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Igbo Women in the Economic History of Lagos, 1900-1990: An Exploratory Study, Nigeria

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Abstract:

This article examines the role of Igbo women in the economic history of Lagos. The study is important because the contributions of these women to the economic development of Lagos have not received attention in major debates on women and development. Besides, much has been written on the entrepreneurial skill of Igbo men but not the women. Therefore this paper argues that the commercial and small scale industries of Igbo women have been a factor in the development and urbanisation of Lagos. The study utilises both primary and secondary source to substantiate the facts. The primary sources include personal interview and newspaper articles, while the secondary sources comprise journals, internet and published works. This study establishes that despite the contributions of these women they have remained marginalised in government empowerment and loan acquisition. The paper concludes that government needs to encourage Igbo women to contribute effectively to national development.

Keywords: Development, economy, Igbo-women, production, Lagos

1. Introduction

The Igbo ethnic group occupied the eastern region of Nigeria and are widely known as migrant traders, producers, and farmers. An important physical feature of their environment is the Niger River. This is because of the manner it shaped their geography, climate, and occupation. The Niger River also serves as a means of transportation, a source of water supply, and a highway of commerce and contact (Northrup, 1972: 217-236). Igboland has a tropical climate and the average annual temperature of about 80° F., an annual range of between 5° and 10°, its rainy and dry seasons are well marked (Uchendu, 1965, 1). In politics and culture, some Igbo areas developed highly titled institutions, while others evolved secret societies but within the larger family of segmentary political system (Falola, Mahadi, Uhomobhi, and Anyanwu, 1993, 87-88). The village-group authority was dispersed, with lineage and non-lineage institutions, hereditary and non-hereditary office-holders, as well as men and women playing official roles in government (Afigbo, 1980, 1-18). The mobility of the Igbo, according to report has been attributed to land question, lack of soil fertility, and high population density. However, records also show that the increase in migrant labour was not only due to land shortages (Olutayo, 1999: 147-174) and other corollary factors, but the theory of social stratification of the Igbo society, especially the *Osu* culture, and respect for wealth. Others have been explained in terms of lack of industrial complexes in the region, and the effects of the Nigerian Civil War (1967- 1970), to mention but a few. (Aworawo, Aluede, Agugua, 2019)

My objective in this paper is to explore the role of Igbo women in the economy of Lagos. It is motivated by Judith Van Allen's assertion that, 'Igbo women haven't taken leadership roles in modern local government, nationalist movements and national government and what roles they have played have not been investigated by scholars. (Allen, 1972: 165-182) Therefore, this paper is significant because there is no existing study of this nature to the best of our knowledge. The paper demonstrates that the involvement of Igbo women in the economy of Lagos was fortuitous and has contributed to food security, urbanisation, and development.

To interrogate these facts, the paper adopts a descriptive and analytical approach in analyzing and interpreting the data used in the study. Primary and secondary sources of data are not only connected but synthesised, and these include personal interviews, published works, journals, internet sources. The historiography of the Igbo indicates that a number of works exist and these include those by (Isichei, 1977; Njoku and Iwuagwu, (eds), 2008; Ofomata, 2002; Njoku, 2001; Afigbo, 1980; Orugun, and Nafiu, 2014; Korieh, 2001; Chinweuba, and Ezeugwu, 2017), and others. These works are useful for the insights they provide on the economy, politics and social life of the people. For example, the works of Isichei, and Ofomata discuss the general history of the Igbo people, politics, social and cultural organisation, while others underscore the economic life of men. Notwithstanding the efforts of these scholars, they have overlooked the role of Igbo women in the economic development of Lagos, which is the focus of this paper.

The analysis is situated in the larger context of gender, development and power. Therefore we shall discuss the background to Igbo migration, the social origins of Igbo women in Lagos, and Igbo women in agriculture. Others include, craft and industry, trade and markets, as well as formal sector economy.

2. Background to Igbo Migration

Mobility among Igbo men and women began in the distant past and has brought with it knowledge and skill in agriculture, craft and industry and trade. To some others, it was a misadventure since they lost most of their property in crisis. Since colonial Nigeria, migration has been a part of the Igbo culture because of wage and non-wage earning labour in many parts of Africa and this has taken them to Fernando-Po, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Gold coast, and other countries (Uchendu, 1976, 211). The groups involved in these movements, whether internal or inter-territorial, originate in areas that are remote from markets, where the economy is predominantly of the subsistence type, and where opportunities to earn cash are rare (Osoba, 1969: 515-538). It is for this reason that their business exploits has been likened to that of the Israelites, which reinforced the argument about their origin from the East (Ijeoma, 2002, 39-54). Today, 'Igbo' is used in three senses: to refer to Igbo territory, to the domestic speakers of the language, and to the language spoken by them. The Igbo migrant labour was at first limited to their environs - Tiv, Ibibio, Aboh and the communities in the lower Niger where they engaged in agriculture, palm-oil economy, palm wine production, potent brew, craft and industry.

The Igbo remained an important itinerant ethnic group because their craft work at Igbo-Ukwu was closely tied up with long distance trade, the copper used in the bronzes was necessarily of Saharan or trans-Saharan origin, while a considerable quantity of the 165,000 beads were of Indian manufacture with some perhaps from Venice (Shaw, 1970, 225-239). The economic mobility of the Igbo became evident during the construction of railway from the North to the East, and West to the North in the 1890s (Tamuno, 1964: 279-292). During this period, they settled along the routes wherever there was a camp. The camps were settlements for workers and their families, especially the Igbo who came from distance locations to work on rail tracks. Providing a clue, one of the scholars said that they came first of all singly. After sometime, they brought their wives, 'small brothers' and sisters, usually to help them in domestic work. Along the railway route where there were camps in the North, the Ibos settled down with their families and began to farm the land around the camps (Amali, 1967, 7; Isichei, 1977, 210). It was from railway job that most of them diversified into trade and gradually began to buy utility vehicles for delivery services to customers in neighboring towns, while others engage as produce buyers. The question therefore is when did the migration of Igbo women become noticeable in Lagos?

3. Social Origins of Igbo Women in Lagos

The actual date of Igbo migration to Lagos cannot be ascertained with precision other than to state that it could have started when the Yoruba Civil Wars ended at about 1893 (Akinjogbin ed. 1998, ix). The coming of Igbo women to Lagos was gradual at the initial stage but increased after the Second World War as they came in groups from different localities. 'Records show that by 1911 the population of this group in Lagos was about 291 and by 1921 it rose to 1,609 and most of them men and thirty years later, there were 31, 887. They formed 44.6 per cent of the non-Yoruba inhabitants of Lagos; many of them live in Yaba, or along the Ikorodu and Agege roads (Isichei, 1977, 210) where they worked in railway station and women in trade and agriculture. The choice of these areas was due to proximity to the Headquarters of the Nigerian Railway Corporation at Ebute-Metta. Another advantage was that these areas had large population of people who bought goods from Igbo and Yoruba women traders.

In successive years, more Igbo came to settle in Lagos districts following the demobilisation of Nigerian soldiers in post-World War II. Most of them collected their gratuities and ventured into new endeavours with their wives because they have learned new skills and trades, as well as English language in the army (Coleman, 1958, 254). Therefore, the Igbo formed 53.5 per cent of non-Edo inhabitants of Benin, 44.6 per cent of the non-Yoruba and 38 per cent of the non-northern inhabitants of Kaduna (Coleman, 1958, 77). This is represented on the table below.

City	Indigenous Group	Percentage of Ibos In Non-Indigenous Population
Lagos	Yoruba	44.6
Benin City	Edo	53.5
Sapele	Urhobo	46.0
Calabar	Efik	50.7
Kano	Hausa	38.0
Zaria	Hausa	39.0
Kaduna	Mixed	40.7

*Table 1: Degree of Ibo Urbanisation outside Iboland
(Early 1950's)*

Source: James S. Coleman, Nigeria: Background to Nationalism Reprint (Berkeley: 1958), 77

The increase in population of the Igbo after independence has been attributed to the demobilisation of the Biafran soldiers and school leavers in search of work in the industrial establishments in Lagos (Udo, 1977: 1-15) Most of them came with their wives, sisters, housemaids and apprentices. Soldiers' wives whose husbands died in the Nigerian Civil War also came with their children because of the opportunities for trade and farming, while others entered into wage-earning employment to make ends meet. This cogently supports the theory of Gunnar Myrdal when he said that it is such regions and localities where economic activity is expanding that attract immigration from other parts of the country (Myrdal, 1969, 27; Udo, 1977: 6)

Therefore it is noted from our discussion that the migration of the Igbo women began in colonial period. Most of them came with their husbands to Lagos; some others were wives of demobilised soldiers in the Second World War whose

husbands had left for Fernando Po, Rio Muni and Gabon, and a great number came without their husbands just to exploit available opportunities in Lagos. Since 'there is no published study from which quantitative data on this problem can be drawn, a serious drawback to regional comparison is that migrant labour is either undefined or vaguely defined (Uchendu, 1965, 32-33). However it is believed that about one million Igbo women lived on agriculture, production, trade and market, wage and non-wage earning labour of Lagos (Nzekwue, 2019).

Year	No. Of Men	Accompanying Wives	Accompanying Children
1947	2,781	X	x
1948	2,888	X	x
1954/55	5,615	556	342
1959/60	7,861	X	x
x = Figures Not Given			

Table 2: Recruitment of Labour from Nigeria to Fernando Po and Rio Muni

Source: S.O. Osoba, *The Phenomenon of Labour Migration in the Era of British Colonial Rule: A Neglected Aspect of Nigeria's Social History*, *The Journal of The Historical Society of Nigeria* IV, 4 (June 1969), 515-538

This explains that migration in colonial Nigeria was rampant in the regions due to unemployment and poor living standards. It was also heightened by the British colonial policy which brought about the expropriation of the country's resources without commiserate development. However, Osoba pointed out that:

The 1954/55 Annual Report on the Department of Labour estimates the number of Nigeria's working in Fernando Po at about 15,800 but there is justifiable reason for regarding this figure as a substantial underestimation. In the first instance this figure could not have included the hundreds, possibly thousands of migrants who slipped into the Spanish Island without registering with the Nigerian Department of Labour and without valid travelling documents (Osoba, 1969: 520). This study agrees with the above statement that there were undocumented labour migrants who slipped into the Spanish Islands to make ends meet. They stayed with friends and relations until they integrate into the society, and Igbo men and women were part of them.

3.1. Agricultural Production

Since the pre-colonial period, African societies depended on agriculture for its food security and income generation, and the Igbo women were no exception. The economic foundations of Igbo society in the pre-colonial period rested on three legs, namely agriculture, trade and manufacture. It is noted that agriculture was the main economic activity, with trade and manufacture coming as subsidiaries (Afigbo, 1980, 18) Agricultural activities comprised of farming, animal production, and fishing. Igbo women were visible in all these productive activities, and women's role extends throughout the entire food system – 50% storage; 100%, processing, 60% marketing; 100% cooking. (Akinrinade, 1990) The commitment of the women in agriculture was primarily to feed the family and earn a little income. Consequently Igbo culture celebrated food and integrated it into their socio-cultural activities of the new yam festival, marriages, naming ceremonies and burial rites. The absence of food or hospitality is a humiliating experience among the Igbo because it signified a loss of prestige. (Uchendu, 1965, 71). The question therefore is what were the factors that favoured Igbo women in the agricultural activities of colonial Lagos?

A number of factors favoured the activities of women in agriculture. First, was sex role in colonial economy of Nigeria, second, was the geographical and climatic condition of Lagos which was partly similar to that of Igboland, and third, was equable rainfall and physical vegetation. The colonial economy was stratified by gender and sex, this made it possible for majority of the men to engage in cash crop economy, forced labour, plantation agriculture and Colonial civil service, while the women participated in subsistence agriculture and trade to augment the income of the household, and by extension, protect the home front in the event of a reversal of fortune in the formal sector employment of their husbands.

Apart from sexual division of labour in colonial Nigeria, there was the factor of geography and climate. 'The soils and vegetation in Lagos are closely related because they have been largely influenced by the nature of the marine and fluvio-lagoon sediments, the prevailing climatic and drainage conditions. There are therefore very close interactions between the landforms, soils and vegetation in the state. The weather and climate of Lagos are characterised by rainy season which often begins in April and lasts till October during which it is heavier owing to the lagoon and coastal location (Abegunde, 1987, 10-15). Thus women's involvement in the economy of Lagos was multifactorial. In broad terms, as explained by one of the scholars, Africa is the region of female farming *par excellence*, and in many African tribes nearly all the tasks connected with food production continue to be left to women (Boserup, 1989, 16). In Lagos, for instance, the development of agriculture was gradual but steady. This is because the women first experimented with compound garden, a small enclosure holding of varieties of crops around living quarters. It varied from hectares to hectares depending on the size of the family. It also contained diverse food crops and perennial trees of economic and nutritional values, compared to the European gardens full of flowers and fruit trees (Ikpe, 2004:95-118).

The practice of compound garden during the period was primarily due to the dispersed nature of settlement compared to modern industrial Lagos where factories and infrastructure had taken over land spaces. Compound garden was important in the food security of Lagos, which is why the colonial government made several attempts to promote agriculture as well as boost the nutritional value of the people. For this reason, botanical gardens were established in different parts of Lagos and by extension northern Nigeria to promote agriculture. In the last decade of the nineteenth

century, the first independent Governor of Lagos, C.A Moloney started a nursery garden and was reputed to have done much tree planting at Kokomaiko, a suburb of Lagos to achieve food sufficiency. Also by his recommendation, a Botanic Station covering 3³/₄ acres was established in 1888 at Ebute Metta which was supported by Kew Gardens. This venture was of immense benefit to the indigenous people of Lagos and Igbo women in agriculture (Miller, 1961, 108). It was from these stations that some Igbo women obtained their crops and seedlings which they planted in their gardens.

Therefore agricultural extension schemes represented the most significant effort by the colonial government to promote production not only in Lagos but in Igboland (Korieh, 2001: 124) Most migrant Igbo women exhibit a sign of uniqueness; they easily adapt to new environment, socialise and initiate change which helped them work as a group. But succinctly underlined is that Igbo receptivity to change is explained by their ideal of progress as expressed in their 'concept of getting up, the flexibility of their social structure, the cooperative yet competitive character which makes adjustment in the city easy, the nature of the contact situation in which they were not overwhelmed (Uchendu, 1965, 105). There were three stages in the evolution of Igbo agriculture. The first stage was marked by the crossing of the barrier from vegeculture to agriculture based on experimentation with local crops, such as certain species of yam and the palm tree'. The second stage began with the coming of Southeast Asian crop complex, such as species of yam, cocoa yam, banana, and others. And the third stage was the contact between European enterprise which connected West Africa with America and the Caribbean from where food crops such as maize, mango breadfruit, cassava, etc, were brought in (Afigbo, 1980, 3.).

This illustration shows that there was contact between the Southeast Asian, America, the Caribbean and Africa. It was this interaction that culminated in the diffusion of some crops and food culture. Available records indicate that Igbo women acquired arable lands from landowners in Lagos or the *Baale* of a community. Sometimes land was rented or leased for just one farming season and at other times for provisional use for a period. The clearing of the arable land was the work of women and children, and thereafter it was burnt. The burning of the farmland, on the one hand was to provide manure, and on the other, to eliminate pests and rodents that destroy crops. Farming cycles began around January and March every year, and planting commenced with the first rains which occur in late March and April. Depending on the size of cultivable land, sometimes land was divided into two halves. One half for perennial fruit trees, the other for annual and seasonal crops.

Perennial fruit trees were planted and demarcated with hedges to discourage intruders. Some of the perennial fruit trees in colonial period included oil palm, bread fruit, avocado pea, mangoes, pepper fruits, oranges, bananas and plantain. Others were pineapples, kolanuts, sugar-cane, grapes and lemon, among others (Ikpe, 2004: 99). Cultivable food crops were vegetables, yams, pepper, potatoes, and tomatoes. Others include fluted pumpkin (*Ugu*), *effirin*, cocoa-yam and others. Amongst other things, these migrant farmers produce garri and fresh vegetable for the metropolitan districts. Many of them also spend the early morning hours collecting forest products including firewood, snails and a special kind of leaf for wrapping cooked food for sale. Vegetables were important ingredients in the preparation of various kinds of dishes, especially bitter leaf, water leaf, fever plant; elephant grass (*achara*), garden egg, okro, *okazi*, *uziza*, and others (Iwuagwu, 2008, 1-46). In addition to the vegetables were other women's crops such as melon, beans, pumpkin, maize, cocoyam, okra, beans, groundnuts, pepper, cotton and calabash, to mention but a few. All these crops were planted in the garden and described as 'women's crops' (Iwuagwu, 2008, 24).

The economic interest of Igbo women is so well defined that women's crops follow the men's, primarily yams of different species. They were called women's crop on account of the fact that men hardly interfere in the planting and choice of these crops; including income derived from the gardens. 'The high prices of foodstuffs in the Lagos area and the fact that farmers can easily dispose of their crops have combined to attract more and more migrant farmers to settle and farm in the nearby rural areas (Udo, 1977: 12). This explains the fact that farming was a lucrative business in Lagos before and after independence. It was the income from farming that helped most women diversify into trade as a result of the establishment of industrial complexes in major parts of Lagos. Crops grown primarily for domestic consumption in colonial Lagos are presented on a table

		1950 Production	1957 production
	{yam	6.63	6.69
Root crops	{cassava	3.61	4.66
	{cocoyams	0.60	0.67
	{guinea corn	1.38	2.14
Cereals	{millet	0.92	1.79
	{maize	0.47	0.66
	{rice	0.19	0.26
Kolanuts		0.08	0.11
Beans		0.07	0.25
Other food crops		0.76	5.00

Table 3: Crops Grown Primarily for Domestic Use, 1950 and 1957 (Million Tons)

*Potatoes, Sweet Potatoes, Pepper, Melons, Vegetables and Acha

Sources: R. Olufemi Ekundare, *An Economic History of Nigeria 1860-1960*
(London: Methuen and Co. Ltd, 1973), 280

As part of farming arrangement, women's crops, were planted sometimes when those of the men have taken roots, in fact, following the planting of yams; plots are usually allocated to the women individually. The question is how was compound garden managed in Lagos? Since most Igbo men were involved in business and others in wage-earning labour, women cultivate the land and planted the crops as earlier mentioned. Tilling and weeding of farmland were periodical exercise, and this was done three times or more during the season, especially the dry season when it is possible for the weeds to be set on fire (Iwuagwu, 2008, 16-18). In time of harvest, men were ignored because they were 'women's crops'. Women also saw the crops as 'convenient produce' because they were harvested anytime even during cooking. It equally served as communal crops because neighbours had access to them before harvesting but must not take more than a daily use, such as pepper, okra, tomatoes, and vegetables. They were barred from touching the cocoyam, cassava, pumpkin seeds, and varieties of beans, stalks and seedlings because of their value, and whenever this was trespassed, the offender was called a thief (Obanya, Ilodibia, Monyei, 2019). A situation in which women divided the plots into arable land and animal husbandry, more labour would be attracted. First, they had to attend to the animals in the morning, provide their feeds, examine the young ones and evacuate the waste from the pen before visiting the farm crops.

Sometimes, they had to observe some of the goats and fowls in their pens, as well as set aside the ones for sale in the market. Not much labour was encountered in the rearing of goats, fowls, ducks, and peacock because they often wandered on their own only to roast at night. The droppings of the animals form part of the manure used in the vegetable gardens. Nevertheless, they also disturbed neighbours since the gardens were located at the back of living quarters. Places where compound gardens were practiced by Igbo women in Lagos included Ojota, Mende in Maryland, Ketu, Orile Iganmu, Amukoko, Coker Village, Lawanson and Ajegunle (Okeke, Nwaolise, Nnadozie, 2019). These areas were suitable because of the availability of land and canals for irrigation of their farmlands. The involvement of women in subsistence agriculture cannot be overemphasised. This is because it gave them a sense of independence, respectability and power in the household.

With the spread of cassava after the influenza pandemic of 1918-19, the crop became a veritable source of food security in Nigeria (Ohadike, 1981: 379-391). Cassava was said to have been introduced in Nigeria from Brazil by the Portuguese during the Atlantic trade but remained largely unknown in Nigeria. The crop diffused from Dahomey to Yorubaland in the first half of the 19th century but 'scorned completely and used to feed pigs (Osifekunde, 1967, 276-277; Njoku, 2001, 14-15). Therefore the age of cassava was to come in the 20th century when different species got to the forest and savannah areas of Nigeria. In Lagos, for instance, it caused the gradual migration of Igbo female farmers to less developed areas in Lagos, such as Ikorodu, Badagry, Epe, Ota, Ketu and its environs because land was no more in abundance in the metropolis.

Igbo women's role in agriculture was fraught with challenges. First, only minimal income was derived from the sale of crops because it was a source of food for the household and neighbours. Second, there was the problem of capital (lack of loan) as most women depended largely on personal income and savings from the gratuity of their husbands. Third, the women relied on the use of traditional implement - hoes, matchets, diggers, and cutlasses in the cultivation of crops leading to low productivity. Another serious challenge of the period was insecurity and kidnapping of women. According to an informant, many women were either killed or kidnapped for ritual purposes during the era, sometimes on the way to the gardens, or inside their farms while weeding (Esedo, 2019). Thus, Marjorie Keniston Mcintosh, concluded that 'urbanisation within Yorubaland was promoted by physical insecurity and large-scale migration (Mcintosh, 2010, 34).

One can argue that these occurrences were the resultant effect of the Yoruba Wars which lasted about a century. Nevertheless, there was change and continuity in the agricultural development of Igbo women in post-colonial Lagos. The change from compound garden to farming industry was precipitated by two main factors. First, was the rapid urbanisation of Lagos after independence, and second was the popularity of cassava as a staple food crop that could take large acre of land, and also compete with yams and vegetables. The period was also remarkable because it marked the end of the description of some crops as 'women's crops,' following the economic change in production. The economic transformation led women into the cultivation of men's crops, but did not last long due to the incursion of the Hausa traders into the economy of Lagos.

Consequently, female farmers began to employ hired labour to till the land, diversify the economy into specialisation, including the use of associations involved in the distribution of seedlings. While some women concentrated in mono-economy such as cassava or vegetable production, others developed intercropping system. The income from agriculture helped most women purchase buses and tricycle for their business. Since the 1980s, Igbo women had been agency of food security in Lagos; majority had also integrated their husbands into the agricultural economy, having realised the advantage it offered in terms of profit, particularly, those who lost their employment in public service. The gradual decline in the Kolanut trade of the Hausa in Yorubaland immediately after the Nigerian civil war led many to enlist into the army, but more importantly, is the fact that it changed the face of Lagos economy. This is because some Hausa kolanut traders came together to invest their resources into livestock trade. Thus livestock markets opened in various parts of Lagos where they sold - goats, cows, rams and fowls imported from northern Nigeria, Chad and Niger Republic (Shehu, 2019).

Therefore Lagos became a centre of food supply not only for its people but neighbouring countries of West Africa. And in successive years, Hausa traders diversified into the sale of foodstuffs, such as beans, tomatoes, pepper, onions, garlic, lettuce, ginger, and cabbage, and others. These foodstuffs were cheaper, accessible and of improved varieties compared to the traditional Yoruba and Igbo crop species. The supply of foodstuffs in large quantities from northern Nigeria contributed to the decline in the agricultural activities of Igbo women, as only a few continued in the cultivation of vegetables and other staple crops, while many took to domestic, long-distance, and cross-border trades. It was the decline

in the agricultural production of Igbo women that brought about the influx of Hausa farmers into the vegetable economy of Lagos.

The impact of this was that Igbo women began to rent or own shops in Lagos markets where others had hitherto gained grounds in the sale of foodstuffs, clothing materials, shoes, specialised goods and others. Since independence, this social group have been at the margin of recognition by the government, especially in the provision of loans; security and empowerment which affected their productive capacity. Thus, it is believed that the Nigerian woman is largely inhibited due to lack of capital and control over her own time and products of her labour (Olabisi, 1998, 3-32). It is clear from our discussion that Igbo women have contributed immensely to the agricultural development of Lagos. They have also spread their farming techniques and business knowledge to some Yoruba men and women neighbours. In terms of inter-group relations most Igbo women traders speak Yoruba, eat Yoruba food, wear Yoruba attire, and marry their children, and vice-versa. Therefore the interaction between the Igbo women and Yoruba has contributed to national development and cultural integration.

3.2. Craft and Industry

Craft and industry were common vocations among communities in the pre-colonial period, and some of them have survived into the present. The industry served as a source of revenue and an opportunity for apprenticeship guided by guilds and associations. Sometimes it is transmitted from father to son and mother to daughter. Therefore it is not a trade for all-comers because of its rituals. Some Igbo women brought the technique of cloth production to Lagos, even though cloth industry had thrived in Yorubaland. The profession among the Igbo was popularised by the people of 'Ndoki', 'Anioma', 'Nsukka-Udi' and 'Abakaliki'. In these areas, as indeed Igboland in general, textile production was the preserve of women, a profession they pursued with zeal. The importance of cloth production in Lagos cannot be over-looked because it was a centre of commerce and cultures. The *Akwette* production by the *Ndoki* people was by far well-known and used in many ceremonies in Lagos just like the *Anioma* White Cloth which had its philosophy from purity and heavenly (Njoku, 2001, 64). The techniques of textile production were simple, and the tools home-made also simple. The production of cotton yarn was in five vertically integrated stages, namely, ginning, carding, spinning, dyeing and weaving. In some places these stages were performed by the same production unit, usually the household.

The beauty of cloth production during the period was that all the raw-materials involved were procured locally. It should also be noted that cloth production had flourished in Yoruba country, particularly among the Ijebu, Oshogbo, Abeokuta, and Ekiti people. Therefore cloth industry among Igbo women in Lagos only complemented existing production in the area. Before the discovery of cotton, raffia and the bark of trees had been exploited. Cotton technology, however revolutionized the weaving industry, and spread to all cotton producing areas (Falola, 1992: 14-16). The income derived was used for the home front since it was largely a household vocation, payment of children's school fees, and further production. Its challenges were obvious in the use of simple tools such as the horizontal and vertical looms, wooden spinning and traditional dye from trees. The traditional industry began to lose its value following the establishment of foreign textile industries and imported factory-made materials in Lagos, therefore putting the women out of trade. Nevertheless, cloth production among Igbo women contributed immensely to the economy of Lagos, even though it is still a trade in a state of flux.

3.3. Basket-Making and Mat Production

Apart from cloth production, some Igbo women were also skilful in the production of baskets, mat and broom production. This craft was practiced in Lagos to make ends meet as well as self-reliant. Lagos vegetation offered a good advantage for the industry because of the preponderance of palm trees and raffia palm which served as raw-materials for the production of baskets, mats and brooms. Baskets were produced from palm fronds; the scales were cut into strands and woven into baskets, while the mid-ribs were used for mats. Brooms were also produced from the strands holding the leaves. Baskets were used for different purposes (Ogunremi, 1996, 14-30). It serves as container for cloth preservation, an object for carrying sacrifice, smoking fish, drying and processing of food. Baskets were also used for collecting of sea-foods and mushrooms, and as objects of decoration at home and schools. On the other hand, mats of different sizes and colours were produced from palm trees and raffia palms. It is processed and dried before use. At other times it was painted in different colours before use to give it special attraction and preservation from ants.

Apart from basketry, and mat-production, in modern Lagos, broom production has also become huge revenue earnings because of the activities of some political parties who adopted it as party symbols. Following this development, broom production by Igbo women in Lagos no longer satisfy the demand of domestic users and thus the importation of brooms from neighbouring countries. Another allied industry that gained popularity among Igbo women in Lagos was the production of cane chairs from raffia palm. Igbo women were initially not skilful in cane business until the 1980s. This is because cane production was dominated by women from the riverine areas of Warri, Calabar and Edo (Kanemo, 2010, 8). Through these women, cane craft spread among Igbo women because of its lucrative nature. Cane craft is a unique industry through which a range of household items are produced. These include furniture, laundry baskets, lamp sheds, and hamper baskets. These items are made of beautiful colours, shapes and sizes, and could be found at the riverine areas of Ojota, Mende, Badagry and Epe. These areas in Lagos provide the raw-materials for cane production. They also served as centres for apprentices interested in cane industry. In contemporary times the women have formed associations to protect their trade due to high demand for cane chairs by hotels and restaurants in Lagos. As one of the informants reported to *True Crime Newspaper*, 'We are doing well; all we need is more support from the Government and banks to enable us get a better land space' (Kanemo, 2010, 8).

3.4. Trade and Markets

Trade is an age-long institution in Nigeria and since pre-colonial period virtually every community has developed its own kind of trade and market whether local, long distance trades or external trade. Most markets perform political and socio-cultural functions inherent in their society. This is corroborated by Ukwu I. Ukwu, when he said that the markets thus fulfilled social, recreational, political, and religious functions in addition to their essentially economic ones (Ukwu, 1967: 649; see Northrup, 1972: 225). Local or domestic trade is composed of daily markets, periodic markets, and night markets. Daily markets as the name implies operate on daily basis in Lagos with buyers and sellers. Most markets in Lagos are daily markets due to its organisation, the services of market managers, and the work schedule of the inhabitants. On the other hand, periodic markets are conducted periodically. As observed, the range of periodicity varied from one place to another and periodic markets were held at intervals of two, four, five, and seven days. Nevertheless, periodic markets in Lagos were held on weekly basis, examples of such markets included the Aswani Market, Mushin Herbs Market, and Onisimbare Market, to mention but a few. Periodic markets had no buildings or stalls for buyers and sellers; they simply operate on open spaces, though managed by market officials and women leaders.

Night markets in Lagos exist for workers and other inhabitants who close late from work. It gave them opportunities to source for ingredients and specialised goods at convenience. The advantage of night market was immense. First, workers had the advantage to make purchases even after a day's work. Second, goods sold in night markets were usually cheaper as sellers were eager to dispose off their wares to minimise losses (Akanke, 2019). In modern Lagos, periodic markets no longer concentrate in rural areas but are active in urban centres. This is because periodic markets are certainly bulking markets (Falola, 1996, 61-71), where traders came to buy specialised and valued goods, as well as local products for resale to other traders and consumers (Zezeza, 1993, 274). The market is significant in the sense that it complements the stocks lacking in other areas thereby promoting comparative advantage.

Long distance trade or inter-trade is organised in different regions, and towns but patronised by buyers and sellers from different and distance areas. It is different from domestic trade in the sense that its logistics, transportation, professionalism and security are different. Also, it varied in size and organisation because the volume and value of domestic goods traded over long distances were much less than those of goods traded in local markets (Njoku, 2001, 85). The activities of the Hausa traders involved in the cattle markets and other foodstuff business in Lagos provide a typical example of inter-regional or long distance trade. Same could be said of the Igbo who travelled to Nnewi and Onitsha to procure goods for resale in Lagos. Also external trade is trade across the border. Goods bought are usually specialised goods and goods in high demand. The benefit of trade and markets cannot be overemphasized. This is because of the advantage it offered individuals, nations and states to obtain commodities which they could not easily produce.

3.5. Domestic Trade

Igbo women were actively involved in domestic and external trades of Lagos. They integrated themselves into the market system of the Yoruba as a result of population advantage, proximity to the border with other countries, and opportunity for quick return on investment. Women involved in agriculture transported their wares to the markets for sale, while some others bought for resale, in addition to family consumption (Ogunlade, 2019). Therefore, local trades were dominated by women with only a few men, nowadays, men have realised that the income from trade has helped women negotiate gender and power in the household. And since colonial period, Igbo women had been conspicuous in markets in Lagos. Notable markets patronised by Igbo women included, *Amukoko Market, Fadeyi Market, Ojota Market, Onyigbo Market, Lawanson Market, and Mushin Market*, to mention but a few. Even though the role of Igbo women were conspicuous in market affairs, every market in Yorubaland was regulated and directed by the market masters and officials responsible for the spiritual and administrative well-being of the market. In these markets, Igbo women sold their produce from the farms - corn, melon, yam, *effirin*, tomatoes, pepper, cocoyam, pea, guava, oranges, pineapples and others (Okeke, 2019). Some others traded in specialised goods which they bought from Badagry, Idi-roko, Ibadan, and Abeokuta. The Yoruba women also sell their wares side-by-side with non-indigenes, and they concentrated in the sale of Shea butter, and guinea corn, fire-wood, sugarcane, fish, palm oil and others.

Due to the business culture of the Igbo, women traders easily switch to border trade, where they purchased specialised goods for re-sale in the markets. Some of them had already been familiar with the trading activities in Gold Coast where they deal in precious metals, clothing and specialised goods. Trade across frontier was not so popular in colonial times compared to the postcolonial period. This is because of trade monopoly and competition among colonial powers on the one hand, and poor road network, distance, bandits, and currency exchange on the other. It was also compounded by the fact that almost all parts of Africa were flooded with manufactured goods from their colonisers to balance the industrial age (Nworie, Obem, 2019).

Immediately after Nigeria's independence, the population of Lagos increased geometrically due to its new found status as a Federal Capital, an emerging industrial hub, and a garrison city. The transformation led to the evolution of new markets and the expansion of others already in existence. Notable markets of the period dominated by Igbo women either as buyers or sellers included, the *OyigboMarket, AlabaMarket, Alaba-SuruMarket, AjegunleMarket, Orile IganmuMarket* and others. In all these markets, Igbo women owned stalls alongside their Yoruba counterparts where they sold food-stuffs, processed foods, clothing materials, jewelleryes, assorted drinks and specialised goods. Other women engaged in the production of various items, such as palm oil, local gin, soap and disinfectants, dress-making and tailoring business, pottery and flower vases, to mention but a few. In modern Lagos, periodic markets, daily markets, night markets are still organised by the Yoruba and Igbo women (Sudarkasa, 1973, 39-42). Perhaps the involvement of Igbo women is made possible by the fact that in their homelands they had daily and fourth nightly markets known as *Eke, Ori, Afo, and Nkwo*.

3.6. External Trade

External trade is one of the oldest forms of trade. It simply means trade across international boundaries (cross-border trade). External or long distance trade was organised across the border, this include Nigeria/Cotonou border, Seme/ diroko border with Dahomey i.e. (the Republic of Benin), Nigeria/Chad border, as well as Gold Coast (Ghana), to mention but a few. External trade was carried out in pre-colonial period by women who have passed the child-bearing age or barren because of the stamina and strength involved in the conduct of trade. It also required a lot of capital for the buyers and sellers to meet the requirement of the trade. Perhaps this is why the Yoruba women engaged in *Esusu*, a kind of contributory financial scheme, where savings are made and rotated from time to time among individual contributors to help solve the problem of capital (Ogunremi, 1996, 31-41). The Igbo had an identical arrangement which they call *isusu*. Sometimes long-distance traders raised credit from family members and from brokers and money lenders (Njoku, 2001, 86). Money from this arrangement was usually obtained during the end of the year or during the August meetings when Igbo women gather to discuss and initiate empowerment programmes for their communities. This they injected into their business for further income or used as a base for diversification or recoup after a loss.

Records have shown that some Igbo women engaged in cross-border trade often took to smuggling of goods and contrabands because of profit. Other affected goods included groundnut oil, rice, cars, clothing, and sometimes illicit drugs, to mention but a few. All these have one way or the other affected the Nigerian economy. And in recent times, some of them diversified to child trafficking, freighting of child labour, and sex trade across Europe. These dangerous crossings across the Sahara Desert and Mediterranean Sea have painted Nigeria and Africa in a bad light. The challenges faced by Igbo women in economic production centred on the lack of government assistance, empowerment, and high interest rate on loans from respective banks (Chinweuba, and Ezeugwu, 2017: 17-24).

3.7. Transportation

Igbo women were not involved in the colonial transport system of Lagos, only a few functioned as carriers in different markets. This implies that they were carriers, who carry goods on their heads for buyers and sellers from one point to the other for a fee. Why these women engaged as carriers was the lack of alternative labour based on their skills to meet the challenges of life as some of them had lost their husbands in the Second World War. However, modern Lagos offered a different scenario as some Igbo women are actively involved in the transport system of Lagos, driving motor-cycles, tricycles, and buses. They carried their duties with courage and dignity. Places of operation included Mile 12, *Ipaja*, *Ayobo* Road, Mile 2, *Okokomaiko*, and *ASPAMDA* International Market, Ojo. Sometimes these women were either hired or chartered to carry goods from one market to the other. They also conveyed crates of eggs; distribute bread, and vegetables to their customers. Recently, an Igbo woman was showcased on the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) documentary in a garage, repairing vehicles as a mechanic, and proudly remarked that it was better than prostitution. Through these activities Igbo women have helped drive the economy of Lagos, some have also become agents of economic change in their homeland.

3.8. Igbo Women in the Formal Sector Economy

Apart from trade and market, a great number of Igbo women engaged in formal sector economy where they worked as managers and owners of business outfit, doctors and lawyers, as well as civil servants (Agbaje, 2019). The creation of a stable wage-labour force in Africa is essentially a product of white settlement and the establishment of European colonial administrations (Cohen, 1976, 155-168). Corroborating the view, Olabisi Aina explained that with the present increase in urbanisation in Nigeria, there has been a steady increase in the rate of female participation in the formal labour market, which could be attributed to their desire for economic independence, as well as a response to growing financial pressures (Olabisi, 1998, 12). Thus some Igbo women overcame the challenges of sex and marginalisation in the society by creating spaces of identity and power

Notable Igbo women who distinguished themselves in their chosen career include, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, Ndi Okereke, Prof. Joy Ogwu, Rosaline Nkechi Coldwill, Prof. Dora Akunyili, and kema Chikwe, among others (Olufemi, 2006: 34-67). Most of these women did not only live and work in Lagos but made appreciable contributions to its socio-economic development and Nigeria in general. While Dora Akunyili was resolute in her fight against fake drugs, Okonjo Iweala helped Nigeria come out of her debt burden with the Paris Club, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. It is also on record that Joy Ogwu was a onetime Minister of International Affairs in Nigeria and contributed immensely to Nigerian foreign policy and diplomacy with the outside world. (Ogwu, 2005). It is clear from the foregoing that Igbo women have contributed immensely to the economy of Lagos and Nigeria in general.

4. Conclusion

From our discussion so far, it is noted that Igbo women had been involved in the economy of Lagos since colonial era. Though the exact date of Igbo migration to Western Nigeria, especially, Lagos cannot be ascertained with precision. Records indicate that the migration of this group and their husbands became noticeable during the construction of the Nigerian Railway in the late nineteenth century. This period appeared probable because the Yoruba Wars which started in 1793 and ended in 1893 obstructed the migration of other ethnic groups for a century. Therefore, with the engagement of men in the colonial service of the railway corporation, their wives took to trading and compound garden around the railway camps. The retrenchment of railway workers forced majority to stay behind with their families in Lagos, where they ventured into agriculture and trade. Agricultural activities were possible for women during the period because of the preponderance of arable lands and the advantage of sex. Therefore while men took to trade, women engaged in compound

garden where they planted vegetables, cassava, cocoyam, pepper, garlic, ginger, melon and sugarcane to mention but a few.

Some female farmers also planted perennial fruit trees such as, guava, pineapples, lemon, pea, mangoes, and fruits. Post-World War II also contributed to the astronomical increase of Igbo men and women in Lagos. It was the outcome of demobilisation of the Nigerian troops in which the Igbo were the third largest ethnic group in the force. Therefore with their gratuities, some of the ex-servicemen and their wives took to trade, craft and industry, while others engaged in agricultural production to promote food security. Post-colonial Lagos only witnessed a few Igbo women in agriculture compared to their population in colonial era. This is caused by shortages of arable land, preponderance of industrial sites, and population explosion. Since the 1980s the economic development of Igbo women in Lagos has largely transformed into trade and formal sector economy. This study revealed that they have not only dominated the business districts of Lagos with their men but have contributed to production, craft and industry. The task of government therefore is to assist this group to form cooperatives, obtain loans, and reduce their tax net, this will enable them diversify their businesses. Additionally, seminars and workshops can be arranged at regular intervals to improve their productive capacity and socio-economic interaction.

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