sup>2</sup>

In most of the cases reported, the missionaries explained that the women had been beaten or abused because they were interested in or involved in the Christian religion. However, there is no way of establishing from these accounts whether this was the simple truth. It is possible that the women involved had been suffering in unhappy relationships for a variety of other reasons and shrewdly emphasised religious persecution as the main reason for their abuse in an attempt to win the support and protection of the missionaries for their cause.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the majority of people who became interested in Christianity or sought refuge at Christian missions were women, and often slave women.<sup>4</sup> This point supports the earlier suggestion that women could not

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<sup>1</sup> In particular he commented "...there can be nothing like Christian homes in Yoruba until native ideas of home life have been thoroughly eradicated from the minds of the girls, and been replaced by those inculcated to Christian teaching." Interestingly he doesn't include boys or men in his vision of re-education on domestic values and practices. See, R.H. Stone, *In Africa's Forest...*, op.cit, p.262.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, p.261.

<sup>3</sup> Kristin Mann, 'Women, Landed Property and the Accumulation of Wealth in Early Colonial Lagos', in *Signs*, Vol.16, No.4, 1991. Evidence suggests that a common reason for deteriorating marital relations was infertility and/or the lack of surviving children.

<sup>4</sup> WMMS, No.18, Bickersteth, Ijaye, letter dated Abeokuta, 6th May 1861; CMS, CA2011/117, N. Ogbonaiye, Itebu, 5th Oct 1879; WMMS, No.30, J. Thomas, Abeokuta, 27th Nov 1882; PRO, CO147/71, No.261, Enc.1, Denton to Knutsford, 1889. A group of missionaries stated in this last document that the proportion of females to males in the Christian community of Lagos at the time was 3:1 at a time when the total female population of Lagos was calculated to be less than the male.

always gain the support or intervention of the town authorities in solving marital disputes. Moreover, in the case of female slaves, physical distance or estrangement from their own family meant that family support was not an option either.

The fact that three-quarters of mission attendants were female may perhaps create a bias in information about the experience, frequency and degree of domestic violence as a whole in Yoruba towns. Nonetheless, those accounts that do relate or suggest the opinion of men on the matter indicate that the bias may not be so great as to render the information unrepresentative. Most of the cases cited that give a male perspective on the issue indicate that men considered physical violence to be a legitimate form of punishing and controlling their wives and thus a 'normal' part of marital relations. Incidents of punishment must have served as an example to other women who were aware of the possibility that such actions could also be directed against them. These accounts provide compelling evidence of the subordination and fear that some women lived in at the time. Indeed, in 1878, when the wives of two missionaries based at Ondo called a meeting of those local women professing an interest in Christianity to ask them why they were not more committed to their choice, some of the women revealed that their reluctance was partly based on a fear of how the men in their households would react.<sup>1</sup>

#### Adultery and Divorce.

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2078/21, Phillips Junior, Ondo, 2nd April 1878.

Seeking the support and intervention of one's family, bale (compound head), town ruler or resident missionary were some of the methods that women used to begin to settle their grievances or escape from unhappy marriages. Additionally, adultery, leaving one's husband and formal divorce were both symptomatic of and responses to extreme marital tensions and disputes. Interestingly, much of the direct evidence on these issues strongly indicates that adultery and divorce initiated by women were on the increase and far more common in the 19th century than many of both the contemporary and early ethnographic accounts suggest. These trends provide more positive evidence that many women were not satisfied with their marriages and/or that marital tensions and disputes were common. They also indicate that, despite the harsh societal and marital control mechanisms outlined above, many women began to exercise more control over their own destiny rather than rely on established conciliatory methods. By implication, the trends also support the above proposition that men were generally losing their former authority over women. Indeed, by 1906 it was reported that among the Egba adultery was more prevalent because husbands did not have the absolute power over their wives that they used to have.<sup>1</sup>

The factors that facilitated women's growing ability to make independent choices and take more control over their own destiny were usually identified by men as the interference and influence of the Christian missions and the colonial administration at

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<sup>1</sup> C. Partridge (originally written by an Ijebu/Egba man named Solanke), 'Native Law and Custom in Egbaland', *JAS*, Vol.10, No.40, 1910, p.424.

Lagos. There is great truth in this however, from women's point of view, other factors allowed them to assert greater autonomy, such as their customary income rights, financial autonomy, lineage ties and the opportunities for exploiting the fundamental weakness in men's overall authority over them; men's ultimate dependence on their reproductive and productive abilities. These issues, and men and women's responses to them, will be discussed more fully below.

Control of women's sexual freedom and fertility was a main concern of both men and many of the older generation of women. If a girl was betrothed at an early age, virginity was an issue of concern to her future husband and her family both before and upon her marriage.<sup>1</sup> The only women who were permitted any degree of choice or control over their sexual freedom were the sisters and daughters of Kings and high-ranking chiefs.<sup>2</sup> As early as 1826 at Old Oyo Clapperton noted that the Alafin's daughters were allowed to take anyone as a husband or lover.<sup>3</sup> In the 1850's Bowen met the Alafin Atiba's sister at Biolorunpelu accompanied by a young lover, while further sources indicate that the practice still continued in later years and in other towns.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Johnson, *op.cit.*, p.115; A.B. Ellis, *op.cit.*, pp.154,183-4; Talbot, *op.cit.*, p.432; Fadipe, *op.cit.*, pp.83-6.

<sup>2</sup> Ellis, *op.cit.*, p.187, reports "the daughters of kings or chiefs can live with or marry whom they please, and change partners as often as they please" (whether this applied when they were married as well is not stated).

<sup>3</sup> Clapperton, *Journal of a Second...*, *op.cit.*, p.46.

<sup>4</sup> T.J. Bowen, *op.cit.*, p.154; S. Johnson, *op.cit.*, p.8 (The Yoruba princesses had and still have the liberty of choosing husbands according to their fancy from any rank in life...); PP, Vol.63, No.6, Enc.2, part 1 of a Report by Higgins and Smith, 10th Feb 1887, p.33 (At Ibadan a chief's daughter marries or lives with whom she pleases and changes her consent as often as she likes).

The earliest move in ensuring a girl's chastity involved what is commonly termed as 'circumcision'. However, the operation was more severe than that implied by the term circumcision, which was a more appropriate definition of the operation performed on boys. Boys were circumcised early in life on a date fixed after consultation with the Ifa priest and the operation involved only the cutting of the foreskin.<sup>1</sup> Girls underwent clitoridectomy around the age of puberty, which removed part or all of the clitoris. In 1910 Dennett maintained that no set time was designated for a girls excision; but more authoritative sources contradict him. In relation to the Oyo and Egba Yoruba in the late 19th and early 20th century, Fadipe stated that clitoridectomy was carried out when a girl reached marriageable age and the operation was part of her marriage rites.<sup>2</sup> Similarly in relation to the last quarter of the 19th century A.B. Ellis reported that girls were excised shortly before puberty.<sup>3</sup>

Lack of evidence makes it difficult to establish to what extent clitoridectomy was practised throughout the rest of Yorubaland in the 19th century. In the sources consulted specific references to the practice in the eastern area of Yorubaland date from 1901 and refer to the Ondo and Ekiti areas. Governor McGregor reported from the towns of Ajue, Idanre, Akure and Iseru that

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<sup>1</sup> Forde asserts that in some Yoruba towns boys were not circumcised until around 20 years of age, Forde, *The Yoruba-speaking Peoples of South-western Nigeria*, p.28; Samuel Johnson noted that the only exception to male circumcision in the Oyo kingdom was in the case of the sons of a the Basorun (title applied to a war chief). S. Johnson, *op.cit.*, p.71.

<sup>2</sup> N.A. Fadipe, *op.cit.*, p.79, n.2.

<sup>3</sup> A.B. Ellis, *The Yoruba Speaking Peoples*, p.66.

women 'doctors' dominated in performing the service. At both Iseru and Idanre he specifically stated that both boys and girls were operated on. At Iseru the operation fee was 25 cowries.<sup>1</sup> Forde asserts that some groups in the west of Yorubaland do not carry out excision of girls.<sup>2</sup> Among the Yoruba diaspora in Sierra Leone excision also took place before marriage. It was performed on girls in puberty prior to the marriage ceremony.<sup>3</sup>

The importance of clitoridectomy before marriage was variously associated with rites surrounding marriage and childbirth and with beliefs that it would limit women's promiscuity. There is no written historical record of women's opinion about clitoridectomy; however, it is clear that women themselves performed the operation and thus upheld the practice and what it stood for. For a girl it was a rare and established rite of passage which ushered in her womanhood and the expectation of pride and honour upon bearing children. Nonetheless, clearly it also limited women's sexual enjoyment and represented a form of control over women's sexual autonomy and freedom. Moreover, the ceremony and the operation itself transmitted an important message to girls about their expected gender role; to be first and foremost a faithful and fecund wife.

In later years in some towns the operation began to be carried out when a girl was in infancy and this is currently the case in Igboho. Lorand Matory suggests that this development may

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<sup>1</sup> PRO, CO879/58/580, No.56, McGregor to Chamberlain, 1901.

<sup>2</sup> D. Forde, *The Yoruba-speaking Peoples of South-western Nigeria*, p.28.

<sup>3</sup> Olumbe Bassir, 'Marriage Rites Among the Aku (Yoruba) of Freetown', in *Africa*, Vol.24, No.31, July 1954, p.252. I would like to thank Judith Byfield for bringing this study to my attention.



reflect a growing need to control female sexuality and gender identity from an earlier age. Unfortunately he does not offer any explanation of the possible motivation behind this need.<sup>1</sup> Although there is little direct evidence in the sources consulted for this study, it may be tentatively suggested here that the change in practice arose partly as a response to women's increasing autonomy. Crucially, economic independence gave women both a real and potential power to be independent from husband and family and thus move away from a desired gender role. Earlier excision can thus be explained in terms of increasing attempts to control women's sexual role and define their gender role from an earlier age.

Attempts by the established patriarchal authorities to attain exclusive rights over women's sexual compliance and ultimately to control their reproductive power were further ensured by the strict penalties for adultery. Punishment varied between flogging, fines and the death penalty. In most cases the severity of the penalty depended on the rank of both the husband and the man caught having an affair with his wife.<sup>2</sup> Clapperton noted the severity of the law in Old Oyo in 1826 such that if a nursing mother was found guilty of adultery she was flogged, deprived of her child and sold into slavery.<sup>3</sup> However, much evidence indicates that the death penalty was a more common punishment in cases involving the wife of a king or chief,<sup>4</sup> although some cases

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<sup>1</sup> L. Matory, *Sex and the Empire*, op.cit, p.98.

<sup>2</sup> Talbot, op.cit, pp.433-636.

<sup>3</sup> Clapperton, op.cit, p.95.

<sup>4</sup> For general statements to this effect see, W. Clarke, op.cit, pp.254-55; Ellis, op.cit, p.186; S. Johnson, op.cit, p.XX; A Report, op.cit, p.95.

involving common men and women also resulted in the death of the women.<sup>1</sup> In the 1850's Bowen noted that such laws were enforced so well among the western Yoruba that they were "remarkably free from adultery..., which we might presuppose to be very common".<sup>2</sup>

Nonetheless, available evidence weakens Bowen's assertion. The practices of polygamy and concubinage gave men the option of taking a woman as an additional wife or concubine rather than simply having an affair; options which were not open to women. Consequently, adultery was more commonly initiated by women. Nonetheless, the incidence of adultery among women increased over the period. It was particularly high in large polygamous households. Often the number of women married to, or living as concubines with, a titled man was so great that it encouraged affairs. Are Kurunmi of Ijaye was said to have had between 400-600 wives and it was reported that adultery was very common among them.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, two missionaries regularly noted not only the killing of Are's wives for adultery, but often those whom he suspected of complicity in the affairs as well.<sup>4</sup> For example in October 1853 no less than 14 women were killed and 5 imprisoned within the space of 5 days in relation to adultery charges.<sup>5</sup> Similarly in Ondo, in 1878 it was reported that the Lisa had an estimated 300-400 wives, "most of whom he keeps only for the

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<sup>1</sup> For some actual examples see, PRO, CO147/56, No.258, Enclosures 1-6, Evans to Granville, Aug 1886; CMS, CA2069/12, Meakin, 1st Sept 1859.

<sup>2</sup> T.J. Bowen, op.cit, p.286.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2077/22, Phillips Senior, 12th Nov 1857.

<sup>4</sup> CMS, CA2077/5, Phillips Snr, Ijaye, 29th Mar 1853, CA2077/7, 3rd and 9th Nov 1853, CA2077/9, 10th July 1854; CA2066/80, Mann, Ijaye, 6th Oct 1853, CA2066/83, 9th June 1854.

<sup>5</sup> CMS, CA2066/80, Mann, Ijaye, 6th Oct 1853.

pleasure of seeing them". Some of them had been found guilty of adultery and he was reported to have dealt harshly with all those involved or implicated, even by suspicion.<sup>1</sup>

Titled men with many wives could afford to make an example of those women accused of adultery; however, common men with less wives could not. Consequently, as Ellis reported in 1894, although in many towns the legal penalty for adultery was death or divorce "as a rule, the injured husband beats his erring wife, and recovers the damages from the adulterer".<sup>2</sup> In most Yoruba towns adultery between a woman and her husband's brother or one of his sons by another wife was considered particularly contemptible. However, it was noted by missionaries that the Ondo deviated from established opinions and practices on this matter. The Rev. Young reported that,

"if the husband hears that his son or one of his relations has any connivance with his wife and keep her as his concubine the case will then be brought forward and if it is proved to be real, the husband will then lay a fine upon the son or brother, that is, one goat, and one or two calabashes of palm wine... After this is done the husband is to swear himself, the son or brother together with the woman to their heathen god that the woman and the man should continue to play together till such time as they will chose to part from each other, that he will no more trouble them or charge the man of it again - but he is only considered to be the right husband - the woman is to look upon both of them as husbands and concubine and should there come any child in so doing the child is the husband's and a brother or sister to the concubine."

He further noted that this custom was "quite different from the Egbas and the Yorubas and I believe from that of other nations

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2078/21, Phillips Junior, Ondo, 26th Aug 1878. He confiscated all the property of those involved and heavily fined the rest.

<sup>2</sup> A.B. Ellis, op.cit, p.186.

too".<sup>1</sup> Some contemporary observers considered this Ondo practice to be 'backward' and 'promiscuous';<sup>2</sup> nonetheless, it had a practical consequence in that to some extent it helped to offset the number of women (and children) leaving marriages through desertion or divorce for another man outside of the family. Thus in this sense it can be viewed as a relatively progressive policy in comparison with practices in other areas at the same time.

By 1926, the British had colonised Nigeria and set up legal systems based on British law. Talbot reported in that year that in Southern Nigeria in general "There is now no remedy for wives committing adultery or running away except to take a civil action in the courts and thus the state of affairs is far worse now than in the past". Moreover, he stated that marital disputes constituted the majority of civil cases brought before the courts, and further that "the vast majority of these is due to the desire of the women for new husbands...".<sup>3</sup> Overall, the evidence suggests that adultery was more common than Bowen considered and that it was on the increase. The fact that women were willing to risk a severe beating at the least, and death at the most, to have these affairs suggests the great extent of their unhappiness and their desperation.

Although Talbot asserted in 1926 that "In the old days there was no means of escape from a husband",<sup>4</sup> actual evidence from the

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<sup>1</sup> CA2098/10, Young, Ondo, 27th June 1875; CA2078/24, Phillips, Ondo, 23rd Nov 1877.

<sup>2</sup> A Report, op.cit, p.81.

<sup>3</sup> Talbot, op.cit, p.430,630.

<sup>4</sup> Talbot, ibid, p.433.

19th century clearly shows that women could and did escape from unsatisfactory marriages by simply running away, leaving their husband or seeking formal divorce.<sup>1</sup> Adultery was often the first step in an attempt by a woman to forge a new and better relationship with another man and it could lead to either formal or *de facto* divorce. Other early twentieth century ethnographic studies often stated that divorce was rare in 19th century Yorubaland.<sup>2</sup> Referring to the last half of the 19th century, Samuel Johnson went as far as to state that it was "practically considered as non-existing".<sup>3</sup> Many of the sources define divorce in narrow terms and this perhaps partly explains why they so commonly assert that divorce was rare. Nonetheless, as Lorand Matory has pointed out, in 19th century Yoruba society, divorce was not defined as the specific legal separation of a man and wife as it was in British law.<sup>4</sup> Various degrees of estrangement were often, in effect, equal to a divorce. Strictly speaking, under customary law in order to finalise a divorce a woman's bride-price had to be repaid to her husband; however, the re-payment simply represented the final stage in the separation.<sup>5</sup> Slave women who had been acquired as wives were at a particular disadvantage. They did not have a bride-price, therefore, technically they could not re-pay it to finalise a divorce. Moreover, if a man cast his wife

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<sup>1</sup> See, A.B. Kasunmu, *Marriage and Divorce Among the Yoruba*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 1962.

<sup>2</sup> Delano, *op.cit*, p.142; Fadipe, *op.cit*, p.90-1.

<sup>3</sup> S. Johnson, *op.cit*, p.116.

<sup>4</sup> L. Matory, *Sex and the Empire that is No More*, (University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p.112.

<sup>5</sup> Bowen, *op.cit*, p.305; Ellis, *op.cit*, p.186; Report, *op.cit*, p.82; Fadipe, *op.cit*, pp.90-91; Forde, *op.cit*, p.28. In 1878 at Ibadan Olubi reported that a woman was advised by the town authorities to pay back 180 heads of cowries to her husband in order to be formally released from their marriage, see, CMS, CA2075/37, Olubi, 10th Mar 1878.

out of the household it was considered equal to a divorce.<sup>1</sup>

Johnson, and a number of other sources further contend that divorce was not granted easily and a number of reconciliatory actions were tried before it was allowed.<sup>2</sup> Avenues of redress and negotiation were particularly limited for slave wives since they were estranged from their families. Certain aspects of Yoruba customary law were intended to militate against women leaving their husbands, in particular, all children belonged to the husband and the wife was not entitled to take them with her if she chose to leave him.<sup>3</sup> In his study of divorce among the Yoruba Kasanmu stressed that polygamy allowed a man to marry another woman without first having to dissolve any previous marriage.<sup>4</sup> This option was not available to women and this was perhaps another factor which caused separation and divorce to be commonly initiated by them.

Moreover, in the 1850's Bowen considered that the economic independence of Yoruba women facilitated divorce for the husband.<sup>5</sup> He failed to recognise that in practice it was the woman's financial autonomy which often made it easier for her to leave her husband if she so wished. As noted above in order for a divorce

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2066/80, Mann, Ijaye, 18th Oct 1853. For examples see, CA20/30, Olubi, 11th April 1874; CA2075/37, Olubi, 10th Mar 1878; CA2075/37, Olubi, 19th Mar 1878; CA2061/56, King, Osiele, 16th May 1855; CA2077/18, 31st April 1857, Ijaye; CA2029/8, Cole, 13th Sept 1871; CA2066/82, Mann, June 1854.

<sup>2</sup> Johnson, op.cit, p.116; A Report, op.cit, p.82;

<sup>3</sup> Ellis, op.cit, p.186; A Report, ibid, p.82.

<sup>4</sup> Kasanmu, op.cit.

<sup>5</sup> Bowen, op.cit, p.304-5.

to be finalised the bride price had to be repaid to a woman's husband either by the woman herself or her family. One of the effects of women's greater economic independence at this time may have been to enable women to pay back their own bride price if they wanted a divorce. Although there is no direct evidence to prove this, it may be suggested that the greater diffusion of income among women as a result of the financial opportunities offered by 'legitimate' trade may have been a contributory factor in increasing rates of divorce initiated by women. Similarly a woman's ability to pay back her bride price may have had some bearing on the particular choices open to her if she decided to leave her marriage, i.e., if she had no or little money, if she were a slave wife who was not allowed an income for example, she may simply have run away.

In 1889 a selection of missionaries claimed that women were often forced to leave their husbands because it was harder for them to obtain a formal divorce both under customary law and the new provisions of the proposed Divorce Act. The missionaries provided 18 cases of women in the coastal region who had left their husbands apparently to live with other men as examples in support of their claims. In contrast, they could only provide one case of a man leaving his wife.<sup>1</sup> Thus, although both Talbot and Forde later asserted that a woman could not legally divorce her

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<sup>1</sup> PRO, CO147/71, No.261, Enc.1, Native ministers of the Christian churches to Denton, 1889. The Divorce Act provided that in support of accusations of adultery and bigamy supporting evidence had to be submitted in order to secure a divorce. A wife had to prove adultery with incest, bigamy, cruelty or desertion but a man could gain a divorce on simple grounds of adultery alone. The missionaries considered that legitimate claims of adultery by women were being hampered because they had to connect it to another misdeed.

husband without his consent, Forde added that "in practice she often does".<sup>1</sup>

Among the most frequently cited 'serious causes' which justified a claim or action for divorce were; impotence, insanity, serious disease or alcoholism, adultery, and extreme cruelty.<sup>2</sup> Delano stated that "There was no divorce on the ground that the people could not understand each other".<sup>3</sup> In practice the evidence suggests that in addition to fertility problems many women did separate from their husbands for persecution/domestic violence and persistent marital disputes. Moreover, in a similar vein to their attitude to marital disputes, the authorities considered divorce to be a matter between the two families or individuals involved and rarely became involved unless to exact repayment of bride price or ensure that any property involved was legally administered.<sup>4</sup>

#### The Position of Slave Women.

Contemporary accounts and later sources often seek to emphasise the relatively benign nature of domestic slavery in 19th century Yorubaland.<sup>5</sup> The general situation is epitomised by Fadipe who asserted that domestic slavery was "mild" in nature, that the

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<sup>1</sup> Talbot, op.cit, p.631; Forde, op.cit, p.28.

<sup>2</sup> Johnson, p.116; A Report, p.82; Fadipe, p.90-91.

<sup>3</sup> I. Delano, op.cit, p.142.

<sup>4</sup> PRO, CO147/71, No.261, Enc.1, Native ministers of Christian churches to Denton, 1889; CMS, CA2075/27, Olubi, 9th Dec 1872.

<sup>5</sup> PP, Vol.6, Report of the Select Committee on the African Slave Trade, Evidence of Rev Henry Townsend, May 1849.



slave found little difficulty in securing redemption and that there was no obvious social stigma attached to slave status.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand James Johnson, a firm campaigner against domestic slavery, wrote in 1877 that "Instances of individual cruelty and barbarity to slaves are not wanting. Slave holding mistresses have been known to be guilty of them".<sup>2</sup> Toyin Falola has commented that Johnson's view of domestic slavery is wrong and misleading and probably motivated by his desire to promote anti-slavery.<sup>3</sup> Although Falola is right to point out the bias behind Johnson's comments, in light of much of the contemporary accounts, it is perhaps too idealistic to suggest that maltreatment was non-existent. At various points in the previous chapters Fadipe's generalisations have been shown to be misleading, particularly in the case of female slaves.

A fair amount of evidence indicates that female slaves in particular often endured harsh treatment and that they held fewer rights in practice than some sources suggest. The most pernicious abuse of the male master - female slave relationship was the sexual exploitation of female slaves and the use of physical violence. Fadipe stated that in theory "a female slave was at the entire disposal of her master and, if he decided to establish sexual relations with her, he made her his wife and thereby automatically gave her her freedom".<sup>4</sup> However, much evidence

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<sup>1</sup> Fadipe, *op.cit.*, pp.180-189.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2056/50, Interior Inspection Tour, Feb-April 1877.

<sup>3</sup> T. Falola, 'Missionaries and Domestic Slavery In 19th Century Yorubaland', in *JRH*, Vol.14, 1986, p.185.

<sup>4</sup> Fadipe, *op.cit.*, p.182.

indicates that female slaves were not accorded full marital rights, freedom or better treatment when their owners established a sexual relationship with them. The situation in many interior towns shows many parallels with that in Lagos, documented by Kristin Mann.<sup>1</sup>

For example, in 1865, one of Henry Robbin's slave women, Awa, stated that she and several other slaves were added to Henry Robbin's harem as his concubines, which suggests that he had established sexual relations with the women. Awa testified to the harsh disciplinary measures used by Henry Robbin on his female slaves; shackling, denial of food and water and flogging with a horse whip were some of them. Within a year of her purchase Awa was sold at the slave market, Okeodan, before her escape to Lagos.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, in 1886 two Nupe/female slaves belonging to the Balogun of Ikorodu, named Ramatu and Asatu, both stated that they had children with the Balogun and were married to him without a full marriage ceremony, which clearly suggests that they were concubines and the Balogun had sexual relations with them. Nonetheless, they testified that they had run away to Lagos because they were consistently cruelly treated by both the Balogun and his family.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, both women considered that although

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<sup>1</sup> Mann, 'The Emancipation of Female Slaves...', 1991 and 'Abolition and the Organisation...', 1993, passim.

<sup>2</sup> PP, Vol.50, Class B, No.1, Glover to Russell, 6 Dec 1865, Enclosure: 'Deposition of Awa, A Slave Woman of Mr. Henry Robbin at Abeokuta'.

<sup>3</sup> Ramatu stated that when her child died "5 days afterwards I was put in irons - a ring was put round my neck and a chain was attached thereto and fastened to the ceiling so as to prevent me from lying down. I could only stand on my feet. I was put in irons in the evening and kept there until the evening of the next day". After her child also died Asatu said, the Balogun "treated me worse than ever. Several times I was put in chains and tied to a post".

they were concubines they had always been treated as slaves.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, the experiences of Awa, Ramatu and Asatu are not consistent with Fadipe's glossy account of the rights of female slaves; none of the women in these cases were formally married or accorded full marital rights, freedom, or better treatment when their owners decided to have sexual relations with them, as Fadipe suggests. On the other hand, the establishment of a sexual relationship offered other women the possibility of better conditions not only for themselves but for any children borne; an option which was not generally open to male slaves.

In contrast to the general treatment of free-born wives who committed adultery, it was easier for a husband to make an example out of a slave wife or concubine if she was accused. Hinderer reported from Ibadan in 1851 that one young man was executed for having affairs with three wives of a chief. The following day, he continued,

"A Devilish noise in the market close to my place announced the sufferings of one of the unfortunate women, who was tied and scourged publicly. Afterwards she was imprisoned and I believe everybody thought with me she would now be cured her of wounds and sold":

However, around 100 Egungun were contracted by the chief to execute the woman and they later publicly displayed her head. Hinderer noted that the death penalty was not a commonly applied punishment for adultery but because the woman was a slave captured by the chief during a war with Efon, "thus it was easy for him to make her an example for the others".<sup>2</sup> Additionally, a slave wife could not divorce or leave her husband unless she was first

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<sup>1</sup> PRO, CO147/57, No.288, Enclosure 1, Evans to Granville, Sept 1886.  
<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2049/104, Hinderer, Ibadan, 1st Oct 1851.

redeemed by her children.<sup>1</sup>

An established form of disciplining slaves was to threaten them with sale to coastal slave merchants; however, as the Atlantic slave trade diminished Consul Campbell noted that slave owners could no longer rely on this threat to gain obedience or compliance.<sup>2</sup> In particular, some Ijebu troops told Olubi in 1867 that whereas formerly they had sold disobedient slaves to the Portuguese, "because of the English presence their slaves, wives and children are intensely disobedient".<sup>3</sup> A fair number of both slave wives and women took their perceived disobedience to its logical conclusion and fled to Lagos seeking protection and freedom under the colonial apparatus. Moreover, if the women had children with their owners it was common for them to flout the man's custody rights and take their children away as well.<sup>4</sup> This tends to suggest that conditions were not as favourable for children born by slave women and free born fathers than many accounts suggest. These women were often referred to in different ways by different people in relation to the same situation; masters called them wives, while the women themselves perceived and experienced their position to be a concubine or slave with less rights than a wife.

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<sup>1</sup> A Report, op.cit, p.81.

<sup>2</sup> PP, Vol.45, No.11, Campbell to Clarendon, 28th Mar 1858.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2075, Olubi, 25th Aug 1867.

<sup>4</sup> For example, CMS, CA2075/32, Olubi, 6th Oct 1875; CA2075/30, Olubi, 17th Mar 1874; CA2011/70, 10th Feb 1874. In 1887 the Ife authorities demanded the return of a woman who had ran away from her husband to Oke-Igbo; the Oke-Igbo authorities refused, saying that many of their women and slaves had also ran away to Ife. See, PRO, CO147/61, No.353, Enc.2, Derin, Oni elect of Ife to Moloney, 1887.

Some of the women found themselves entering new abusive and/or dependent relationships after redemption. Often, Sierra Leonian repatriates would put up the redemption money for female slaves and employ them as 'domestic servants' in their households. Once again ambiguous definitions such as 'domestic servant' masked the true position of the women and suggested that they were freely employed when in fact they were indebted to their patrons for paying their manumission costs and were in effect experiencing another variation of dependency and slavery.<sup>1</sup> In 1861, Acting Consul McCoskry noted that in some of the numerous cases involving slaves seeking protection at the consulate "I find many who have been here have fallen into bad hands, and have again been sold into slavery."<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, as Kristin Mann has argued in relation to female slaves in Lagos, these new relationships could also be positive for women since they offered protection and patronage.<sup>3</sup>

### Witchcraft Accusations and Gender Tensions.

Among the Yoruba a distinction was recognised between 'black' and 'white' magic.<sup>4</sup> A report explained that "Black magic is

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<sup>1</sup> In one case in the town of Onitsha in the east of Nigeria, a girl of around 14 years was redeemed by the Sierra Leonians Mr. and Mrs. William John. The girl was subsequently murdered in an extreme case of punishment. All of the local witnesses referred to the girl as a 'slave' and the details of her case and treatment certainly show that she was treated as one. See, PP, Vol.63, Colonies Nigeria, Correspondence concerning The Onitsha Slave Girl Trial, No.1 and Enclosures, Ussher to Kimberley, 1st Nov 1880.

<sup>2</sup> PP, Vol.47, No.19, McCoskry to Russell, 3rd Sept 1861.

<sup>3</sup> See references in footnote 2, p.257 above.

<sup>4</sup> For studies dealing with witchcraft in Yorubaland (although none of these studies is essentially historical) see, J. Hoch-Smith, 'Radical Yoruba Female Sexuality: The Witch and the Prostitute' in Hoch-Smith and A. Spring, *Women in Ritual and Symbolic Roles*, 1978; P. Morton-Williams, 'Yoruba Responses to the Fear of Death', *Africa*, Vol.30, 1960 and 'The Atinga Cult Among the South-western Yoruba: A Sociological Analysis of a Witch-finding Movement', *Bulletin de l'I.F.A.N.*, Vol.18, No.3-4, 1956.

considered to be cognate with witchcraft and an embodiment of the influence of evil spirits. 'White' magic is displayed by members or priests of fetish cults in public markets, and at festivals and places of amusement, and is considered to be harmless".<sup>1</sup> Invariably 'black' magic, or witchcraft, was thought to be the preserve of women while 'white' magic was associated with men. Tensions between the sexes and between rivals or opponents of the same sex were often manifest in beliefs surrounding witchcraft and in witchcraft accusations themselves. Witchcraft was often perceived to be the cause of societal disasters, unexplained deaths and fertility problems.<sup>2</sup> In 1863 it was even reported that a little girl was cast out of her household by the *bale* after being accused of killing both of her parents using witchcraft.<sup>3</sup>

Although individual men were believed to be capable of malevolent magic,<sup>4</sup> all females were believed to possess the potential to use witchcraft (have witchcraft: *ni aje*) or to be witches. In particular older women were thought to be active witches. In the late 19th century Ellis remarked that among the Yoruba, "witches are more common than wizards, and here, as elsewhere in the world, it is the oldest and most hideous of their sex who are accused of the crime".<sup>5</sup> Childless women (whether due

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<sup>1</sup> A Report, op.cit, p.100. In 1888 a group of male Egba elders explained to the missionaries at Ake that "There is a community of witches whose only object is to do evil especially to those against whom they have a spite. See, CMS, G3A20/1888, 18th Oct 1888, Ake, No.172, Rev. T Harding to Merensky, p.8.

<sup>2</sup> For example see CMS, CA2098/11, Young, Ondo, 16th Sept 1875. For general statements to this effect see, A.B. Ellis, op.cit, p.116; A Report, op.cit, p.100.

<sup>3</sup> CMS, CA2087/65, White, Ota, 17th Feb 1863.

<sup>4</sup> PRO, CO147/72, No.309, No.19, Denton to Knutsford, Oct 1889 and Enc.2 in same; A Report, op.cit, p.100.

<sup>5</sup> A.B. Ellis, op.cit, p.116.

to age, infertility or some other circumstance) were more commonly suspected of being witches. P.C. Lloyd later stated that older women were seen as bitter, post-menopausal witches because they were jealous of their younger co-wives who were fertile and received more of their husband's attention.<sup>1</sup> Such feelings may have been a reaction on the part of junior co-wives to the authority and power that the senior wife held not only within the general household, but specifically over them. Indeed, as noted in Chapter II, from the mid 19th century polygamy was becoming considerably more widespread among the general population than it had been previously. Consequently, many more junior co-wives existed in households and senior wives were able to exploit their labour. Clearly, both the hierarchy of authority and the allocation of work among women in many households was affected by these changes and tensions between junior and senior co-wives were most certainly increased. This view focuses on the rivalry, tension and suspicion that could exist between co-wives and females in a household as a motivating force behind accusations.

Additionally, as noted above, many childless women were very successful, independent businesswomen. Old age and/or childlessness gave such women more economic and social independence both from their husbands and patriarchs who may have resented the wealth that these women had.<sup>2</sup> They were seen as

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<sup>1</sup> P.C. Lloyd, 'Divorce Among the Yoruba', *American Anthropologist*, Vol.70, 1968, p.59-60.

<sup>2</sup> See, J.R.O. Ojo, *The Position of Women in Yoruba Traditional Society*, University of Ife seminar papers, 1978-9, pp.134-6. Based on Nadel's study of Nupe women which makes a direct link between the resentment and antagonism that men feel toward rich trading women and accusations that the women are witches, Ojo suggests that this is also often the case among the Yoruba, although he cautions that such connections are less obviously expressed.

inadequate, disobedient wives since the dedication they gave to trade or business (which may have required long trips away from home) transcended the commitment they gave to their husbands and domestic duties. Such independent women were perceived to be capable of challenging the desired gender roles which prescribed them as mothers and wives whose gender role, sexuality and fertility was largely controlled by men. Additionally, as mentioned above, witches were commonly believed to be responsible for impotence, infertility, any problems during pregnancy and childbirth and the death of babies. If these points are considered together, it can be argued that such women posed a potential threat to male authority and power. Crucially, the threat or challenge to male power in the mind of those subscribing to witchcraft beliefs derived not only from the fact that witches held an ultimately more powerful control over female fertility than any of the male dominated or patriarchal methods of control discussed above, but also that they possessed the power to control and manipulate male fertility and sexuality. Consequently, witchcraft effectively directed culpability for male sexual and fertility problems toward women. Ultimately, tensions between the sexes were manifest in witchcraft accusations and associated executions. Men commonly suspected that women who challenged male authority were witches or they used the accusation as a pretext to humiliate or eliminate the accused woman and thus re-affirm male authority.

The classic theory that witchcraft accusations are a

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manifestation of societal tensions and deteriorating social relations is often stated in studies concerning witchcraft in Africa.<sup>1</sup> In his study of the mid 20th century witch-finding movement, the Atinga cult, in Yorubaland, Morton-Williams asserts that "the fear of witchcraft and activities to counter witchcraft must be symbolic; cultural expressions of hidden anxieties, of psychic stress".<sup>2</sup> As the above discussion indicates, this theory also applies to 19th century Yorubaland where an environment of general political and societal change and upheaval largely contributed to conditions in which death, disease, insecurity, rivalry and gender tensions were prevalent and witchcraft accusations were common.

Some women that were accused of witchcraft were unfortunate pawns in subversive displays and struggles for political hegemony by political opponents. Accounts of accusations motivated by political considerations were very conspicuous in the missionary journals. For example, in 1865 White reported that at Ota much suspicion and anxiety among the population had been caused by constant rumours of war and attack. In particular he noted that "the superstition of the female population... and belief in witchcraft has caused many an unfortunate individual to be exposed to the malice and vengeance of the cruel worshippers of the god

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<sup>1</sup> See Mia Green, *Shaving Witchcraft in Ulanga: Kunyolewa and the Catholic Church*; Solomon Mombeshora, *Witches, Witchcraft and the Question of Order: A View from a Bena Village in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania*; Simeon Mesaki, *Witch Killings in Sumakaland, Tanzania* all being papers presented at the ASUK Biennial conference, Stirling 1992.

<sup>2</sup> P. Morton-Williams, 'The Atinga Cult Among the South-western Yoruba', *Bulletin de l'I.F.A.N.*, Vol.18, Series B, No.3-4, 1956, p.327.

Owo, who is supposed to possess the faculty of discerning witchcraft in the possessors and to have the power of punishing them". In one case it was reported that a woman accused of witchcraft was illegally murdered in contravention of the established methods of dealing with those accused of witchcraft. It became apparent that although the town's ruler had ordered that the woman should be released, one of his political opponents had countermanded his order and had thus forced her death.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, in politically factional coastal societies witchcraft accusations were prevalent<sup>2</sup> and were often linked to political wrangles between factions. Women belonging to rival households or groups were commonly made the scapegoats in political struggles or murdered without the proper trials associated with witchcraft accusations in a bid by rival factions to display their power and weaken rival households and groups.

However, witchcraft was not only used by men as a social and political weapon. Women accused of witchcraft often subscribed to belief in it themselves and sometimes acknowledged their own guilt, as both Bowen and Ellis noted.<sup>3</sup> Amba Oduyoye has noted that in a modern context in Ghana "If women indeed constitute the majority of witches, one could interpret that fact as a form of protest against their factual powerlessness in society".<sup>4</sup> From the

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2087/67, White, Ota, 5th Mar 1865.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2087/63, White, Igbessa, 18th Feb 1862; PRO, CO879/15/192, Faulkner to Moloney, Report by Lees on the Settlement of Lagos. Igbessa, 1879, p.9; PRO, CO147/6, No.53, Glover to Cardwell, Aug 1864; PP, Vol.47, No.15, Enc 1-3., Badagry 1860; PP, Vol.47, No.3, Enc, 1861; PP, Vol.41, Campbell, 1854; WMMSA, Champness, No,19, 1863.

<sup>3</sup> Bowen, op.cit, p.97; Ellis, op.cit, p.116.

<sup>4</sup> Amba Oduyoye, 'Female Authority in Asante Law and Constitution (part II)', African Notes, Vol.8, No.2, Oct 1979, p.12.

preceding discussion it is clear that as a social group, women in Yoruba towns were in many ways powerless. They endured many hardships and disadvantages which were largely the result of established beliefs about gender roles such that women should be subservient to and less privileged than men. Both in the household and on a wider scale, the largely male authorities used a variety of methods, such as control of women's fertility and sexual freedom, domestic violence, and restrictions and financial exactions imposed by the Egungun and Oro cults to ensure women's subordination. It is possible then that Yoruba women subscribed to witchcraft beliefs in the 19th century and before partly because it also gave them a powerful social weapon with which to challenge their subordination and vent their antagonism toward men. Indeed, Burton, who noted how common witchcraft was in the western area of Yorubaland in the early 1860's, remarked with insight,

"Witchcraft has its good side, and is by no means the unmixed evil that some hold it to be. Where the dark places of the earth are full of cruelty, its vague terrors form a salutary check upon the violence of husbands and masters, rulers and criminals. It is the power, and the only power, of the weak".<sup>1</sup>

A general indication of both the conditions that fostered witchcraft accusations and changing conditions affecting the way people reacted to and dealt with witchcraft can be highlighted by a discussion of the strategies and methods that were employed to deal with witches in the 19th century. The established method of determining and bringing those accused of witchcraft to account

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<sup>1</sup> Burton, op.cit, p.201-2.

was for the accused to undergo a trial by ordeal.<sup>1</sup> An ordeal was undertaken under the auspices of various cults depending on the town.<sup>2</sup> The most commonly mentioned cult dealing with witchcraft ordeals in Yorubaland was that of Orisa Oko. The accused woman had to take poison in order to prove her guilt or innocence. If she survived, she then became an *Iyawo Orisa Oko* ('bride of Orisa Oko') and Oko priestess.<sup>3</sup> As discussed previously, missionary sources stress that Orisa Oko was the 'farm deity' and its cult membership comprised largely of women from noble, well-to-do families. Nonetheless, as King pointed out in 1860 at Abeokuta, "the first introduction or acquirement of Orisa Oko in a family in ancient times was not by an individual of honest, upright, and consistent character, in as much as it was always originated from the accusation of witchcraft and sorcery".<sup>4</sup>

King's statement, together with previously cited evidence which established that from the second half of the 19th century Orisa Oko initiates were usually wealthy and paid a hefty admission fee, suggest that over time the membership of Orisa Oko had changed from one which was dominated by convicted witches undergoing an ordeal to the wealthy fee-payers. In other words it is possible that Orisa Oko lost its function of putting accused witches to trial over time. Other evidence further indicates that over the same period Egungun and Oro became more involved in

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<sup>1</sup> Burton, op.cit, p.203; A Report, op.cit, p.100.

<sup>2</sup> In Ota the cult of the Goddess Owo was associated with dealing with accused witches. In Igbessa and the surrounding area one of the cults named was Gbuku. See, CMS, White CA2087/62, 5th Sept 1861; CA2087/63, 18th Feb 1862; CA2087/67, 5th March 1865.

<sup>3</sup> Fadipe, op.cit, p.267-8.

<sup>4</sup> CMS, CA2061/66, King, Abeokuta, 23rd June 1860.

bringing witches to trial and killing them, particularly in the southwestern towns where these male-dominated, politico-religious cults were politically more powerful. As part of their emphasis on aspects which controlled and subordinated women, Egungun and Oro may have largely superseded the authority of Orisa Oko to deal with witches. The priestesses who dominated the Oko cult lost a considerable amount of their power in this area to the men who operated in the more powerful, politically central, male-dominated Egungun and Oro, which were, more importantly, centrally controlled by the highest authorities.

Moreover, Egungun and Oro used more direct methods to deal with those suspected. Oro functionaries not only located and 'arrested' women suspected of witchcraft, they used their authority in this respect to further bolster their attempts to subordinate and financially exploit women. For example, in 1863 it was reported that some Oro officials declared a curfew in Okeodan and "A message was sent to Mr. Mann to say that they wanted to make this Oro, and begged he would have silence kept, because they wanted to be heard, as they were out to frighten some women that were possessed by witchcraft".<sup>1</sup> In another example occurring in 1875 at Ado it was reported that an Oro official declared that a witch was located in Ado. He threatened all the women in the town with destruction unless they handed over a sacrifice of one goat, hen and 15 strings of cowries and four kola nuts to him in order to propitiate the goddess Oya and neutralise

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<sup>1</sup> PRO, CO147/4, No.95, Glover to Newcastle, 1863, Enc.1, Tickel to Glover, Oct 1863, Okeodan.

the witchcraft.<sup>1</sup> Particular Egungun (called Agan in Oyo) were concerned with the actual execution of witches.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, much evidence suggests that Egungun and Oro functionaries did not allow women suspected of witchcraft any means of establishing their guilt or innocence. In 1859 Mann noted one incident in which a woman merely accused of witchcraft had been 'arrested' and killed by the Egungun.<sup>3</sup> Although trial by ordeal methods paid lip-service to the idea of a trial it was always possible that the accused could be proven innocent if they survived the ordeal; however, Egungun and Oro methods dispensed with this possibility altogether. The point that male-dominated cults superseded a largely female-dominated cult that had formerly handled witchcraft trials further suggests that men were intentionally using witchcraft accusations not only as a means to exert their authority over women in general, and independent women in particular, but to vent their antagonism toward the opposite sex.

In conjunction, many accounts of the execution of supposed witches give a clear impression of the insecure, volatile nature of society at the time. At the end of the century, Ellis suggested the hysteria that often prevailed;

"properly speaking, a person charged with witchcraft should be subjected to trial by ordeal, and then, if found guilty, immediately executed, but the excited populace, filled with superstitious terror, frequently acts without waiting for

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2040/4, Foster, 24th Feb 1875; CA2035/8, Docherty, 24th Feb 1875.

<sup>2</sup> S. Johnson, op.cit, p.29; Talbot, op.cit, p.636.

<sup>3</sup> CMS. CA20066/96, Mann 26th July 1859.

proof, and puts the accused to death without trial".<sup>1</sup> In the case reported by White in 1865, outlined above, the eagerness of people to see the woman killed without a proper trial was noted. Similarly, in the year before at Ajido, it was reported that "an infuriated and senseless mob" dragged a woman condemned of witchcraft to be sacrificed.<sup>2</sup> These reports indicate that witchcraft accusations and sacrifices additionally represented times for society in general to vent tensions.

The most commonly quoted method of defusing the tensions between the sexes and in society as a whole is the western Yoruba Gelede festival. More recent literature has placed great emphasis on the Gelede festival as a crucial time to acknowledge respect for the role and power of all women in Yoruba society and ensure social harmony through the Gelede ritual performances.<sup>3</sup> Benedict Ibitokun highlights this function of Gelede among the Ketu on the border of southwestern Yorubaland. He asserts "For any festival, or rite of passage such as birth, marriage, chieftaincy ceremonies, royal installations and deaths, etc., the Gelede show is always the climax which rounds it off. The reason for this is clear: There is a constant need to placate 'our mothers' by stressing their social relevance...".<sup>4</sup>

The 'show' incorporates ritual masquerade performances by

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<sup>1</sup> Ellis, op.cit, p.116.

<sup>2</sup> PRO, CO147/6, No.53, Glover to Cardwell, August 1864.

<sup>3</sup> See, P. Morton-Williams, op.cit; Benedict M. Ibitokun, *Dance as Ritual Drama and Entertainment in the Gelede of the Ketu-Yoruba subgroup in West Africa (A study in Traditional African Feminism)*, (Ile-Ife, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Benedict M. Ibitokun, *ibid*, p.70.

men who dress up as women and move and act in an exaggerated feminine manner. Samuel Johnson, who described these masquerades in the late 19th century, stated that they "were more generally of a female form, with carvings of plaited hair, and magnificent busts; they are elaborately or magnificently dressed, bedecked with a wealth of female ornaments of native manufacture, such as earrings, bangles, beads, etc., with jingles on their ankles...".<sup>1</sup> Ibitokun asserts that through the performance men willingly demean their masculinity in order to pay public homage to females by mimicking and praising what is perceived to be women's most powerful attributes i.e., female sexuality and fertility. It can be seen then that the Gelede festival requires men to publicly acknowledge that, despite the various methods used by men to control female sexuality and fertility, it can never really be fully possessed or controlled. In this respect the Gelede performance inherently challenges male authority. Although Johnson described the Gelede masquerade, he compared its significance to that of the Egungun (or Eyo of Lagos and Adamuorisa of the Awori), and did not interpret its role as placating societal tensions. Similarly, a Gelede festival was extensively described by White at Ota in 1872; however, he made no mention of any aspect associated with appeasing women or witchcraft. White considered the purpose of the festival as a means by which each township displayed both their skill in craftsmanship and wealth via the Gelede masks and costumes. This may indicate a lack of understanding on his part of the complexity of the significance of the Gelede festival, or that the festival did not incorporate

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<sup>1</sup> S. Johnson, op.cit, p.32.



the aspects discussed above at this time or in this particular town.<sup>1</sup>

Overall, tensions in society, between women and between women and men were expressed in various ways. The most obvious signs of growing discord between the sexes were marital disputes and the conspicuous increase in methods used by both sexes to deal with or escape their situation. Thus, deteriorating gender relations are reflected in the evidence which strongly indicates increasing maltreatment and subordination of women, both slave and free, by men via domestic violence and use of the male-dominated cults as men tried to maintain and exert greater control over women; increasing rates of desertion from marriage, divorce and adultery initiated by women as they tried to re-negotiate or escape their situation; and a general increase in witchcraft accusations against women as both men and women tried to vent their antagonism in various forms.

The causes of these trends were complex. One of the main alterations in relations between the sexes was occasioned by women's increased productive role and economic independence which the rise of the palm produce and other lucrative industries heightened and strengthened. In conjunction, the increasing use of domestic slaves altered hierarchies of authority within the household and caused tensions between women themselves. On a larger scale, Yoruba society was affected by warfare and slavery

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2087/76, White, Ota, 13th Jan 1871. Another Gelede festival was held on the 12th Feb 1871.

which caused disruption and insecurity. The establishment of both a Colony at Lagos and numerous mission stations in the interior towns provided women with new and powerful avenues for support and redress in their struggle to re-define their relationships within society and with men. Overall, it is clear that as men in general tried to maintain and exert greater control over slaves and women, the strategies they employed were often counter-productive and ultimately generated more disharmony.

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**>>+> CONCLUSIONS <+<<**

This study has explored women's role in the economy, polity and society in Yorubaland during a century of transition. The main strength of the study is that it re-constructs women's 19th century history using many first hand accounts which have shed new and clearer light on many of the established beliefs about women's position in the century. The sources have provided the means to extend and clarify current historical knowledge on the details of how women were both involved in and affected by many of the historical developments in Yorubaland that are widely studied and debated.

In particular the study highlights the vital and immense role that women played in the commercial transition from an export trade in slaves to a variety of vegetable products from the mid 19th century onwards in Yorubaland. Women formed the bulk of the labour force, both slave and free, that aided economic production and brought the Yoruba interior further into the world market. As the Atlantic slave trade diminished and new economic opportunities expanded, the entry of many more male and child slaves into jobs that were formerly considered as women's work altered existing sexual and generational divisions of labour. The increase in domestic slavery, in addition, brought about changes in job status and in social hierarchies which partly fuelled social tensions.

Similarly, as domestic slavery overtook Atlantic exports of slaves the evidence indicates a widespread increase in polygamy among the general population. This development suggests, and some evidence shows, that many women acquired new sources of labour in the form of co-wives which they most certainly used both to increase out-put on a small scale in whatever business or trade they were engaged in, and to free themselves from laborious and time-consuming domestic chores in order to concentrate on lucrative enterprises and/or long-distance trading trips. The majority of such women were able to earn fair to middling profits from their various productive activities. Fewer women were able to buy additional slaves in order to expand their industries and help them with domestic duties; nonetheless, the evidence indicates that the number of women who owned individual or small numbers of slaves is greater than that which has previously been acknowledged. Likewise, there are many more accounts of and references to large-scale slave holding women in the sources than is suggested by the common focus on famous women such as Tinubu and Efunsetan in many secondary studies.

However, it is also evident that in many cases one woman's access to greater labour power and profit was concomitant with another's increased workload and servitude, whether as a junior co-wife or slave. The adverse affects of women's heavy workload both at home and in the public sphere were (to some extent) reflected in the writing of missionaries such as Hinderer who commented in 1851,

"the common people are generally working hard especially the females, and their appearance bespeaks rather an enslaved

condition".<sup>1</sup>

and James Johnson who added in 1877,

"most of the women I met with were young and in midlife, but their appearances were generally worn out - or they lacked the fullness and brightness of youths".<sup>2</sup>

Nonetheless, overall women maintained and increased their economic independence over the period through engaging in new economic opportunities such as the production, trade and transport of palm produce and the manufacture and sale of pottery, cooked food and cloth. One of the most significant indications of women's growing autonomy was a deterioration in gender relations. Deteriorating gender relations are evident from both the prevalence of domestic violence and in accusations of witchcraft levelled against women which are evident in the sources. Many women were not willing to endure such treatment and subordination and employed various strategies in order to improve or change their situation. Among the most evident are an increase in adultery, separation and divorce mainly initiated by women and the significant flight of many female slaves from their masters and mistresses in search of liberation and/or protection either in Lagos or elsewhere.

Women's perceived independence and deteriorating gender relations were further marked by an increased need among the patriarchal authorities to control and subordinate women which is clearly reflected in the distinct and developing emphasis on

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<sup>1</sup> CMS, CA2049/104, Hinderer, 4th Oct 1851.

<sup>2</sup> CMS, CA2056/50, J. Johnson, Lagos to Ibadan, Feb-April 1877.

those aspects of the male-dominated cults which were concerned with maintaining social and domestic control of women. In addition, both Egungun and Oro, and their equivalents in other areas, increasingly restricted women's mobility and extracted both money and goods from women. The study also suggests that as free-born women exerted their autonomy men may have taken slave women as both wives and concubines because they were able to exert greater control over both the person and income of slave wives and thus circumvent free-born women's strong income rights. The growth of polygamy had both positive and negative effects for women. On the one hand it liberated many free-born women from time-consuming chores, giving them more time to accumulate their own income which ultimately facilitated their independence, while at the same time it allowed men, and some senior women, to exert greater control over slave wives and their income.

Moreover, the study has highlighted the role of women in the political development of Yorubaland over the period and shown how both changing political systems and warfare affected and involved women. Although in a minority, many more women than is usually recognised earned immense wealth and status through the palm oil, slave and other trades which were flourishing from the 1840's. Only these women had enough resources to establish and maintain influential relationships with male power-brokers and thus indirectly exert political influence. Moreover, it is clear that even fewer of these wealthy women were chosen to be endowed with political/social titles and thus officially recognised in a largely male-dominated political and social order.

Although many other women earned more than previously from the opportunities offered by the palm oil and other trades, they did not earn enough wealth to invest in political influence. In addition the actual position of the majority of women in relation to the day-to-day administration of political matters was both revealed and clarified by the missionary sources which gave actual accounts of the operation of the male-dominated cults in relation to women. The majority of women were denied even a partial role in political debate mainly through the maintenance of total curfews on all females by the male-dominated cults during public political meetings.

Nonetheless, the majority of women played a vital and large part in the Yoruba wars. There can be no doubt that the many adverse affects of militarism and social upheaval reduced many women to poverty, isolation or slavery through displacement and warfare over the 19th century; however, women played a positive and active role in their town's military efforts by maintaining vital food, supplies and moral support. Some also maintained farms and households for men who were absent at war camps. Previous studies have presented an idealised and/or limited account of the role of the majority of women in politics and warfare in Yorubaland largely due to emphasis on ethnographic and descriptive accounts which recount the titles and duties of the privileged few.

On a broad scale, individually and in their interaction

with others it is clear that women played a prominent and vocal part in shaping the social, political and economic development of 19th century Yorubaland. On the whole the evidence strongly cautions against making inferences, and thus generalisations, from the experience of one group of women about the lives of other groups during the period. Experiences were diverse and dynamic and were based on many variables such as location, social and ethnic status and age among other things. Although many women were vulnerable and found themselves in positions of dependency, the evidence shows that many did not endure their subordination lightly or compliantly; there is no question of type-casting women as passive victims. Characteristically perhaps, in the 19th century Yoruba women were not, as it is commonly asserted in relation to women in historical perspective, 'invisible'.

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Figure 1: Woman weaving on a vertical broad loom.  
(G.J.O. Ojo, Yoruba Culture, London, 1966.).



Figure 2: A dyeing establishment in Ibadan.  
(Grant, A Geography of Western Nigeria, UK, 1960.).



Figure 3: Woman trading at a market in Ibadan.  
(E. Huxley, Four Guineas, London, 1955.).



Figure 4: Woman crushing palm kernels using traditional method. (UNIFEM, Empower Tools, NY, 1995.).



Figure 5: River transport: floating puncheons of palm oil.  
(E. Huxley, Four Guineas, London, 1955.).



Figure 6: Man collecting palm wine in Ibadan area.  
(CMS, F10/88, Acc.233.).

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DATE/SOURCE	GENDER/AGE/NAME/ORIGIN	SLAVE ROUTE, LOCATION/S	TRADER/OWNER/S	COMMENTS/HISTORY
1848, PP <sup>1</sup>	Young woman named Try Norman (of the Yoruba area)	Captured from the Yoruba area as a child. Intercepted and taken from Gallinas to Sierra Leone (SL) where freed.	Mistress in SL is Mrs Gray. Held by Prince Manna in Gendamar in 1841 due to debt owed by mistress.	Witnesses the sale of 100's of slaves (mostly Cosoo [Kosor?]) by Manna to Spanish dealer John Buron for export. States that she saw people crying as they went on board. One case cited below.
1848 PP <sup>2</sup>	Young man	Based in Gendamar	Sold by Prince Manna	Sold for export by Manna as punishment for apparent adultery with one of his wives.
1849 CMS <sup>3</sup>	Young woman (born Sierra Leone)	Living in Ake, Abeokuta	Seized in market many years ago she and her mother were slaves of an Ijemo man	The woman is the Balogun of Eruwa's niece. Previous owner demands his right to her.
1849 PP <sup>4</sup>	2 girls; one c.12yrs	For sale in Abeokuta	Female trader	Offers girls for sale to Townsend for \$32 & \$33.
1849-56 T.J. Bowen <sup>5</sup>	Woman (of Idoko)	captured near Idoko ends up in Iketu in slave market	Not stated	Kidnapped while trading. Changed hands several times. Has a husband & 3 children in Idoko
1849-56 Bowen <sup>6</sup>	Woman (of Iketu)	Captured in Iketu taken to Dahomey, recaptured by Egba, ends up in Iketu slave market.	Not stated	Woman is war captive enrolled as an Amazon (female soldier) in Dahomey. Parents try to redeem her in Iketu market but she wants to return to serve as Amazon.
1850 CMS <sup>7</sup>	Woman named Otteshade (of Itoko)	Based in Abeokuta	Belonged to Babalawo (Ifa Diviner)	Sold to the Babalawo around 1845 and refused to marry him in 1850 after converting to Christianity. The Ogboni (council of chiefs) punish her for 9 days.
1853 CMS <sup>8</sup>	Woman	Held in slave dealer's house in Ibadan and sold; unknown destination.	Ijebu male slave dealer sells her	Dealer has bought many more slaves to sell recently

<sup>1</sup> PP, Vol.4, First Report from the Select Committee on the African Slave Trade, evidence of Try Norman, female, 1848.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> CMS, 1849.

<sup>4</sup> PP, Vol.6, Report of the Select Committee on the African Slave Trade, Henry Townsend, 2nd May 1849.

<sup>5</sup> Bowen, *Adventures and Missionary Labours*.. p.148.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p.149.

<sup>7</sup> CMS, CA2072/13, Muller, Abeokuta, 19th Jan 1850.

<sup>8</sup> CMS, CA2049/107, Hinderer, 26th Aug 1853.

## DOMESTIC SLAVES OF YORUBA ORIGIN

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DATE/ SOURCE	GENDER/AGE/ NAME/ORIGIN	SLAVE ROUTE, LOCATION/S	TRADER/ OWNER/S	COMMENTS/HISTORY
1853 PP <sup>9</sup>	Girl named Alabon or Rosa, c.12yrs	Based in Badagry then taken to Lagos	Owned by Tinubu who gave her to Mr. Sandeman at Badagry in 1851. Officially freed in process.	Alabon was taken back by Tinubu in 1853 who insisted that still her property
1854 PP <sup>10</sup>	Woman named Jenny Johnson (Sierra Leonian)	Lived in Abeokuta	Stolen by Chief Sogkenu and taken as concubine	Jenny was taken from her mother, a Sierra Leonian woman, by Sogkenu and he held her for 11 years until she escaped and sought refuge in Lagos
1855 CMS <sup>11</sup>	Man and old woman	Based in Ibadan	Man is sold for theft. Old woman belongs to the man's mother	Man sold for crime is the son of a woman expelled from her compound with her old female slave
1855, CMS <sup>12</sup>	Woman (of Ibadan)	Captured by Ilorin during Ibadan/Ilorin war while visiting husband at warcamp. Based in Ilorin	Owned by Ilorin man & taken as his wife	She suffered physical violence from Ibadan husband for interest in Christianity. Ilorin husband lets her worship as she pleases.
1856, CMS <sup>13</sup>	Woman	Lives in Ijaye	Not stated	The slave woman's brother is willing to give her 2 bags cowries to help redeem her only if she gives up devotion to Sango.
1856, CMS <sup>14</sup>	Woman	Based in Abeokuta	Owned by woman	Mistress was devotee of Sango and persecuted her because she went to church.
1856, CMS <sup>15</sup>	Two women (of Efon) named Ogunyomi and her daughter	Captured near Efon and taken to Ibadan	Not stated	The women were displaced during Ibadan/Efon war and were captured while they fled. Mother and daughter were separated.
1857, PP <sup>16</sup>	5 redeemed slaves: 1 old woman named Ibitola & her two young sons; 1 man; 1 girl.	Based in Lagos	Sierra Leonian, Mr. Williams redeemed them. Man called Ajambadi 'takes' them	Ibitola trades on own behalf. Her two sons go to school. Girl is domestic servant & man farms. Man redeemed for 62 heads cowries, girl 60 heads.

<sup>9</sup> PP, Vol.41, No.1, Enclosures 1-6, Fraser to Malmesbury, 20th Feb 1853.

<sup>10</sup> PP, Vol.40, No.36, Enc.4, William Marsh to Campbell, 19th Dec 1854

<sup>11</sup> CMS, Ca2049/110, Hinderer, Ibadan, 20th Feb 1855.

<sup>12</sup> CMS, CA2066/88, Mann, Ijaye, 1855.

<sup>13</sup> CMS, CA2066/90, Mann, Ijaye, 27th May 1856.

<sup>14</sup> CMS, CA2050/2, J.J. Hoch, Abeokuta, 6th June 1856.

<sup>15</sup> Anna Hinderer, *Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country*, p.143.

<sup>16</sup> PP, Vol.44, No.14, Enc.4, Mr. Williams to Campbell, 18th June 1857

## DOMESTIC SLAVES OF YORUBA ORIGIN

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DATE/ SOURCE	GENDER/AGE/ NAME/ORIGIN	SLAVE ROUTE, LOCATION/S	TRADER/ OWNER/S	COMMENTS/HISTORY
1857, PP <sup>17</sup>	Man named Briama	Based in Lagos	Owned by Akintoye.	Married to King Docemo's sister.
1858, CMS <sup>18</sup>	Woman	Lives in Ijaye	Owned by woman	Mistress casts her out of compound because she is unfit for work. Dies shortly after.
1859, PP <sup>19</sup>	Redeemed female called Moneyakpa or Reki	Based in Ilorin	Property of Balogun of Ilorin. Redeemed by Sierra Leonian Mr. J.M. Turner (an ex- slave).	Freed at Lagos for 12 bags cowries with Balogun's consent.
1859, PP <sup>20</sup>	Redeemed female called Ohlomo (Yoruba)	Taken to Ijebu for sale. Passed through several hands & sold at Lagos	Man sells her in Ijebu area. Becomes property of Badda, an ex- slave (Tinubu's husband)	While a child her mother is captured & sold for Atlantic export. Ship is intercepted and she is freed at Sierra Leone. Ohlomo pays 10 bags cowries for redemption and is re- united with mother.
1859, CMS <sup>21</sup>	Long line of captives, mostly boys, but two girls (most of Nupe and Kukuruku origin)	On foot from Oyo to Ijaye	Slaves being overseen by Egbas	_____
1859, CMS <sup>22</sup>	Woman	Based in Ota	Owned by Mrs. Thomas Williams	Slave woman runs away from mistress.
1860, CMS <sup>23</sup>	Man	Based in Ibadan	Not stated	Killed as a pre-war offering to Ogun.
1860/1, CMS <sup>24</sup>	Female (of Ijaye)	Based in Abeokuta	Kidnapped by 'powerful chief' Ogoodookpeh	The woman is taken during the 'Anti- English' riots in the town. She escapes to Lagos leaving a son behind who is killed by the chief.
1860/1, CMS <sup>25</sup>	Man	Based in Abeokuta	Not stated	The man was sacrificed to Ogun for success in war.
1861, CMS <sup>26</sup>	Woman (of Ijesa)	Based in Ota	Not stated	Woman is sacrificed by devotees of deity Owo.

<sup>17</sup> PP, Vol.44, No.14, Enc.1, Davis to Campbell, 18th May 1857.

<sup>18</sup> CMS, CA2066/95, Mann, Ijaye, 10th Nov 1858.

<sup>19</sup> PP, Vol.46, No.11, Brand to Russell, 31st Dec 1859.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> CMS, CA2069/13, Meakin, 31st Aug 1859.

<sup>22</sup> CMS, CA2087/60, White, Ota, 29th Oct 1859.

<sup>23</sup> A Hinderer, *ibid.*, p.211/12.

<sup>24</sup> R.H. Stone, *In Africa's Forest and Jungle*, p.219, 251.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p.244.

<sup>26</sup> CMS, CA2087/62, White, Ota, 5th Sept 1861.

DATE/ SOURCE	GENDER/AGE/ NAME/ORIGIN	SLAVE ROUTE, LOCATION/S	TRADER/ OWNER/S	COMMENTS/HISTORY
1861, WMMS <sup>11</sup>	Woman named Mrs. Green	Lives in Abeokuta	Owner is man called Jeremiah	Mrs Green is married with children to a Christian. Her master agreed to the marriage and to leave her alone. However, in 1862 he takes Mrs. Green and her children back & pawns one of the girls. Jeremiah wants 18 bags cowries per person redemption.
1862, PRO <sup>11</sup>	Man	Based in Abeokuta.	Owned by a woman	Mistress intended to sell him but he secured his freedom via Slave Court.
1863, PP <sup>11</sup>	Boy called Daniel Dopemu	Sold from Abeokuta. Escapes via Oko-Obba, Makoloki, Ota to Lagos	Property of Mr. Henry Robbin. Sold to slave dealer, man called Lumeye.	Bought by Robbin in 1861 for 14 bags, 4 heads cowries due to debt owed to Robbin by his mother. Sold to Lumeye in 1863.
1863, PRO <sup>11</sup>	Man named Amodu	Lives in Lagos but taken to Porto Novo	Seized by Chief Agbotou of Porto Novo	While on trading trip on behalf of others Amodu is seized and held ransom for return of a fugitive slave woman who is residing in Lagos.
1863, PRO <sup>11</sup>	2 women (of Addo)	Taken to Porto Novo	Seized by chief Edubaken, elder brother of King of Porto Novo on behalf of a man named Kinikini	Women held as ransom until Kinikini receives a female slave as bail for the women from a man named Musah. Musah had previously seized a slave belonging to Kinikini due to a long-standing debt incurred by Kinikini for a female slave (90 heads) and 3 other slaves (10 heads cowries) sold to him by Musah in 1859/60.

<sup>11</sup> WMMS, Notices Vol.XVI, 1860-61, Letter extract from Rev, Champness at Abeokuta, 25th Nov 1861 & 4th Sept 1862.

<sup>11</sup> PRO, CO147/1, Freeman to Newcastle, 4th June 1862.

<sup>11</sup> PP, Vol.47, No.15, Glover to Russell, 7th Nov 1865 & Enclosure, Deposition of Dopemu, 31st Oct 1865; CMS, CA2080/41, Robbin, 1865.

<sup>11</sup> PRO, CO147/4, Enc. No.68, Report of Samuel Rowe at Police Court, Lagos 1863.

<sup>11</sup> PRO, CO147/4, No.68, Enc, Glover to Didelot, 3rd Aug 1863.

## DOMESTIC SLAVES OF YORUBA ORIGIN

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DATE/ SOURCE	GENDER/AGE/ NAME/ORIGIN	SLAVE ROUTE, LOCATION/S	TRADER/ OWNER/S	COMMENTS/HISTORY
1863, PRO <sup>12</sup>	2 men: Mamadu (of Ijesa) and Faro (of Pochiah)	Sold at Ota taken to Addo and sold again in Addo. Taken to Appa intended for export at Porto Novo	Sold by person named Onikosi at Ota to Amore then at Addo to Ashade, Balogun of Addo. Ashade sells them to Popo man via his wife at Appa for 25 bags & 5 heads cowries each	While being held at Appa the men heard that they might be sold to the King of Porto Novo for a consignment of 80 young male slaves intended for export via a French vessel expected at Porto Novo.
1864, PRO <sup>13</sup>	13 slaves redeemed (most are from Egba); 9 woman named Laddi, Siye, Timiva, Akese, Fadumade, Taiwo, Sangoyimi, Efunsoyan & Oke. 4 men named Opeleye, Idowu, Dada & Dada.	Captured at or near Makun.	Captured and sold by Ikorodu people	All were freed at the Slave court in Lagos 1864.
1865, PP & CMS <sup>14</sup>	Woman named Awa	Brought from Ibadan to Abeokuta. After 1 year taken to Okeodan and sold. Taken to Porto Novo then Lagos. Escapes at Lagos.	Owned by Mr. Henry Robbin. Sold by female, Osanyipeju (Principal wife's relative) on Robbin's request at Okeodan to two women for two rolls tobacco. Sold on to a man.	Awa is Robbin's concubine. She is used for domestic and trade duties by Robbin and his principal wife.
1865, PP & CMS <sup>15</sup>	Three women named Ebo (of Ibadan), Ajisomo (of Efon), Lakanye (of Ijaye) and lakanye's son named Akitunde	Based in Illugun, Abeokuta. Sold at Okeodan, destination unknown	Owned by Mr. H. Robbin	Concubines of Robbin. Used by him and principal wife for domestic and trade duties.
1865, PP & CMS <sup>16</sup>	Two women named Roki and Eyinle and Eyinle's child	Based at Illugun, Abeokuta. Sold on to Porto Novo	Owned by Mr. H. Robbin	Both women were concubines. They meet Awa at Porto Novo where they were sold after Awa.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.<sup>13</sup> PRO, CO147/6, No.33, Enc.1-5, Freeman to Cardwell, June 1864.<sup>14</sup> PP, Vol.50, No.1, Glover to Russell, 6 Dec 1865, Enc, Deposition of Awa.<sup>15</sup> Ibid.<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



## DOMESTIC SLAVES OF YORUBA ORIGIN

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DATE/ SOURCE	GENDER/AGE/ NAME/ORIGIN	SLAVE ROUTE, LOCATION/S	TRADER/ OWNER/S	COMMENTS/HISTORY
1865, PP & CMS <sup>37</sup>	Woman named Elatutoon	Based at Illugun, Abeokuta. Sold on to unknown destination	Owned by Mr. H. Robbin	Concubine. Shackled to post for 6 days with Awa as punishment.
1865, PP & CMS <sup>38</sup>	Six men and a boy. Other male slaves. One man named Ali and his wife Ogunoko.	3 men & boy at Illugun, Abeokuta. 3 men at farm outside Abeokuta. Other male slaves at Ake, Abeokuta.	Owned by Mr. H. Robbin	_____
1869, CMS <sup>39</sup>	Woman and her son and whole household	Condemned for crimes and sold for gun powder	Not applicable	Woman punished for causing a fire that damaged c.200 households and her son condemned of stealing two people from Abeokuta.
1869, CMS <sup>40</sup>	Man	_____	Owned by woman inherited from her husband, a Christian convert	Mistress threatens to sell him if he goes to church.
1870, CMS <sup>41</sup>	Girl slave	Based at Ota as domestic slave then taken to Igbessa with mistress	Owned by woman.	Mistress paid 134 heads cowries for girl. She supplied 120 and borrowed 14 heads from her husband. Dispute over ownership when wife decides to leave him.
1871, CMS <sup>42</sup>	Old woman	Ibadan	Not stated	Woman is ill and cannot get aid from anyone.
1876, CMS <sup>43</sup>	Woman. c.10 other slaves	Based in Ondo	Woman bought by Lisa. Other 10 slaves bought and owned by rich woman	Woman is bought 'purposely to be killed and buried' with corpse of rich woman.
1876, CMS <sup>44</sup>	Girl c.11yrs	Based in Ibadan	Owned by woman	Slave girl obtains permission via Johnson from her mistress to attend church on Sundays.
1876, Cole <sup>45</sup>	Woman (returned slave from Jamaica)	Ijesa quarter of Abeokuta	Wife of chief of quarter.	Meets the woman while visiting the chief, her husband.
1877, CMS <sup>46</sup>	Woman	Based in Ondo	Owned by a woman but sold by her to Lisa	Sold and sacrificed at burial of a rich woman. Lisa reports that the slave had committed a serious crime.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.<sup>38</sup> Ibid.<sup>39</sup> CMS, CA2075, Olubi, Ibadan, 1869.<sup>40</sup> CMS, CA2019/8, Allen, 29th Aug 1869.<sup>41</sup> CMS, CA2087/76, White, Ota, 23rd May 1870.<sup>42</sup> CMS, CA2019/15, Allen, Ibadan, 9th Feb 1871.<sup>43</sup> CMS, CA2098/13, Young, Ondo, 6th March 1876.<sup>44</sup> CMS, CA2058/6, S. Johnson, Ibadan, 11th Aug 1876.<sup>45</sup> CMS, CA2029/19, Cole, Abeokuta, 15th Aug 1876.<sup>46</sup> CMS, CA2098/17, Young, Ondo, 21st & 22nd July 1877.

## DOMESTIC SLAVES OF YORUBA ORIGIN

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DATE/ SOURCE	GENDER/AGE/ NAME/ORIGIN	SLAVE ROUTE, LOCATION/S	TRADER/ OWNER/S	COMMENTS/HISTORY
1878, CMS <sup>47</sup>	Young woman (from Lekie area)	Based in Ondo from childhood	Owned by old chief called Awa	Woman bought by Awa as girl specifically to be sacrificed at his burial. Common practice among wealthy in Ondo. She is treated as favourite wife, must remain faithful and is given powerful medicine to suppress fertility.
1878, CMS <sup>48</sup>	Woman	Based in Ibadan	Owned by a woman	Slave woman is being beaten in street by a crowd on an accusation of theft. Mistress takes her away.
1879, CMS <sup>49</sup>	Young man	Based in Ondo runs away to Okeigbo and is returned to Ondo	Bought by Ondo woman	The slave is used by mistress to trade at Aye when he runs away.
1879, CMS <sup>50</sup>	Woman named Agun	Lives in Itebu	Owned by King Manuwa of Itebu	Agun is wealthier than the rest of the slaves that attend mission. She trades by canoe and always works on Sundays. Reported that she drinks too much. Dies in Dec 1879 after falling out of her canoe.
1879, CMS <sup>51</sup>	2 old men: 1 immigrant from Brazil, 1 of Akiti (Ekiti area of Abeokuta)	Both live in Akiti village, Abeokuta. One captured from Yoruba area and later freed at Sierra Leone living at Leopold town, Bathurst. In 1857 returned to Find family at Akiti	Free by 1879	The man from Brazil is the headman of village. The other man was a church member at Bathurst and was baptized by a Mr. Davey.
1879, CMS <sup>52</sup>	Number of slaves	Based in Abeokuta	Owned by Betsy Desola, a rich trader	the slaves were allowed to earn their own income but had to hand over 15 strings cowries daily to Betsy.
1879, CMS <sup>53</sup>	4 households with a 'number of slaves'	Based in Abeokuta	Owned by Lydia Gemowi; Mary Coker; Fanny Fisher; Susannah Lawolu (all (communicants & traders).	_____

- <sup>47</sup> CMS, CA2078/21, Phillips Jnr, Ondo, 20th Nov 1878.  
<sup>48</sup> CMS, CA2058/10, S. Johnson, Ibadan, 15th April 1878.  
<sup>49</sup> CMS, CA2098/26, Young, Ondo, 4th Aug 1879.  
<sup>50</sup> CMS, CA2011/117, Ogbonaiye, Itebu, 5th Oct, 26th Oct & 9th Dec 1879.  
<sup>51</sup> CMS, CA2041/10, W. George, Kemta, 6th Feb 1879.  
<sup>52</sup> CMS, CA2056/28, J. Johnson, 2nd Aug 1879.  
<sup>53</sup> CMS, CA2056/28, J. Johnson, 2nd Aug 1879.

## DOMESTIC SLAVES OF YORUBA ORIGIN

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DATE/ SOURCE	GENDER/AGE/ NAME/ORIGIN	SLAVE ROUTE, LOCATION/S	TRADER/ OWNER/S	COMMENTS/HISTORY
1880, PRO <sup>54</sup>	Two slaves	Based at Itebu	Owned by a chief of Itebu	Slaves were sacrificed as replacements for chief's daughter who was to be punished by committing suicide for adultery.
1880, CMS <sup>55</sup>	c.500 slaves of both sexes	Based in Ibadan	Owned by an 'influential woman'	The slaves were part of the woman's household. She lived in Lagos before moving to Ibadan. Not stated if slaves did so also.
1880, CMS <sup>56</sup>	Old woman named Mary	Based in Ondo	Owned by woman lately deceased. Mistress's brother takes charge of her	Her late mistress's brother is threatening to re- sell her to someone who could use her to sacrifice on their burial.
1880, PRO <sup>57</sup>	3 adult woman and a girl c.13yrs (hometown Gbogbole)	Seized as ransom for debt near Ejinrin and taken to Memfo	Held by 2 men owed a debt by another man from Gbogbole	The women were on a trade trip when they were seized. Their captors threatened to sell the them if the debtor did not settle his account.
1880, PRO <sup>58</sup>	6 people, one is a woman (all of Lagos)	Not stated - coastal area.	Seized by Takobe, brother of King Bona of Igbobini	People are held as security for repayment of a debt due to Takobe from late King Kosoko of Lagos.
1880, PRO <sup>59</sup>	6 slaves	Bought at Ondo, taken to Epe and sold	Dealer was a 'young man' of Ife	The slaves were sold at Epe for a 'considerable profit' paid in produce which the man took to Lagos and exchanged for European goods.
1880, PRO <sup>60</sup>	Girl	Seized at Epe	Not stated	Seized as security for a debt owed by one of her relatives.
1880, PRO <sup>61</sup>	Woman named Iyejo and her brother	Seized in Ijebu area	Held by a man called Onida- nla and some Epe people	Whether both were seized as ransom for a debt or simply kidnapped is not stated. Two men named Oluso and Oloyemi (Iyejo's son-in-law) report the seizure.

<sup>54</sup> PRO, CO147/42, No.246, Griffith to Ussher, 1880.  
<sup>55</sup> CMS, G3A2/0/1880-81, S. Johnson, Ibadan, Quarter ending June 1880, 13th Feb 1880.  
<sup>56</sup> CMS, G3A2/0/1880-81, Young, Ondo, 4th July 1880.  
<sup>57</sup> PRO, CO147/40, No.63, Griffith to Ussher, 1880.  
<sup>58</sup> PRO, CO147/40, No.67, Griffith to Ussher, 1880.  
<sup>59</sup> PRO, CO147/42, No.246, Enc, Extract letter from Phillips (Ondo) to Wood, 1880.  
<sup>60</sup> *ibid*, No.289.  
<sup>61</sup> PRO, CO147/43, No.300, Griffith to Ussher, 1880.

## DOMESTIC SLAVES OF YORUBA ORIGIN

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DATE/ SOURCE	GENDER/AGE/ NAME/ORIGIN	SLAVE ROUTE, LOCATION/S	TRADER/ OWNER/S	COMMENTS/HISTORY
1880, PRO <sup>62</sup>	15-20 slaves and a number of other slaves	Based in Ondo	15-20 slaves bought by other slaves. Other slaves belong to the recently deceased Lisa	Some of Lisa's slaves arm themselves and set up a camp to defend themselves against being sacrificed at his burial. They are permitted by Ondo authorities to buy replacement slaves to be sacrificed (15-20)
1886, PRO <sup>63</sup>	Girl 7yrs called Siemi	Sold from Lagos to Weme and sold to Porto Novo in 1885	Two dealers called Morinatu and Siedu Ojobara sell to Prince of Weme then sold to Adigun (Porto Novo)	Sold to Adigun for 60-70 bags cowries.
1886, PRO <sup>64</sup>	Woman called Dowe (of Jeregbe)	Jeregbe to Porto Novo then back to Jeregbe	Belongs to (wife) King Mepon of Porto Novo then inherited by Prince Kumenu then again to Prince Gbenu	As a child Dowe is exchanged with 40 bags cowries to Mepon for the release of her father who was prisoner/slave. Taken as a wife. Gbenu her 3rd husband goes back to Jeregbe with her but she leaves him and is later found tied & drowned.
1886, PRO <sup>65</sup>	Woman named Ramatu (Tapa [Nupe] mother and Ilorin father) born in Ilorin	Stolen from Ilorin as child lives in Abeokuta until 1882 when she is sold & based in Ikorodu. Escapes via Abeokuta villages, Akolu, Ebute Meta to Lagos	Owner in Abeokuta not stated. Bought by Balogun of Ikorodu in 1882.	Becomes concubine to Balogun in early 1880's. Her baby died early 1886.
1886, PRO <sup>66</sup>	Woman named Asatu (Nupe) born at Bida)	Stolen as child from Bida sold and stays in Ijebu-Ode until 1881 sold to Ikorodu. Escapes via same route with Ramatu.	Owned by woman in Ijebu, when she dies sold to Balogun.	Becomes concubine to Balogun. Her child dies in 1884.
1887, PP <sup>67</sup>	Man named Gureje (of Ijesa)	Taken as captive to Abeokuta.	Not stated	Became captive as a boy, bought his own freedom in Abeokuta. Engaged in arms trade between interior and Lagos. Friend of Ogedemgbe (himself an Ijesa ex-slave).

<sup>62</sup> PRO, CO147/42, No.295, Enc Rev. Phillips to Griffith, Ondo, 1880.  
<sup>63</sup> PRO, CO879/23/315, No.84, Enc.1, Moloney to Ayide of Weme, March 1886; CO147/55, No.135,  
May 1886.  
<sup>64</sup> PRO, CO147/56, No.258, enclosures, Evans to Granville, Aug 1886.  
<sup>65</sup> PRO, CO147/57, No.288, Enc.1, Evans to Granville, Sept 1886. Depositions by Ramatu and  
Asatu, 28th aug 1886.  
<sup>66</sup> ibid.  
<sup>67</sup> PP, Vol.63, No.6, Enc.2, Higgins, 1887.

DATE/ SOURCE	GENDER/AGE/ NAME/ORIGIN	SLAVE ROUTE, LOCATION/S	TRADER/ OWNER/S	COMMENTS/HISTORY
1889, PP <sup>61</sup>	1 young woman	War captive from Okeodan ends up in Ishaga quarter of Addo	Sold by Dahomians to Olumoju who sold her to relatives	Olumoju sells woman for 120 bags cowries paid half in silver and half in Croydon cloth.
1889, PP <sup>61</sup>	10 slaves: 3 men (of Popo villages) and 1 woman called Ahonyo (Popo) mentioned in particular	Captured from villages around Porto Novo then taken to Badagry and Addo	Held by dealers, men named Okoja and Ashade. 4 slaves mentioned re-sold by Okoja via female dealer in Addo named Olumoju.	3 men and woman to be sold. One man sold at Shagbo. Rest are to go to Porto Novo.
1889, PRO <sup>62</sup>	Two women called Mary Dota and Anuta and 1 man.	From Lokoja, up for sale in Aiyesan	Captured by man named Galadima (of Epe).	Captured while on trading trip. Galadima takes Asiki's goods (6 homespun cloths) and Anuta's (4 hand-crafted slippers).
1893, PP <sup>61</sup>	c.100 captives & slaves of all ages & both sexes. Specifically young woman (Fulani), old woman c.70yrs & girl c.10yrs	Exposed for sale in slave market in Ilorin	Not stated	Fulani woman is distressed. Told that old woman would sell for c.£2 in cowries.
1894, PRO <sup>62</sup>	Two old women named Oshamfumi (of Ijesa) and Ibeyemi (of Ikole, Ekiti)	Based in Makun	Owned by the Apena of Makun.	When Apena dies his brother arranges to give the women to Ewusi of Ijebu-Remo for a human sacrifice in connection with his enthronement. They escape.
1894, PRO <sup>62</sup>	Old woman named Ekundayo (of Ife)	Based in eastern coastal area	Owned by wife of Chief Ogunbawo named Ojayemi.	Ojayemi bought Ekundayo as a girl for domestic use. States that mistress intends to sell her to Ewusi of Sagamu (Ijebu) and purchase another girl.
1995, CMS <sup>64</sup>	Man named Ogunkojole	Based at Ilorin	Head slave of Emir	Ogunkojole was 'very wealthy and possesses many slaves of his own, yet he himself is the King's slave and cannot redeem himself.

<sup>61</sup> PP, Vol.60, No.34, Millson to Denton, Enc.2, Deposition of Wheto, 20th Jan 1889.

<sup>62</sup> PP, Vol.60, No.34, Millson to Denton, Enc.2, Deposition of Wheto, 20th Jan 1889.

<sup>63</sup> PRO, CO147/69, No.55, Moloney to Knutsford, and Enclosure 1, Statement of Mary Dota, 1889.

<sup>64</sup> PP, Vol.64, Colonies Nigeria, G. Carter to Ripon, 11 Oct 1893, p.23.

<sup>65</sup> PRO, CO879/41/475, No.3, Enc.2, Carter to Ripon, 1894.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> CMS, Farrow, *Niger and Yoruba Notes*, Vol.1, p.29, 1995.

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DATE/ SOURCE	GENDER/AGE/ NAME/ORIGIN	SLAVE ROUTE, LOCATION/S	TRADER/ OWNER/S	COMMENTS/HISTORY
1896, PRO <sup>15</sup>	2 women: Asiki (Hausa) & Ajara, and their two children.	Taken to Ilorin then sold ending up in Oloro.	Asiki & child given by Ilorin soldiers to superior called Nasamu then to Balogun Alanomu. Asiki then sold to man called Idowu.	Idowu used Asiki to pluck long reeds to make mats.

<sup>15</sup> PRO, CO879/45/509, No.39, Enc.1, Rohrweger to Chamberlain, 1896.

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