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ECONOMIC CRISIS DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR
AND THE RESPONSE OF THE MARKET TRADERS IN
IBADAN, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The soaring prices of imported goods that accompanied the Second World War led to the increase in demand for locally made goods, indigenous industries like the textile and tinsmith therefore thrived. However, the most severe problem created by the Second World War was the acute shortage of food all over Nigeria due to the fact that promotion of export crops had already attracted farmers away from food crop production. This phenomenon was badly felt in Lagos, Ibadan and other major producing centres were not left out. This shortage consequently resulted in high prices of food. The Colonial government tried to rescue the situation by restricting the movement of foodstuffs from producing centres and pegging the prices of such commodities. But, rather than putting an end to the ugly situation, the attempt aggravated it. The market women in Ibadan viewed the colonial government's intervention as undermining their economic position. Traditionally, they controlled the distribution of foodstuffs and had established a very efficient system of marketing and pricing. They responded by ignoring the scheme and devising a method of selling their goods at a price that guaranteed their own profit. The market traders

experience therefore provided an important opportunity to explore women's relationship to the Colonial State.

Introduction

Adam Smith's theory of division of labour emphasizes interdependence among people in the pursuit of their individual needs. At some point, a person has to use the surplus of what he has in exchange for those things that he lacks and which are necessary for his daily life. It is through this pattern of interdependent exchange relationship that bulk of goods is distributed through all the different levels of the society (Bamidele Ayo, 2002; 167).

Such exchanges are facilitated by the availability of appropriate markets. The rural farmer will only be stimulated to sustain his production if demand remains high in the urban centres. Movement of goods (farm produce) from the producing centres to the urban areas therefore became a necessary feature of market transactions.

The literature on market in Africa generally has greatly discussed the preponderant role played by women in market activities at all levels; locally, nationally and internationally. The position occupied by women in economic transactions has significantly influenced development in the political arena. In Nigeria for example, market women have served as sponsors or nationalist movement during the struggle for political independence. Market women have progressed in their trade transactions by extending economic relationships with foreign entrepreneur, especially Europeans during the colonial period and even after independence. Consequently, market women succeeded in linking local market transactions with foreign economic interests (Bamidele Ayo, 2000:184).

One of the most severe problems which the British colonial administration had to contend with in Nigeria during the Second World War was food shortage. Food was in short supply all over the country in the face of increasing demand. Due to the facts that export crop promotion was already having the effect of attracting farmers away from food crop production. In addition, farm technology did not improve from the traditional hoe and cutlass and so cultivated areas could not increase especially as thousands of young men left the farms for industries or to be conscripted into the army. Consequently, consumers of food increase while producers decreased thus leading to increase in prices of food crops (Oyemakinde, 1973: 416).

During the world war, prices of imported goods soared for two reasons, import shortages and war-time restrictions and controls. Local cottage industries particularly weaving, dyeing and tinsmithing revived as a result of the shortage of imported goods. Demand for hand woven and adire increased as a result of the high prices of

imported textiles. The tinkers also increased their production of cooking and other household utensils as substitutes for imported enamel wares. However, they could not meet the demand and prices inevitably rose.

Consequently, by 1939, the output of farm produce was not adequate to meet the needs of the people in most of the provinces in Southern Nigeria. The colonial government therefore decided to rescue the situation by restricting the exportation of certain farm produce from the producing centres to other needy provinces with the intention of preventing increase in the price of goods. The food price control scheme itself began in 1941 under the direction of Captain A.P. Pullen whose name was attached to the operations. Although this scheme succeeded in cutting down prices to the lowest point in the producing centres, in other needy districts, the story was that of a sharp increase in prices resulting from the limited supply. By the colonial government restrictions and control, foodstuffs like *gari*, yam, maize and cassava could only be exported from producing centres by government appointed agents such as UAC, GBO, Military contractors and agents of the Association of West African Merchants. Special permits were issued to these exporters by the District offices. For instance only European firms and Messrs Odutola and Brothers could purchase *gari* in Ijebu-Ode and transport it to Ibadan in 1940. (Oyo Prof 1/1294, 1940:122)

These restrictions caused much hardship to farmers and traders, majority of who were women. Farmers in Oyo province for instance complained bitterly about trade restrictions. This was due to poor sales during the 1943 yam harvest since they were forbidden to export to places like Ibadan, Lagos and other urban centres. However, the appointed agents were unable to purchase all the harvest, and farmers were holding a large surplus which they could not dispose off legally (Oyo Prof 1/1294) 1940; 128) They were compelled to sell the surplus yams at ridiculously low prices such as one penny per tuber, whereas in Lagos yam was a scarce commodity, selling for six pence per tuber. A bag of *gari* (cassava grains) cost seven shillings and seven pence in Ijebu-Ode, (a major producing centre) while it cost nine shillings and eight pence in Ibadan and eleven shillings in Lagos (Oyo Prof 1/1294, 1940; 125).

In Ibadan, this restriction resulted in a substantial decrease in the volume of foodstuffs marketed. Between 1940 and 1942, there was a fall in the volume of certain foodstuffs imported and marketed in Ibadan. During this period, the volume of *gari* sales dropped from 10,996 in 1940 to 10,796 bags in 1942, maize dropped from 10,432 bags in 1940 to 9,975 in 1942. The volume of yam fell from 92,670 in 1940 to 78,074 in 1942 and 420 tons of cassava flour marketed between January and March, 1940 dropped to 288 tons in the same quarter in 1942 (Oyo Prof 2/3) 1942; 211)..

While there was a fall in the volume of restricted foodstuffs to Ibadan, there was a simultaneous increase in the volume of unrestricted goods marketed in Ibadan. Table 1 below compares the volume of foodstuffs imported and marketed in Ibadan markets between January and March, 1940 and 1942.

Table 1: The volume of foodstuffs imported and marketed in Ibadan between January and March 1940 and 1942.

Commodity	1940 (in tons)	1942 (in tons)	Origin and quantity in tons in 1942
Rice	19	25 ½	15 tons railed from the North, 9 ½ tons lorried from Abeokuta
White Beans	204 ¼	252 ¼	170 tons were railed from the Northern province, 82 ¼ tons from Oyo province
Tomatoes	10	13 ¼	8 ¼ tons railed from the Northern province, 5 tons were purchased in Ibadan and district
Pepper	115 ½	126	116 tons railed from the Northern province, 10 tons produced in Ibadan district
Fresh Fish	8 ¾	10	3 ¾ tons imported from Jebba, 7 ¼ tons from Ijebu province.
Dried Fish	50	54	37 ¾ imported from the North, ¾ from Oyo province, 6 tons from Ibadan district
Melon Seed	7	9	2 ½ tons imported from the North, ¾ from Oyo province, 6 tons from Ibadan district
Groundnut oil	5	7 ½	They were railed from the North – namely Kano, Jos and Zaria.
Palm oil	-	427	362 tons from Ijebu province, 41 tons Abeokuta province, 14 tons from Ondo and 46 tons were produced in Ibadan district. Out of this 44 tons were exported to Oyo province.
Onions	129 ½	135	Railed from Kano, Jebba, Gassau, Kurranamoda and Wushish
Yam flour	-	1,591 bags Approx	Ote, Oyo, Lanlate, Shaki, Ogbomoso and Fiditi

		240 ½ tons	
Fresh okro	-	5	Produced by Ibadan district
Dried okro	6	8 ½	From Ede and its neighbourhood
Dried meat	-	2 ¼	From Iwo and Oyo
Guinea corn	-	13 ½	From Oyo province by lorry
Cattle	-	5929	Railed from the Northern provinces
Pigs	-	98	From Lanlate and Eruwa by lorry
Goats	-	139	From Fidiki, Shaki and Ibadan district by lorry

Sources – NAI, Oyo prof. 2/379: *Internal Trade 1939-42; pp.92-93*

Inflation was rampant during World War II. Prices rose abnormally without any corresponding increase in wages or profit margin. For instance, a bag of local rice from Abeokuta was sold for forty-five shillings in 1938, it increased to fifty shilling in 1940 and in 1944, it was sold for seventy shillings. The price of a bag of yam flour, which sold for twelve shillings in 1940, rose to forty-five shillings in 1946 (Ib Div 1/1/1984; 1945;88)

Soaring inflation caused immense difficulties for wage earners and traders. The profit margin on a bag of local rice from Abeokuta had been four shillings in 1935 in 1938; this profit margin fell to two shillings, dropping further to a shilling in 1940. By 1944, the profit margin on a bag of local rice had dropped to six pence (Ib. Div 1//1984; 1945: 90) The result was that a large number of traders were subjected to unbearable economic hardship. Most of the affected farmers and traders were forced to resort to smuggling the restricted goods.

The colonial government attempted to regulate inflation by setting out the prices at which farm produce and other commodities were to be sold in the markets between 1939 and 1945. The food price control scheme under the direction of Captain A.P. Pullen was devised to draw out and stipulate maximum selling prices for foodstuffs in Lagos, which was to take effect from 1941. It however became clear that the scheme had little or no chance of success if it only tried to peg prices in Lagos without paying attention to what was operating in other close areas. To this end, similar regulations were stipulated to arrest rising prices in other areas including Ibadan in January, 1944 (Oyemakinde, 1973:418). The fixed price for a bag of maize was six shillings and six pence while retail price was a penny per lb. The control price for a bag of beans was twenty-six shillings while the retail price was 1½ pence per lb. A bag of *gari* was 10

shillings and 8 pence while the retail price was 7/10d per lb. A tin of palm oil was seven shillings while the retail price was 4 ½d per pint bottle. Table 2 below shows the maximum prices of farm produce set out by the colonial government in markets in Ibadan Division (Ib Div 1/1/1944, 1944; 120)

TABLE 2: Government Controlled Prices, January 1944

Article	Wholesale prices for cocoa bags	Retail price per lb	Local measure weight per one local measure	Approx Average weight per one local measure	Retail per measure
Okro	6/-	3/4d	Basket	1b, 41ds	3/4d
Maize	6/-6	1d	Orente	1 lb	1d
Egusi seeds	24/-	1¾ d	Yoboro, Atowoda Kolobo	6½1b 1½1b 11b	11 1/11/
Yam flour	15/-	1½ d	Abo Elubo	½ 1b	¾ d
Gari	10/-8	7/10d	Denge, Besue Kolobo	8lbs, 51bs, 11b	6 ½d 7d
Beans (local)	26/-	1½ d	Kolobo	9 lbs	1/- 1/-
Yam tubers	1/-per 28 lbs				1/- per 28 lb
Palm oil	7/-per tin		Pint bottle		4 ½d
Salt			Cigarette tins		1d
Meat (Mutton)		8d			
Beef without bone		8d			
Fowls		7d			

Sources: NAI, IB Div 1/1, 1944: Local Foodstuff prices control of and movement.p140.

This colonial government intervention in markets in Ibadan was vehemently opposed by the traders. Prices of commodities, especially foodstuffs, were determined in the local markets through haggling and bargaining. The difference between a price initially quoted for an article and its final selling price may be as much as 100 percent, depending on how skillful the buyers are in the bargaining process. In spite of a variety of tricks and shifts brought into play by both buyers and sellers, a mutually favourable price is always obtained and more importantly final selling price must be well above the trader's cost price, so as to give room for profit (Bamidele Ayo, 2002;187).

The colonial government restriction placed on the movement of foodstuff negated the principle of haggling and bargaining process discussed above. It therefore met a brick wall.

The colonial government's attempt to control market prices was not effective because price control left no margin for profit. The colonial government did not take cognizance of the cost price of foodstuffs from different producing centres before

fixing a price. The prices set were therefore lower than the trader's prices. Market traders in Ibadan petitioned the government for change. In 1945, the foodstuffs sellers in Ibadan presented a petition to the District Officer, Captain J.Wann delineating the actual situation.

The present controlled price for a bag of maize needs an amendment. We had gone to different towns and villages where bags of maize are brought to Ibadan. At Gbede, Ilorin Road, they sell one bag of maize for 17 shillings, the drivers are transporting a bag for 4 shillings to Ibadan, to reckon expenses of labourers with cost, the price of one bag of maize is equal to 22 shillings. The same thing obtained in Gambari, Iseyin Road and Lanlate towns. We solicit on behalf of all other foodstuffs sellers in Ibadan to help us suggest and bring out any suitable controlled price for a bag of maize and other foodstuffs(Ib Div 1/1/1984,1945;140).

Such pleas fell on deaf ears and since the traders could not afford to sustain long term losses, the controlled prices were ignored and the market women sold at a price which guaranteed their own profits. Consequently black markets emerged here and there, and as long as ready buyers were available, the black market operated smoothly, though illegally. According to one of the traders:

We locked up our shops and sat in front of it. When a customer was around, we would negotiate for the price. When we both agreed on a price, we opened our shop to bring out the commodity in question. At times our customers come to our homes in the night to buy our goods.

There was a sharp difference, between the controlled prices and the prices set by the traders. For instance a bag of yam flour was sold in the black market for twenty-six shillings in 1944, while the controlled prices were fifteen shillings. A bag of garri sold for twenty shillings in the black market while the controlled price was ten shillings and eight pence. A bag of local beans actually sold for thirty-five shillings while the controlled price was twenty-six shilling. Table 3 shows the actual market prices between 1944 and 1947. (Ib. Div1/1/1944; 191)

TABLE 3: ACTUAL MARKET PRICES

Commodity	Measurement	JAN 1944	APR 1944	JULY 1944	NOV 1944	JAN 1945	APR 1945	JULY 1945	NOV 1945	JAN 1946	APR 1946	JULY 1946	NOV 1946	JAN 1947	APR 1947	JULY 1947	NOV 1947
Pepper Jos	Bag	60s	55s	60s	62s	60s	120s	-	80s	120s	120s	70s	120s	90s	80s	100s	80s
Pepper Oyo	Bag	35s	40s	42s	-	30s	70s	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Beans Native	Bag	35s	32s	32/6	22s	25s	35s	35s	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Beans Kano	Bag	32/6	31s	32s	28s	30s	37s	40s	35	32s	30s	32s	47s	37	42/6	55	55s
Onions Zaria	Bag	40s	35s	32	45s	90s	-	-	40s	50s	-	-	-	90s	-	-	-
Onions Kano	Bag	35s	30s	35	40s	85	25s	30s	30s	30s	30s	20s	55s	-	20s	35s	45s
Rice Abeokuta	Bag	65s	65s	70s	55s	57/6	-	-	55s	-	60s	60s	80s	75	70s	80	80s
Egusi seeds	Bag	52s	50s	52/6	52s	60s	60s	100s	70s	50s	60s	60s	50s	70s	70s	70s	80s
Gari	Bag	20s	12/6	11/6	9/6	12s	15s	20s	14s	-	20s	24s	24s	22s	86s	17s	17s
Maize	Bag	8s	13s	12s	13s	20s	27s	40s	12/6	15s	16s	18/6	20s	20s	27/6	27/6	17s
Yam flour	Bag	26s	26s	30s	30s	32s	40s	42s	40s	45s	30s	45s	55s	57s	25s	55s	65s
Cassava flour	Bag	14 s	13s	13s	12s	14s	14s	16s	12s	10s	16s	18s	20s	20s	20s	18s	18s
Yams	Cwt	4/9	5/6	6s	3s	6/6	7s	8s	5/6	7s	9s	15s	11/6	11/6	13/4	14s	11s
Potatoes	Case	25s	30s	37/6	18/6	20s	25s	-	10	10s	10s	10s	20s	40s	40s	45s	35s
Palm oil	Tin	8s	6s	7/3d	8s	8s	6/9	8/6	13s	20s	10s	8s	9/6	9/6	8/6	12/9	12/6
Coconut oil	Tin	25s	25s	20s	17s	18s	19s	20s	22/6	-	22/6	18s	18/6	30s	35s	25s	25/2
Tomatoes	Coop	6/6	5/6	8/6	6/6	7/6	5s	6s	5/6	4s	4s	5/6	5s	6/6	7s	7/6	7/6
Fowl eggs (mpt)	Doz	7d	9d	9d	-	9d	9d	9d	-	9d	9d	9d	11d	-	11d	9d	9d
Fowl eggs (local)	Doz	11d	11d	11d	11d	11d	11d	11d	11d	11d	11d	11d	7d	9d	9d	1/6	1/6
Fresh fish	1b	11d	11d	10d	1/2	2s	2s	2s	1/3	1/9	1/6	1/6	1/9	1/6	1/8	1/6	1/6
Fresh meat	1b	11d	9d	10d	10d	11d	10d	11d	11d	1s	11d	1s	1/3	1/3	1/3	1/3	1/3
Okro	1b	10d	2½d	1½ d	1d	2½ d	3½d	3½d	2d	4d	3½d	3d	31/2	4d	6d	5d	4½d
Fowl	Each	Sam e	Sam e	Sam e	Sam e	Sam e	Sam e	11-3s	Sam e	Sam e	Sam e	Sam e	Sam e	Sam e	1/6d	3/6d	same

Sources: NAI, 1b Div/1/1944, Local Foodstuff prices control and road movement.

As a matter of fact, the black markets won in the competition with the guaranteed market. While the government efforts failed, the black markets flourished because the people sided the illegal traders. As long as people had money to pay, they could always go to the traders for their foodstuffs. The people were not subjected to prolonged waiting on long queues as it was the case in the official market. The producers in the Provinces hid a lot of foodstuffs away from the government agents who offered lower than equilibrium prices and instead made secret sales to the local merchants who paid more. Through selling quietly in the black market, many women evaded price control wardens. If detected defaulters could be arrested and fined five pounds. Since the parties to the secret deal stood to gain from it, no one reported the other, food stuff thus poured into the secret stores of these market women who operated flourishing black market. (Oyemakinde, 423)

Another major response of the market women in Ibadan to the economic crisis that accompanied the war was the organization of commodity traders' association. Prior to this period, there was no well defined association among the market women in Ibadan. But the need for the formation of a formidable trade associations gathered momentum between 1939 and 1945.

The maize sellers association was founded in 1942 in response to the unfavourable control price set out by the colonial government (Ib.Div1/1984; 140). All other foodstuffs associations were formed in response to the Pullen Marketing Scheme, which undermined the economic position of the market women, who originally controlled the distribution of foodstuffs and had established an efficient system of marketing and pricing. Each of the commodities association is administered by women. These association of market women exerted significant influence on the transactions of the market. In the past, they were saddled with the responsibility of fixing prices and sourcing of goods for members. The associations functioned like trade unions or cooperative societies.

During this period, all the market women in Ibadan saw themselves as one irrespective of the market or the goods sold. They always came together to safeguard their economic interest in the face of any threat against it. They sought out sources of supplies because of war-time scarcity and arranged for transport to the market.

The functions of the trade associations were more or less uniform. The difference related to the type of commodities sold and the varieties of these commodities. They controlled the entrance of people into the trade; they performed social functions in the interest of their members; settled disputes among the members and organize cooperative, thrift and credit facilities for members to borrow money for trading. This was aimed at improving the capital base of the members (Bamidele Ayo, 185).

Although, the trader's association in all the market had their own executives that managed the affairs of their trade transactions, all these executives were under the leadership of the Iyaloja, the market mammy, who was appointed by the traders, but her appointment had to be ratified by the Oba before she could perform her responsibilities which included:

- i. maintenance of law and order in the market
- ii. Serving as intermediaries between the traders and the local government officials in the collection of the market levy, settlement of disputes between traders, buyers and council officials among other functions.

Subsequently, the position became a force to reckon with by the state government.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is evident that efforts by Colonial government to claim economic areas dominated by women which extended into the running of markets and the control of prices affected women's economic activities in one way or the other. The market women having quickly perceived the nature of the threat to their interest regrouped their forces by forming association on commodity basis. As a united group, the market women in Ibadan were able to challenge the Colonial economic policies that were inimical to their interest. Thus, the study did not only illustrate how the market association fared under colonialism, it also shows how a representative group of women traders navigated the colonial political economy. The activities of these women traders also reminded us that States did not only impose, women also used State in their effort to renegotiate. Through their actions, demands and protest, women reconfigured some of the best-laid Colonial plans and helped to shape nationalist discourses. (Judith A Byfield, 2004; XXIX)

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