

Class, Gender, Sexuality, and Leadership in Bodija Market, Ibadan, Nigeria

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Bodija market is the largest informal foodstuff market in Ibadan, southwestern Nigeria. At its inception in the 1980s, leadership of the market space followed long-standing Yoruba tradition, prioritizing the role of older women. This pattern of leadership continued until the mid-1990s, when former government workers, laid off upon implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), moved into the market as traders and eventually as the leaders and market “technocrats.” As a consequence of this, the market women who had held informally recognized leadership positions were sidelined. This development also redefined class within the market structure. The new leaders have impacted the market administration by incorporating symbols of elitism in their leadership style.

Key words: Class, elitism, leadership, market women, Structural Adjustment Programme, Nigerian government workers, Yoruba

Markets are central to the growth and development of complex societies. The scale and wealth of a market reflects the community’s social well-being (Obateru 2003). In developing countries, markets are important socioeconomic institutions that accommodate a vast spectrum of social groups of the society, including people who are unable to secure employment in the civil service (Filani and Iyun 1997; Kaplow 2010; Omobowale 2011). Furthermore, the everyday interactions of a market exemplify larger class, gender, and leadership roles. This creates the market’s essential structure, which entails dominance and subordination (Plattner 1983).

Markets, in Africa and elsewhere, are embodiments of the larger society, incorporating unique subcultures of class, power, and gender relations (Olajubu 2003; Pietila 2007). While Bodija market may differ from other markets contextually, it is certainly a relevant case study in terms of street economy discourse (Hansen, Little, and Milgram 2013). Moreover, the Bodija market also represents a change in conventional landmarks and values in sub-Saharan market discourse. The focus of this study, therefore, is the class, gender, and leadership dynamics in the Bodija market (Ibadan). It first will outline the contextual reality of class, power, gender, and sexuality in the structuring of traditional

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markets, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (Oladejo 2015; Omobowale 2012). Bodija market, the largest foodstuff market in Nigeria, attracts vendors and buyers from all over Nigeria and across West Africa. It is the successor to the Oritamerin market, which had existed since the precolonial period (Olaoba 2000). Bodija market was created under a deliberate government policy in 1985 to provide more space for Oritamerin traders and buyers and to reduce the constant vehicular mishaps that were the hallmark of Oritamerin market. This study examines how the “victims” of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP)¹ in public and private sectors have moved into the market space and have biased market administration in favor of male dominance, forming a new elite class in the market. In particular, this new class of educated elites has emerged as market “technocrats” and assumed the leadership roles, thus redefining the structure of gender relations, class, and leadership in Bodija market.

The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) is an economic policy promoted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) beginning in the 1980s to help developing nations cope with economic recession (Anaemene 2013). It entails the roll-back of the government’s participation in economic activities, the provision of social services, and the adoption of neoliberal principles (Orubuloye and Oni 1996). In Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, SAP had debilitating effects, especially on the livelihood and even the survival of the poor (Ozoemenam 1991). Clark (1994:398) succinctly described the effects of SAP on the poor as follows:

The hardships suffered under SAP by traders and other low-income groups should not be underestimated. Imports and manufactured goods they once could not find to buy, because of shortages, they now cannot buy because of price. Local foodstuffs prices lag behind imports, but they still rise fast enough that missed meals and painful nutritional choices remain part of everyday life. Fees for medical care, schooling, water, and electricity have been raised high enough that some traders’ families . . . forget about junior secondary school, and even pull sick children out of the hospital. As women, traders bear a disproportionate burden in compensating with their own labor for services and supplies cut back or foregone and for the falling real incomes of other family members. Belt tightening becomes a misleading phrase under such conditions; one must first own a belt in order to tighten it. Further reductions in consumption simply bring hunger, illness, and the exhaustion of human capital, lowering production levels rather than raising them.

The effects of SAP were not limited to hardships experienced by vulnerable social groups: it has also had a compounding effect on market structure and social relations (Berry 2007; Clark 1994; Guyer and Hansen 2001; Lund and Boone 2013). The market is no longer a center of female dominance in leadership and administration (Olajubu 2003; Pietila 2007; Rosen 1983), but rather has become a space for everyday competition with men, where women have to utilize their sexuality and interpersonal dexterity to negotiate and gain access to power within the market (Omobowale 2012). The Bodija mar-

ket presents a scenario in which class, gender, and power are fused into one complicated socioeconomic situation.

Markets, as institutions, have been in existence since prehistoric times. In Africa, markets predate European colonialism, and, in fact, market interactions with European explorers and traders paved the way for colonization (Clark 1994; Falola and Heaton 2008). Gray and Birmingham (1970) provide an analysis of market systems in East and Central Africa, acknowledging the existence of markets and long-distance trade well before the colonial onslaught in Africa. They argue that market-oriented trade generated new forms of wealth and economic values among precolonial Africans. Also, Fadipe (1970) has shown that markets are a cornerstone of the Yoruba civilization of southwestern Nigeria (also see Sekoni 1994). As centers of production and distribution of goods and services, Yoruba market systems were integral to the local economy and wealth creation (Hodder 1965; Lydon 1996). Moreover, the precolonial Yoruba markets supported the indigenous social structure, with women in the forefront under the leadership of an *iyaloja* (mother of the market).² Thus, the eventual upheaval of the long-standing market system disrupted the entire community (Ogundeji 2006).

Yoruba markets attract people of diverse classes and financial capabilities, whose statuses can be inferred through their behavior within the market culture and spending habits. Simply put, the market is a space of social, economic, and symbolic transactions marked by different hierarchical structures, including the relative status of buyers and sellers, the types of sales spaces controlled by traders, and other accoutrements of the trade industry (Lawuyi 2005; Ogundeji 2006; Oladejo 2015). Markets are not only commercial centers but also important locations for cultural practices such as entertainment, meetings, disseminating information, and rituals (Akanmu 2007; Lawuyi 2005, 2012). The market serves as a metaphor for existence within human society; it accurately reflects major realities of life, such as social differentiation (Ogundeji 2006). “Market values may be understood not simply as momentary quantitative indicators or measurements of opportunity cost, but as social processes in which people continually access present circumstances and options in terms of their understandings of the past” (Berry 2007:57). Berry’s argument validates Guyer’s (1997, 2004) thesis that, as Africans cope with instability and multiple crises, they utilize collective responses reflecting the distinct logics in African economic life and the street economy of the Global South (see also Vaughan 1988; Hansen, Little, and Milgram 2013). Guyer’s hypothesis is very much applicable to the Yoruba market system, especially as revealed by the impact of SAP.

Although Yoruba society is patrilineal, women have traditionally been central to the market system from precolonial times (Olajubu 2003; Oyewumi 1997; Rosen 1983) to the present. This may be traced to the gender roles and principles of Yoruba traditional values (Bádéjo 1998). Whereas men were associated with roles such as farming, building houses, tapping palm trees, and smelting iron, women were involved in marketing farm produce, dyeing clothes, and other activities that were considered less strenuous and also allowed them to care for their children and households. Apart from the culturally constructed division of labor that situates women within the market system, Yoruba women

have been involved in both short- and long-distance trading. This stemmed from the accepted notion that trading enables women to respond better to household chores, child-bearing and nurturing. Though men also engage in trade, over the years the market space has usually been considered fundamentally a female space (Banwo 2004; Fadipe 1970; Olajubu 2003; Sekoni 1994). This role in the market space places females at the center of economic development and helps them generate income and economic power (Krieger 1997; Olajubu 2003).

Whereas other markets in Ibadan, such as Aleshinloye, Oje, Oja Oba, and Beere, are still structured along traditional lines, which give market leadership and dominance to women, in Bodija market, women have been largely displaced, with the market structure coming under the leadership of wealthy male “technocrats.” Hence, this study seeks to answer the following questions: (1) How is leadership structured in Bodija market? (2) What is the impact of class and power relations in Bodija market? and (3) How do women utilize sexuality to survive in the market space?

METHODS

The ethnographic design used in this study was adopted to record emic and etic perspectives on Bodija market and to understand the market’s sociocultural context within its natural sociopolitical setting in Ibadan (Clarke 2001; Creswell 2003). Data were collected through participant observation, four key informant interviews with Bodija market executives, and 200 in-depth interviews with leaders and members of the 21 traders’ subgroups at Bodija market between 2010 and 2013. The interview data were recorded over a ten-week period between July and September 2015. Participant observation continued throughout the duration of the study, from 2010 to 2015.

For this research, I—a Yoruba female—assumed the role of a temporary trader, with the permission of the market leader and the individual traders in whose shops and stalls I transacted business with customers. Listening to conversations, gossip, and rumors about the market and the larger society illuminated market structures, beliefs, and social relations for me. Listening to sermons and admonitions from Muslim clerics (*waasi*), Christian preachers (*iwasu*), and traditionalists of various other religions helped me to gain insight into relationships, lived realities, and ideological strategies within the market.³ In my role as trader, I attended meetings of the traders’ association as well as subgroup meetings, where I observed decision-making processes and interactions among traders. I also participated in ceremonies such as *ikomojade* (christening/naming), *oku-agba* (funeral for the aged deceased), “freedom” (graduation from apprenticeship), periodic market prayers (*adura oja*), and the market anniversary ceremony (*ajodun oja*).

During participant observation, I recorded aspects of market interactions that are often taken for granted: traders’ codes and language; sexualized and non-sexualized verbal advertisement; control, access, and utilization of space; gender relations; and verbal and physical sexual relations among traders. I also observed material and cultural signifiers of the market, such as dominance structures throughout the leadership hierarchy, the arrangement of stores and goods, type and placement of goods sold, physical appearance of

both sellers and buyers, and the different gestures that come with felicitation and discussions. These observations in turn informed the focus during all interviews.

The interviews were conducted in Yoruba, pidgin, and English as each case demanded. In some instances, an appointment was scheduled with informants at least a day or two before the interviews. Lists of topics to be discussed during the interview were drafted beforehand and were strictly followed as the interview progressed. The topics included those arising from participant observation; questions concerning attitudes toward and the values of space and class; and the relationship of sexuality, power relations, social organization, and economic negotiations in the market.

The key informants for this study were discovered in the course of participant observation in the market and were purposefully selected based on their preponderance of knowledge about the culture of Bodija market and willingness to share that knowledge with me (the researcher). The four informants, two male and two female, were representative of different economic groups in the market. They were between the ages of 42 and 66 years and had spent between 10 and 16 years in the market. The interview process with each of the key informants was extensive: cumulatively, each interview lasted for at least twenty-four (24) hours, and some totaled two days over repeated visits. The key informants were also observed and asked questions on certain issues that were considered private, especially their sexual life; this was done in order to identify sexual norms and values in Bodija market. Since these were experienced and knowledgeable members of the market, they also introduced the researcher to other important informants: the group of “in-depth interview” (IDI) informants. These informants were also purposely selected across major economic subgroups in the market. Five males and five females were selected from each subgroup (both leaders and members), and in all a total of 200 IDIs were conducted.⁴

In the course of this study, Bodija subcultural codes, symbols, language, sexuality norms and values were learnt and used in relating to all informants. Likewise, during observations and interviews, Yoruba cultural norms and values on decorum, respectfulness, openness, politeness, and gender-based “avoidance relationships,” especially with older males, were considered significant and observed. All interviewees participated of their own volition, and both traders and customers were aware that I was conducting research during my participant observation in my role as trader. The data were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed ethnographically.

MAJOR FINDINGS

The Original Leadership in Bodija Market

Across sub-Saharan Africa, women play a significant leadership role (Oyewumi 1997), and traditionally the marketplace (especially for groceries and produce) has been considered feminine space (Olajubu 2003). However, this has been changing lately due to the increasing influx of men into the market. At its inception in 1985, Bodija market leaders were predominantly middle-aged or elderly women who managed the market, adjudicated space conflicts, and represented the interests of the traders with the government.

Yoruba culture values their elders' pool of experience, wisdom, and knowledge as vital for societal success (A. O. Omobowale 2014), and therefore, early on, the market relied on the elders for administration. The Yoruba also believe that the market is a complex space where spirits, demons, and ancestors interact with the living (Ogundeji 2006). Since elders are assumed to have substantial experience as spiritual and mortal agents of social order, they can be relied upon to keep market interactions within normative expectations and to administer positive sanctions. The local belief system views market leadership as a tremendous responsibility, which the inexperienced and immature cannot successfully undertake; hence, in local parlance, "*atari ajanaku, ki se eru omode*" (an elephant's head [leadership] is too heavy for a child to bear). In fact, market leaders were often referred to as *aye* (those whose mystic powers enable them to relate with the intricacies of the supernatural and natural worlds and who can use their supernatural powers to subdue others).

Although older women dominated market leadership, not all elderly women in the market were able to become leaders. Apart from requiring specific personal and social attributes, including charisma, social capital, fame, patronage, ability to network, and material and social endowments, market leaders must also have demonstrated the ability to deal with the physical and spiritual intricacies of the market. This understanding will enable them to exercise influence, power, and control (Lawuyi 2005), singling them out as famous personalities within the market system.

At the founding of Bodija market, the offices of *iyaloja* (market mother) and *babaloja* (market father) were already in place. The *babaloja* ideally plays a supporting role to the *iyaloja* by settling disputes and conflicts in the market, especially among the men; seeing to the security situation of the market; and giving "non-binding" suggestions to the *iyaloja*. These leaders were supported by the heads of two newly created traders' subgroups: Binukonu (Unity of Purpose) and Ifelodun (Love Is Sweet). Traders were at liberty to join any of the subgroups early on. There were also a few charismatic leaders who did not hold official positions but had some influence because of their material success, shrewdness, and philanthropy, which endeared them to the traders and market leaders.

Bodija market was founded during the long years of the military dictatorship in Nigeria (Olaoba 2000) (Figure 1). The leaders had a limited relationship with and access to the state, and although they were recognized by and subject to the military government of Oyo state, they were primarily involved in matters internal to the market, where they were respected and referred to as elders, helpers, and leaders. Though they had a strong hold on the market's internal politics and administration, they often sent younger, literate traders to meet and interact with government representatives. This gradually created a class of "technocrats" among market traders, who became the think tank and the custodians of "modern knowledge" in the market. The ranks of these market technocrats swelled following the implementation of SAP in Nigeria in late 1986 and the subsequent movement of educated but unemployed or recently terminated government and private-sector workers (M. O. Omobowale 2014). Since the majority of the leaders and younger traders consisted of (largely uneducated) women who were preoccupied with conflict set-



Figure 1. View of Bodija Market (Ibadan, Nigeria).

tlement and price regulation in the market, class and gendered hierarchies were almost invisible. Despite the seemingly flat structure of authority, the market hierarchy was in fact subtly inspired by a “dynamic, competitive struggle for self-aggrandizement which permeated the [market] from bottom to top” (Barber 1991:183). This struggle would eventually lead to a change in the market’s gender and class structure.

Contemporary Class and Power Relations in Bodija Market

Between 1985 and 2003, Bodija market leadership was controlled by the elderly under the supervision of the *iyaloja*, with the support of the *babaloja*. The leadership of the elders was challenged by relatively younger men, typically under 50 years of age. This was a departure from cultural values that held the elderly in awe and admiration as custodians of knowledge. The young were *omode*—people who lacked experience in the structure of both the temporal and the mystical (*aye*), two critical components which make the market a social as well as an economic space (Nolte 2004). However, the normative and mystic conceptions integral to the prevalent belief system and social structure were discounted by the realities of the day. These young men, mostly literate and semi-educated, had been dismissed from government service and could not find other employment because of SAP (M. O. Omobowale 2014). With fluid job opportunities, markets provided avenues of economic advancement. These semi-educated traders formed a new, critical sector of the market, becoming market technocrats.

These technocrats were somewhat distinguished and guided by modern values and the administrative patterns they had acquired from the civil service. Because of their experience and exposure, these technocrats were also aware of the nexus between politics and the economy. They provided a link to the state, initially working as “errand men” for elderly market leaders, helping to write letters and representing the market in meetings with government officials. They possessed modern administrative skills, including literacy, and a working knowledge of English, with which they could present a degree of competence to both market leaders and the government in affairs relating to the market. Educated young men served as good representatives of elderly market leaders, and they also presented an acceptable image of market leadership to which the government employees could conveniently relate.

The data from personal interaction and interviews show that some of the male traders came into the market with significant capital saved during their employment in the civil service, while others who started with little capital were later able to secure bank loans to expand their businesses. One trader stated:

When we came to the market, I had the capital I gathered from my gratuity [severance payout], and many of us had the cash to do business. Some got bank loans using their houses as collateral, and we were all fine. However, those elders calling themselves leaders had no capital; they only come to the market in the morning, extort from everyone, and go back home in the evening with money in their pockets. That was one of the reasons we moved to change the market leadership.

Securing bank loans is a step uneducated market women can rarely take. They lack the necessary collateral and documentation and are also discouraged by normative beliefs, which describe bank lending as exploitative, even when it is accessible (A. O. Omobowale 2014). To them, bank loans are seen as “*gbomu le lantern*” (putting their breasts on a [hot] lantern),⁵ indicating a very negative attitude toward risk-taking. The younger men’s willingness and ability to take financial risks not only helped them expand their businesses, it also earned them respect and popularity in the market. By helping other traders with loans or facilitating loans from the bank, they developed a clientele of local supporters, including apprentices. Many of the newcomers used their capital to acquire market stalls and then sublet them to other traders. The young traders were also able to bring new ideas to bear on the development of the market. With their outspoken interest in improving the physical conditions of the market and helping less-advantaged traders, these market technocrats became popular and gradually supplanted the traditional leadership.

One interviewee described how the elderly leadership became unpopular, which paved the way for the younger leaders:

One of the biggest problems in the market at that time was the market roads. The market roads were so bad, filled with bad-smelling black mud, and we suggested that we go round to collect money from traders in the market and ask the govern-

ment to come in and help us. However, aged leaders rejected the view. They said the market road is just okay, that for some spiritual reasons the road should be left like that.

According to this interviewee, the local belief system assumed that markets should be dirty, muddy, and difficult to navigate. The young men were questioning the status quo. They wanted to improve the market infrastructure, while elderly leadership did not want to change. The elders were condemned by the young men for not managing the market well, for being exploitative, and for retaining traditional strategies that were not geared toward market development. An interviewee said:

We realized that the market was not well managed by the ruling elders because they were old; many of them were in their 70s or 80s. They used their offices as means of making money. They had no other business in the market than to milk traders. They would just be there from morning till evening, sending messages out to traders to get what they want, like food, without paying; they saw themselves as lords and masters of the market, in this twenty-first century.

The elders were quickly seen as part of the old order that had to be replaced. Young, dynamic, and resourceful traders no longer saw old age as the fulcrum of wisdom but rather as indicative of greed, corruption, inefficiency, and autocratic leadership. It was evident to the younger traders that market leadership must be modern, educated, mobile, and pragmatic. Rejecting spiritual and mystic beliefs, the young wanted their market leaders to have a vision and mission focused on problem-solving, especially in the area of market infrastructure, to advance transactions and traders' wealth. Covertly, however, young male traders and technocrats also wanted to improve their own positions: they were no longer content with being errand men, connecting the market to the formal world. They wanted to be fully in charge of a market administrative system somewhat modeled after government or business systems.

Their opportunity came with Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Nigeria transitioned from military to civilian rule in 1999. In Oyo state, the Alliance for Democracy (AD) won the elections, while the People's Democratic Party (PDP) formed in opposition. The AD represented the old order in Yoruba politics. It largely consisted of older politicians who had been in office since the 1950s (Omobowale and Olutayo 2007). The PDP provided an avenue for younger and other aspiring politicians who had been edged out of the AD. It was also the party of the market technocrats. Surprisingly, the PDP won the elections in Oyo state in 2003. This victory motivated the young; they saw it as a sign that they could also take over market leadership. With the support of the newly installed PDP government, a "revolution" was launched to displace the older market leadership. The process took place during a one-day seminar organized by the young technocrats, ostensibly to improve the market. They sought and received approval from the existing leadership for the seminar. Attendees included the market leadership and representatives of

the state market association and the state government. During the seminar, the young technocrats held a vote of no-confidence and successfully passed a resolution to change the administrative system from the traditional *iyaloja-babalaja* structure to an executive chairmanship model (Okosun and Akinpade 2010). This revolution had the blessing of the Oyo state government and the executives of the state market association (guided by the government). The traditional leadership filed a petition in court, but it was unsuccessful because the court favored the young elite. A former member of the leadership, Baba L'Oyo (pseudonym; 82 years old at the time of the interview, 2010) explained how their lack of education and political knowledge placed them at a disadvantage:

On that day, those “children” (*awon omode yen*) said they wanted to do a talk, and you know we are not educated, so we allowed them, and in the course of the program they turned against us, there were serious arguments and debates, accusations and counter accusations, curses and threats. It was there that Baale (overall chief or head of market leaders in Ibadan) and others said we should step aside for the young people to take over.

The takeover did not come easy. It resulted in violent clashes between the agitators and the supporters of the existing leadership, who described the youth as rude, arrogant, wealthy, inexperienced, and power-hungry. As recalled by Oriefonka (a pseudonym—“Your Head Has Scattered”—age 42 at time of interview, in Bodija market), who was involved in the conflict:

There was a time during the [leadership] struggle [of 2003] that the opponents came with a cutlass, poisonous knives, local guns, and many charms; we also [had] to draw out our weapons, and we gave it to them man to man. In the process the police came, and they [the opponents] ran away. The issue later landed in court, and we won. . . .

Weapons including knives, cutlasses, and broken bottles were freely used. In the end, the young elites had the upper hand and received recognition by the state.

This revolution produced a unique system of authority in the market. Bodija market leadership is now male-dominated, and an examination of the academic and social credentials of men in the newly created leadership positions illustrates the importance of education as well as political and social connections outside the market. The new chairman of the market has a technical college certificate and worked for Radio Nigeria Ibadan as a clerk before retiring to do business in the market in the early 1990s. The secretary has an ordinary national diploma (OND) from a polytechnical institute and worked for a private firm before setting up business in the market in 1996. The market's public relations officer has an OND in accountancy and worked for the now-defunct National Bank of Nigeria before he joined his mother in the market as a trader. Thus, the new market leaders are educated and, unlike their predecessors, have knowledge of

bureaucratic power; they have experience which helped them draw on resources outside the market.

Subsequent, unexplained illnesses and deaths among some of the spearheads of the technocrat takeover frightened the market public, who saw them as evidence of mystical machinations (*juju*) by the former leaders, who understood and could control the powers of *aye*. According to an executive of the Bodija market association, “At a stage, in April 2009, we lost the Chairman; not too long after that we also lost the treasurer and some influential people in the struggle. Those old wizards killed them; they think if they do that we will succumb to their dictates, but we remain strong even after these events.” While the elders were tagged as evil, wizards, sorcerers, and murderers, they were also patronized and appealed to for peace. A new arrangement in Bodija market gives symbolic recognition to the *iyaloja* and *babaloja*, along with other former market leaders. They receive cash gifts and foodstuffs as former leaders; however, real power and control of the market lies with the new class of elite male technocrats.

Masculine Leadership and Feminine Sexuality

The leadership change in Bodija market facilitated some positive infrastructural and administrative development. At the time of my research, the market had borehole water, a public toilet, and a partially graded road. The *ile-egbe* (the market association’s building) had been renovated. Additionally, subunits of the traders’ associations were created representing related categories of goods and services. The new technocrat-leaders also introduced an annual celebration of the market’s founding, which features medical and financial seminars. The finale of the anniversary is a large party involving popular local *fuji* musicians. Moreover, the new leadership has published a monograph on the activities of the market and its association. All these developments give a modern dimension to the market administration.

The educated technocrats have also modernized market leadership structure, and the executive offices are all held by men: the chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, financial secretary, public relations officer, chief whip, subcommittee chairmen, and ex-officio. The new structure also includes the “G-15,” comprising 15 literate and prominent male traders championing market democracy and modern market administration. The G-15 is recognized in the market’s constitution, which also states that the G-15 cannot be proscribed (Okosun and Akinpade 2010). The G-15 has a chairman, and the group influences the decisions of the market’s executive officers. It plays an active role in market politics, its members are eligible to run for executive positions, life-membership is allowed, and market chairs return to the G-15 at the end of their tenures. In short, the G-15 is a strong, male-dominated power bloc consisting of literate technocrats who are influencing market politics and administration.

The restructuring of the market’s administration also had an impact on everyday practices. The new leaders devolved the market association structure from two to 21 sub-associations, with predominantly male sub-executives subject to the oversight of the central executives. Although one of the motives might have been self-aggrandizement

by the young rebels and their supporters, who wanted to hold management positions, this development also largely democratized the process of decision-making in the market: with more associations, representation increased because traders could now air their views through their group leaders. Furthermore, the categorization resulted in a system in which men are routinely voted into tenured leadership positions. A further look at the hierarchy of the new leadership, both the central and the sub-association executives, illustrates the degree of sophistication and innovation introduced into the market administration. These offices mirror the contemporary leadership system and the administrative style of the state, thus validating the political sphere from which the new market technocrat leaders draw their support. This administration structure functions financially in a similar way to government as well. Interviewed market leaders claim that the monthly costs of administration range between ₦500,000 and ₦800,000 (\$3,030–\$4,848),⁶ but the amount of monthly income was not disclosed. Substantial amounts of money are generated daily through market tolls, permits, and unregulated but forced contributions, for which the leadership does not have to account as long as they can keep the market running without conflict.

This new administrative structure does not include women in leadership positions. As a representative example, the *iyaloja* has been reduced to a figurehead without a recognizable administrative role. When the position became vacant in 2006, the office remained unfilled until 2016. For one thing, there is a general belief that women are incapable of confidentiality and ensuring leadership unity. According to one key informant, “*nkan t’odo ba ti de ko le rita ni ti okunrin, sugbon awon obirin enu won kobo*” (for men, whatever a mortar covers cannot see the outside,⁷ but women cannot keep sealed lips; recorded during an interview in Bodija, 2013). Another informant said: “We cannot admit them because women have no Adam’s apple (larynx); they are fond of creating chaos, their mouth is loose, and [they] are very cowardly; if a group is peaceful and a woman joined, chaos will be let loose” (recorded during a key informant interview in Bodija, 2013). Because of this mistrust, women are denied positions in both market administration and external relations with state officials. Iya Mutia, a female trader, spoke her mind regarding this new market leadership: “The men represent us with the government; we women cannot go there. How do we not know what goes on there? Our fathers should settle everything [with an expression of disapproval]” (the informant was 61 years old at the time of the interview in Bodija market, 2010). Furthermore, women are also at a distinct disadvantage in the new leadership structure dominated by semi-educated and literate technocrats. This is not to say that there are no literate female traders. There are a few, but they appear to be more interested in profit-making than in market politics, partly because they consider it a muddy and dangerous terrain for women. The insinuation is that only men can negotiate the dangerous and more rigid terrain of this patriarchal space divided by power blocks.

Although women are largely excluded from direct administrative control, they have devised alternative means of influence. One potent method is through sexuality—“the explanation for everything” (Foucault 1978:78). Female traders have found they can

use their sexuality as a tool to negotiate access to power, including having sexual relationships with influential market leaders. Sexuality is an “unrepressed” explanation for gender relations in Bodija market, just as in other spaces (Tamale 2011). Use of sexuality to access power was thoroughly discouraged under traditional leadership, but within the contemporary market subculture, sexuality has become a visible tool of negotiation. Women who make themselves sexually available are exploiting their sexual power to access market controllers to their advantage. Such sexually available women may play games of reticence (locally described as being “hard to get”), in a bid to extract greater advantage. The slogan of the women who consciously draw on their sexual powers is explicit: “*tita lobo, dido loko*” (the vagina is for sale; the penis must penetrate). The market leaders willing to engage with such women are openly referred to as *oko awon omo ele* (husband of beautiful girls), *oko awon omoge* (husband of young damsels), or *oko awon to “damo” eleyinju ege* (husband of women with sexually fascinating eyes). Also, many of these male market elites have sexually inspired nicknames, such as *epon* (testicles), *paraga* (a local aphrodisiac), and *sweswe* (this term has no direct gloss in the local Yoruba language, but it is interpreted as being handsome and sexually active in the market). Women involved in sexual relations with market leaders are sometimes referred to as *awon alagbara oja* (the powerful ones in the market). Through the use of their sexuality, they influence decision-making in their favor. A female informant made the following statement to comfort a female friend, who was involved in a contest over space with a male trader: “*Ma worry, a lowo, a lenu, a mo’yan, atun ni oko*” (do not worry, we have money, we are vocal, we are famous, and we have a penis). Here the woman’s claim of “having a penis” reflects the use of her sexuality to influence market leadership and obtain favors; indeed, the case was eventually settled in favor of her friend.

The politics of sex and sexuality and the economics thereof in Bodija market organization is, on the one hand, a manifestation of male exploitation of female sexuality, but on the other, it simultaneously represents women’s ownership of their erotic powers to negotiate their access to, presence, and relevance in the market at little or no material cost. Market sexual norms have been redefined from chastity and fidelity to open sexuality. Many men and women in the market are involved in the politics of sex and sexuality. It is so common that traders call Bodija market a “polygamous community.” Infidelity among traders is largely overlooked and subtly encouraged, and hence women have partial access to the male-dominated market leadership through their sexuality.

CONCLUSION

Male domination in the administration of Bodija market is one of the examples of structural reforms induced in Nigeria by the introduction of SAP in 1986. The change started with the movement of workers from the civil service and private organizations into the market. This new set of traders formed a knowledgeable class who initially provided their technical expertise to the market leadership under the traditional executive powers. Moving from the sidelines to mainstream market politics, members of this new, educated, technocrat class have taken over the market administration and introduced

a semblance of democracy via an imposed constitution. Nevertheless, the constitution has enabled the dominance of privileged, literate, and wealthy male traders and has led to a system of elite patriarchal control. Stripped of their traditional roles and real participation in market access and administration, female traders now negotiate their relevance through their sexuality.

NOTES

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1. SAPs are restrictive economic policies promoted by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund beginning in the 1980s to assist developing nations cope with economic recession. SAPs require a “conscious change in the fundamental nature of economic relations within a society.” In the case of Nigeria, this program was judged to have substantial adverse effects, especially on livelihood and survival (Mbachu 1991)

2. An *iyaloja* was a female leader who oversaw the affairs and administration of the market space. She worked with female deputies and was considered very influential. She was responsible for the management of the market, conflict resolution, and the representation of the interests of the market and market women (Marshall 1964).

3. A *waasi* (Islamic) or an *iwasu* (Christian) is a homily or sermon.

4. At the request of the interviewees, some names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

5. Literally, “put your breast on a hot lantern” (a loan with a high interest rate that results in a negative impact on the trader’s profit margin).

6. Based on the exchange rate in 2013–2014 at ₦165/US\$1.

7. A mortar among the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria is a carved hardwood bowl used for pounding medicines and foodstuffs. When turned upside down to cover an item, it is assumed that such an item will be firmly secured.

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