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Mutiat Titilope Kareem-Ojo
Emmanuel Alayande College, info@eacoedoyo.com

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International Trade and Women Merchants at Gbaji Textile Market, Ibadan

Mutiat Titilope Kareem-Ojo

This paper examines the historical background of Gbaji textile market in Ibadan and the response to international trade among women merchants at the market. It discusses the relationship between Lebanese traders in Nigeria and Yoruba women merchants at the market. In this connection, the paper explains how the presence of the Lebanese influenced textile trade. It also examines how women merchants adapted to the changes associated with international trade relations. The paper concludes by analyzing the changes that occurred in the market via the trading activities of women merchants.

Introduction

Women's activities and participation in the traditional modes of trade had been a peculiar and overwhelming attribute of pre-colonial African societies. The nature of Yoruba women's trade has for centuries been directly linked to inter-communal migration. The movement was tracked along trade routes, mostly geared towards the purchase and distribution of a commodity in a particular locality. As Christopher Fyfe (1965, p. 237) explained, local trade developed through inter-communal support:

Some have commodities that others lack, so they trade with one another; [one] may be full of fish, the other has no river but it is built on clay soil, which can be used to make pots. Each has something the other lacks and the inhabitants can make and exchange clay pots for fish.
In other words, no community could stand in isolation; the purpose and condition for trade movement depended on the available resources in the natural environment. Export trading usually comprised commodities that were end products from special craft industries. As Vidrovitch (1997, p. 31) explained, apart from basic trade in foodstuff, women were also involved in the production of diverse handicrafts. The availability of natural resources in a community served as a source of raw material for industrial production. For example, the presence of palm trees and cotton in Southern Nigeria accounted for large scale production of baskets and hand-woven textiles. Both the production and trade in traditional textiles (Aso-oke and Adire) were cultural heritage being passed from one generation to another. The need to create markets for indigenous textiles opened up trade relations with other communities in Yorubaland.

Yoruba women's involvement in long distance trade was born out of the desire to increase profits and extend the frontiers to access crafts and products of women from other communities. Their achievement was attached to the institution of trade guilds and lateral interactions with other communities. In Yorubaland for instance, the guilds such as Egbe Alaso (guild of textile dealers) and Egbe Olobi (guild of kolanut traders) were formed in line with commodity specialization in traditional markets. Both genders were involved in long distance trading activities but there were lines of specialization. The traders in each area of specialization were mobilized and grouped to form associations meant to enhance goodwill, support commercial friendship, and ensure continued supply of goods. Women's trading activities entailed the concept of space control. The space is usually in form of market site (Falola, 1995 p. 23). These markets were operated periodically at the frontage of the king's palace. In Samuel Johnson's (1921, p. 118) account of the history of Yorubas, the markets were central places dominated by women and it was a medium to exercise power. Among Yoruba women, the elderly and experienced ones constituted the institution of Iyalode (woman chief of the marketplace) who supervised and administered markets (Denzer, 1998, p. 6).

With the emergence of modern markets such as the Gbagi textile market, commercial places were established as daily markets. Gbagi textile market is one of the biggest markets of its type in Africa and it is mostly dominated by women, some of whom were interviewed to ascertain facts used in this paper. These women narrated their experiences with Lebanese traders and European firms in the market.

Definition of Terms: Market, Trade and Entrepreneurship

Market, as it is conceived in this paper, is a center for women's trading activities. Trading as it is practiced by Yoruba women could be seen as a process of
exchanging goods and making profit necessary for replenishing the business and ensuring continuity as well as meeting personal contingencies. The word market has varied meanings, most especially if analyzed from the field of economics. But the perspective in which it is used is attached to an institution, occurring at a definite place and involving the meeting of people there at an arranged time. Hodder (1967, p. 137) analyzed Ibadan markets as unique for special purposes in terms of commodities, either as daily or periodic markets. The chain of distribution and network of relationships among various communities has been source of commercial advantage that sustains supply of goods and services. Generally, women mostly dominate the informal sector in African societies and they are engaged in unwaged works which are solely on small scale (Mama, 1996, p. 24). Yoruba women’s informal sector activities involve craft production and trading which has market sites as the meeting point.

The existence of market as a trading institution since the pre-colonial period has opened up opportunities for Yoruba women to be involved in trade relations with other groups of people. Modern commercial centers emerged in the cities, with new transportation facilities that enhanced free movement of peoples (Europeans and Asians) involved in production, importation and distribution. Entrepreneurship is applied to the attributes of Yoruba women in trading activities. Before the 20th century, Yoruba women were dual entrepreneurs. That is they were both producers and traders. In simple terms, an entrepreneur controls the means and factors of production. It is the ability to act as agents of change through innovation (Hailey, 1992, p. 6). The function of an entrepreneur is to create new business and generate profits within the opportunities offered by the environment. Hence, Olson’s (1986, p. 29) definition of an entrepreneur fits this discourse. An entrepreneur is seen as an innovator and opportunistic decision maker, who assumes and determines situation and time to avoid risk and maximize profit.

The activities of Yoruba women in trading revolve around the functions highlighted. Since the integration of Nigeria into the realm of global business, Yoruba women have lost the wherewithal to be dual entrepreneurs, i.e., to produce and trade. They were mainly functioning as traders in modern commercial centers. Though Akinwumi’s (2000, p. 3) notes on Yoruba women’s entrepreneurship argued that it was only virile and sustainable in the pre-colonial period, but the attributes analyzed of Yoruba women still existed till contemporary times. The attributes were adapted to conform to the new trade relations in the city.
Gbagi market emerged through trading activities between immigrant and indigenous traders in Ibadan. Modern trading activities began when each European trading group intensified their Nigerian trade in the early 20th century. A destructive competition among foreign traders developed and continued until Nigerian market was left principally to the British (Ekundare, 1973, p. 300). British traders prevailed over other European traders largely because of the collaborative business relations of the Lebanese and Syrians, who operated mostly as middlemen between Nigerian traders and the British. The construction of railways linking Ibadan to Lagos was the major factor that led to the creation of trade centers. Within Ibadan, the railway line along Dugbe and Ogunpa inevitably drew European firms to establish trade stations, which were in the form of warehouses. The opportunity of getting supplies on wholesale led to the convergence of European and indigenous traders and transformed trading stations into market centers (Faluyi, 1996, p. 132).

In Ukwu's (1982, p. 170) follow up work on the formation of markets in West Africa with respect to Nigeria, modern developments facilitated the growth of markets such as buildings and well-planned geographical layout, with commercial charges in forms of rents and rates. The existence of modern markets was also facilitated through improved finance systems, currency valuation and communication systems among others. The advantages offered by these facilities increased the rate of convergence in the cities.

Before the influence of European firms, the areas around Gbagi was occupied by the autochthonous inhabitants of areas such as Inalende, Oke-Ado, Mokola, Isale-Ijebu, and so-forth. The peoples around these areas were internal migrants, including people from various parts of Yorubaland, the Nupe and the Hausa. The lands on which the market developed were in the form of residential houses owned by successful local merchants and residential landlords. However, the ownership of land by indigenes was subject to the native land acquisition proclamations which reduced the powers of indigenous ownership. The proclamation favored European firms which enabled the erection of warehouses.

The operations of pegging out the boundaries of the plots of land became a novelty that was locally adapted for the naming of the market (Mabogunje, 1968, p. 209). The word “to peg” was turned to Gbagi in Yoruba dialect. In another way, the word Gbagi was said to have been derived from “Gba igi mu,” which implies using or holding stick. The stick referred to is the yard-long ruler used by traders in measuring textiles for sale.
Yoruba women merchants achieved prominence in the market partly because of their shrewd and realistic business sense. This was coupled with the provision of modern facilities that in turn aided the migration into the city. The exportation of finished commodities of various sorts made indigenous production of craft peculiar to women less viable for continuity. This accounted for massive migration of women to urban areas in order to participate in and maximize opportunities provided by the new global business. The emergence of the Lebanese as middlemen changed the course of trade relations between Europeans and indigenes.

The Lebanese and the Growth of Gbagi Market

Considering the fact that Gbagi market emerged as an indigenous response to global changes, the impact of foreign traders cannot be underestimated in the growth of merchandise in the market. Initially, the Lebanese were concentrated in Sierra-Leone and Nigeria before 1950s, but as countries in West Africa were on the verge of decolonization, they naturalized as citizens, acquired land, and spread to other parts of West Africa (Vander Laan, 1975, p. 2). The majority of them arrived with little money because of the unfavorable political and socioeconomic situations in their home country. Some of them migrated with the intent of gaining employment, but few did because they had no useful experience and did not know any of the languages (Falola, 1990, p. 528).

Table 1: Lebanese Traders at Old Gbagi Market 1930-1970

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Number of shops</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P. Saliba</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Zabett</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. Dibbou</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abudu Sakis</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdallas</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germana Reis</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anwa Pratt</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mustafa Barber</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1R.S. Moukarim</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raymond Chididac</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Younan</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: National Archives, Ibadan (NAI), Oyo Province (Oyo Prof), File No. 1/1187, Ibadan Business Area; NAI, Ibadan Division (Ibadan Div), File No. 1/1851, Syrians in Ibadan; NAI, Chief Secretary’s Office (CSO), File No. 26/37362, Lebanese Motor Transport Owners.
Once in Nigeria, the Lebanese began trading as hawkers or peddlers. A description of their trade outlook showed that they went about with a board set out with few articles and strapped round the neck (Vander Laan, 1975, p. 105). Their stock in trade was mainly coral beads and they later concentrated on textiles. The main stock which was coral beads served as the derivative for their description in Yoruba language, which is Oyinbo Kora (literally white men [Oyinbo] selling coral beads [Kora]). They also rented shops from the indigenous occupants and they established transport services by operating lorries to facilitate movement of goods.23

In the course of their interactions with the host community, they were able to socialize by learning and speaking indigenous languages. This was one of the qualities needed to facilitate trade. As a result of the fact that they had little capital to commence large scale business, they took to petty trading by selling cheaply imported goods. They were able to identify and access market opportunities by integrating with the community.24 Their integration with the community initially occurred by way of renting houses built by indigenous (male) merchants around the trade station.

Textiles were one of the prominent articles which the new middlemen (the Lebanese) sought to control. Serving as middlemen in the textile trade was also more viable because the commodities needed to be imported: indigenous manufacturing companies could not meet demand, the technology was obsolete, and their output was low. In the 1940s, two indigenous textile companies were the Kano Citizen Trading Company financed by the Northern Region Development Board and a private Lagos factory technically assisted by the Federal Department of Commerce and Industries (Ekundare, 1973, p. 301). Their lack of entrepreneurial wherewithal and the increased rate of importation by European subsidiary companies made the Lebanese presence more germane to the growth of Gbagi market. The domination of the Lebanese in textile trading ushered in new trade relations.

As middlemen, the Lebanese stood to make huge returns on their investment. They competed with indigenous entrepreneurs such as Salami Agbaje, Seliya Jawondo, Humani Alaga, Sule Edidi, John Adelagun, Yusuf Agiri, among others.25 The competition between the Lebanese and indigenous entrepreneurs increased the rate of insecurity for the latter, while the former continued to expand trading activities. For instance, Salami Agbaje reputedly had to quit textile trade because of them (Ojo, 1988, p. 30). Overall, the rivalry and competition did not favor Nigerian merchants.

Their involvement in transport business was initially to explore the lorry as a means of hawking and marketing textiles to other communities in Ibadan.26
In one way or the other, the lorries affected the perception of indigenes. The lorries facilitated their movement into the city and this increased the rate at which petty traders in textiles evolved. Afterwards textile trade hawking was limited to shops at the market as a result of protest from local traders that the use of lorries gave the Lebanese undue advantage.

Another strategy employed by the Lebanese was the granting of small credit to the local traders. Moreover, they employed indigenes who served as clerks and secretaries in their shops and gave commission or wages. All these strategies used by the Lebanese increased the size and proportion of the market under their control.

Around the 1940s the growth in size of textile trade led to the need for expansion. The Lebanese applied for extension of land to build more shops and residential houses. This was strongly resisted by the local merchants. In spite of the resistance especially from women traders, the contributions of Lebanese in granting credit facilities and the payment of commission or wages ushered in new generation of textile traders.

Another factor that aided the growth in size of Gbagi market was the success of the Lebanese in acquiring entry permits. The permits were a formal means of justifying their stay in Nigeria. By the 1950s the entry permits granted increased the tempo of textile trade. It was also a period when indigenous textile manufacturing industries could not produce efficiently. Subsequently the level of importation increased. With the increase in the level of importation, there was expansion in the rate of local and global involvement in textile trading. To the local population, new entrants mostly dominated by women found it profitable to rely on the Lebanese to ensure supply.

Ibadan Market Women and Lebanese Textile Traders

In Mintz's analysis of Yoruba women (1971, p.251), trading activities is inherent amongst wives, in which the profit realized are expected to contribute to the upkeep of the family. This was especially for the financial demands of children's education given the polygamous nature of the family. In order to meet the family demands, the competition with foreign private middlemen became a major challenge that could not be resisted.

The relationship between the Lebanese and Yoruba market women is not so prominent in written works. There is limited variety of sources indicating the relationship. The most visible case study could be found in Ibadan which, with its peculiarity of emerging from the prestige of traditional military power, witnessed tremendous colonial interest. Colonial administration found Ibadan as a town that would be virile for political and economic management of
Yorubaland. This increased the provision of infrastructural facilities, which further encouraged the growth of markets around the railway stations.\textsuperscript{30}

Several prominent women traders were involved in the formation of this market in the 1910s, and in the establishment of administrative structures for the management of trade in Ibadan city. This is evident in Captain George Chardin Denton's treaty with Ibadan Chiefs in Samuel Johnson's account (1921, p.666). Iyalode Lanlatu emerged as a signatory in this treaty. She was at that time one of the most prominent women traders in Ibadan city. Then, how did the Lebanese fare better than the Yoruba women in later years?

The period between World War I and World War II could be described as years of consolidation for Lebanese trade in Ibadan. Coming in as migrants, they re-invested profits realized from hawking and filled the vacuum left by European subsidiary firms as a result of the wars. This elevated their status and placed them at a vantage position. The social factor of race/color could also be an advantage. This was because the Europeans perceived them as semi-whites, and related to them differently than Yoruba market women who were blacks. During this period, elites like Lanlatu were few among women traders because the colonial economy was still being adapted.

The institution of the \textit{Iyalode} title within the market political structures was a medium for women to air their grievances, most especially in the 1930s when the expansion of Lebanese trading activities was taking place in the textile as well as other sectors of the market.\textsuperscript{31} Ward Price (1939, p.235) explained that:

\begin{quote}
There is a small coterie of traders about whom there has been a good deal of argument, namely the Syrians and Lebanese. Their numbers are steadily increasing. They do not come and go like other foreigners. They keep to themselves having only trade relations with Europeans and native... quietly steadily, their profit mount up. Many chiefs and educated Nigerians regard them as obstacles to native traders.
\end{quote}

Being an obstacle to the indigenous traders, Lebanese activities had greater impact on women than men. Women were mostly retail traders who had no other business investment. Men, on the other hand could be described as equal to the Lebanese in terms of merchandise. Although the indigenous male merchants also had commercial rivalries with the Lebanese, their situation was different because they had other lines business.

During the period of Lanlatu as Iyalode (from the 1890s to 1910s), the competition with the Lebanese was not intense. However, her immediate
successors—Iyalode Ruqayat Ajisomo and Iyalode Humani Alaga, who were also leading textile traders—organized and mobilized women to face the competition head on. The activities of Humani Alaga to reduce the influence of Lebanese transformed into the formation of the Nigerian National Council of Women Societies (NCWS) in 1959 (Adeboye, 1996, p.332). The Council comprised the Ibadan Women Improvement Society and the Isabatudeen Society. Alaga monitored developments in various markets in Ibadan as a foundation member of NCWS. She emerged in 1934 as Iya Egbe Alaga, in 1950 as Iyalaje of Ibadan (leader of all women traders), and was the president of the Union of Women Traders in Cotton Goods and African Textile Traders Association.

The women associations in the market remained separate from those of the men. There was also Ibadan Native Traders Association under the leadership of men merchants such as Salami Agbaje, Adebisi Giwa, and so on. The male-female divergence was especially badly timed in the face of competition with the Lebanese. Humani Alaga organized a series of protests against the Lebanese. Specifically in 1938, she led the Union of Women Traders in a protest and petition to the Native Authority against the expansion of Lebanese trade to surrounding Ibadan districts which, hitherto, was the domain of women traders; but the the Lebanese continued to enjoy the support of the colonial administration.32

Women Merchants and Adaptation to International Trade

One of the most distinguished women merchants was Iyalode Humani Alaga. She was an asset to the development of textile trade in Ibadan (Akinola, 2005, p. 13). From her background, trade in textiles was one of the commercial ventures of her parents. She was an apprentice to her mother who moved to various parts of the country to buy and sell available goods. She easily adapted this early training to the requirements of city trading. By 1925, she started hawking textiles at the Gbagi market at the age of 20. Three years later, she acquired the shop Number 30, in the present Lebanon Street, Old Gbagi, Ibadan, with the sum of £100. By implication, Humani’s merchandise must have been a challenge to younger women, because before the 1920s, the general merchandise in foreign commodities was in the control of indigenous men and very few women. In addition, the Osomalo textile traders dominated by men of Ijesa origin were also at its peak (Aluko, 1994, p. 53). Women traders were few probably because most Yoruba women were left in the rural areas, while the labor requirements of the urban economy drafted men to the cities.
Table 2: Nationality of Companies Importing Textile to Ibadan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Companies</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gottschalk &amp; Co</td>
<td>Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagos &amp; Kano Trading Company</td>
<td>France-Compagnie française de l'Afrique occidentale (CFAO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miller Brothers</td>
<td>Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G.B. Ollivant</td>
<td>Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAC</td>
<td>Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Walkden &amp; Co</td>
<td>Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patterson-Zochonis</td>
<td>Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangalakis</td>
<td>Britain (Operated by Indians)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Holt</td>
<td>Britain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NAI, Ibadan Div, File No. 1/11187, Ibadan Business Area Allocation

Table 3: List of Principal Members of the Union of Women Traders in Cotton Goods in the 1940s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senior Division</th>
<th>Junior Division</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yesinle</td>
<td>Oyetoro Iya Iseku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Abeo</td>
<td>Moradehun Iya Egbe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laperi</td>
<td>Adeyinka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abioye</td>
<td>Abadatu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adepale</td>
<td>Ayiduniye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adetoro</td>
<td>Salamotu Iyalode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aijabi</td>
<td>Adeedewe Aduni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ola Idi Areere</td>
<td>Akinola Pidan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lalange</td>
<td>Wuraola Abolade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selia Atanda</td>
<td>Boade Ille Olubadan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In spite of the initial male dominated nature of textile trade, Humani was able to thrive as a dealer with direct links to European companies such as G.B. Ollivant, John Holt, and United African Company. There is no precise record of the number of women traders that apprenticed through her, but she employed the services of ten men as clerks, bookkeepers, and secretaries. The employment of service men suggests the influence the foreign presence had on the management of trade. This discretion displayed in business management enhanced her status in the market as she was made *Iya Egbe Alaso* (leader of
textile traders). The distinguishing charisma further enhanced her status to the Ibadan traditional political institution of Iyalode line (Denzer, 1998, p. 36).

Since she influenced the apprenticeship of some women traders, it was easy for her to inaugurate textile traders association to challenge the commercial rivalries encountered with the Lebanese. According to business ethics in Yoruba culture, the concept of Egbe (cooperative association) was a vital medium to enhance support for each other. This system was revived by Humani to carve out space for women to fulfil socio-political and economic needs. By its revival in textile trading, women merchants at Old Gbagi market were made to recognize the association by registering as active members. The registration was used to mobilize the population and present coherent views of women on the impact of the local and global forces affecting their trading activities. Specifically, in 1938 the Egbe Alaso (association of textile traders) was explicitly named “Union of Women Traders in Cotton Goods.”

Table 4: Nature of Trade Movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year in vogue</th>
<th>Country or City</th>
<th>Nature of textile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>China, Indonesia</td>
<td>China white cotton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Thailand, India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Abidjan, Kano, Indonesia</td>
<td>Guinea material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Ghana, Kano</td>
<td>Ankara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Korea, Dubai</td>
<td>Foil lace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>India, Italy</td>
<td>Dry cotton lace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Thailan</td>
<td>Satin lace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Gambia, Togo, Senegal,</td>
<td>Kampala/Adire*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Kampala/Adire, Ankara and Guinea are mostly African made products manufactured with modern technology. Markets for these textiles spread across countries in West Africa.

Sources: Table Compiled from field survey.

The hindrances that constrained women’s trading activities were clearly stated in a formal petition. It was the perception of women traders that they should be in charge of trade expansion to areas beyond the Gbagi market. The Lebanese were using the advantage of excess labor to promote sales outside the market. Thus, it was the demand of these women with the support of the traditional ruling council that women merchants must be registered irrespective
of their affinity either to indigenes or foreigners. It is pertinent to note that the strategy of employing clerks as sales agent increased also the involvement of women. This was because rural-urban drift made a lot of women seek cheap jobs to earn a living in the city.

The association (Egbe) was able to provide means of survival for women traders by recommending that trade licenses be used. In addition, the union requested that the Lebanese be restricted to the Gbagi market. The quest for immigrant restriction could be described as ambiguous, in view of the fact that the indigenous landlords had already collected high rents on buildings used by Lebanese for commercial purposes. In spite of this, the use of Egbe was a survival strategy that was borrowed from Yoruba culture as a way of ensuring collective bargaining and continuity within the realm of global business.

**The Impact of Lebanese Exit on Women's Entrepreneurship**

With the attainment of independence, the management of many foreign companies was transferred to Nigerians. The emergence of trade unions and cooperative movements among the labor force in the subsidiary companies facilitated the transfer of management and administration after independence. This transfer reduced the rate of exclusive foreign involvement in the importation of textiles. On the other hand, the Lebanese involvement as middlemen in textile trade was dwindling because they diversified into other lines of businesses while some returned to their home country. Western system of education also reduced the involvement of Lebanese; those had already naturalized as Nigerian citizens sent their children to Nigerian schools.

The gradual and situational exit of the Lebanese from textile trade was the prelude to the involvement of women in cross-border trade to expand the rate of networking for supplies. The pattern of women's movement was inter and intra-continental in nature. The need for cross-border trade arose out of the fact that the traditionally produced textiles had been subjected to importation because some of the raw materials required in production such as cotton threads were imported from Asian countries. The textile materials required for formal workplace outfits were also produced in Asian countries.

The change in social perceptions of Africans against the use of traditional textiles also informed the need for women to move beyond the borders of Nigeria. Hence, the consumer preference of textiles determined the nature of textiles that were in stock and this influenced the nature of trade movement. The trade movements involved temporary travels to countries where textiles are manufactured or purchased in bulk. The directions of trade movement
are usually to Thailand, China, and Indonesia, and to neighboring African countries such as Ghana, Togo, Senegal, Benin Republic, Gambia, and Cote d’Ivoire.

The new trade relations accompanied with cross-border trade opened up the need for market site relocation to reflect the influence of modernization. The market was relocated to New Ife Road, along Alakia on the Ife-Ibadan Expressway (Kareem-Ojo, 2008, p. 49), away from the railway lines which were no longer in operation.

The social impact is related to the change in the entrepreneurial identity of women merchants. The business travels widened the varieties of textile in stock. Women merchants innovated designs and patterns for production in Asian countries. The designs led to a kind of modified reversion to the use of African traditional textile such as Ankara, Adire, Guinea, Kampala, and Aso-oke. The entrepreneurial function also revived the use of natural scenes such as flowers and images of beauty in the African context. These designs cut across cultures in the African continent. The cross-cultural transfer of African designs and the Asian innovation in production has introduced insights to improving and adapting Aso-oke. The designs on imported damask and gele (for head tie and cap) are being adapted to by indigenous weavers to produce trendy patterns of Aso-oke. Therefore, the exposure of women to international trade relations has led to the re-emergence of textiles with African cultural motifs.

Conclusion

The withdrawal of Lebanese traders from Gbagi market gave an upper hand to indigenous traders mostly dominated by women. It exposed women to long distance trading activities and global business. These traders continued to operate through the mechanism of the market, but the new Gbagi market itself had been transformed into a global market, and has become one of the biggest textile markets in Africa. This ultramodern market was designed with sections for all sorts of textiles to ensure convenience of traders and customers in the market. In addition, it has police station, restaurants, fire station, parking spaces, banking spaces, power generating houses, petrol stations, clinics, post office, gate houses, and toilet blocks.

Modern trade in textiles also changed the nature of Yoruba women’s involvement. Their hold of textile trade entrepreneurship shaped and exposed their identity as potential traders. It enabled a kind of intercontinental transmission of culture and return to the use of African images on textiles. The success recorded in modernizing African textiles could serve in appraising
Yoruba women’s entrepreneurship. This is in concordance with Sudarkasa’s summation that the world of market is primarily a woman’s world in Yoruba society (Sudarkasa, 1973, p. 155).

References


Archival References

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Endnotes

1 These areas are occupied by migrants from other ethnic groups in Nigeria. It comprises the Ijebu, Nupe, Ibo, and Hausa peoples.
2 Most English words are usually conformed to suit quick pronunciation in Yoruba Language.
4 National Archives, Ibadan (NAI), Chief Secretary’s Office (CSO), File No. 26/37362, Lebanese Motor Transport Owners.
5 NAI, Oyo Province (Oyo Prof), File No. 1674, Lebanese in Ibadan.
6 NAI, Ibadan Division (Ibadan Div), File No. 1/1 1187, Ibadan Business Area Allocation.
7 NAI, Ibadan Div, File No. 1/1 1651, Union of Women Traders in Cotton Goods.
8 NAI, CSO, File No. 26/21526, Syrians
9 NAI, Oyo Prof, File no. 1674, Lebanese in Ibadan
10 There is the possibility that the act of giving commission or wages encouraged a lot of women. Given that fact, there was the zeal for movement of population to urban areas.
11 NAI, Oyo Prof, File No. 1674, Lebanese in Ibadan.
12 Full details on the institution of Iyalode in Ibadan can be found in La Ray Denzer’s monograph - The Iyalode in Ibadan Politics and Society 1850–1997 Ibadan Sam Bookman Publishers.
14 NAI, Ibadan Div, File No. 1/1 1651, Union of Women Traders in Cotton Goods
15 This was inferred from the report from Dokheeds Nigeria Limited, Estate Consultant in charge of Gbagi Market.