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# Men, Women, and Trade

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This paper<sup>1</sup> considers one aspect of the relationship between social organization and certain sorts of economic activity, using a particular setting, the internal market system in peasant societies (Mintz, 1959), as a frame of reference. The argument proceeds from the well-known fact that, in many of these market systems, much or even most of the distributive activity is carried on by women, and these women often engage in commerce more or less independently of the economic undertakings of their husbands. In such cases, husband and wife participate in distinguishably different risk structures, an arrangement having particular relevance to the nature of family life and culturally determined sex-role differentiation. Furthermore, since husbands and wives in such cases may carry on not only independent but also different economic pursuits, it would not be surprising if some of the attitudes related to the kind of economic activity also differed along sexual lines. Productive and distributive undertakings require different skills; probably they evoke different temperamental responses as well. One might claim that the tests of success for the middleman are different in character from the tests of success for the agricultural producer; those successful in one pursuit are not necessarily those most likely to succeed in the other. Of course this contention does not preclude some optimum combination of skills; many producers also engage successfully in intermediary and distributive activities, and some of the so-called underdeveloped world's most skilled traders began as agricultural producers (Bauer, 1957: 71; Bauer and Yamey, 1957: 104–5). Moreover, it is important not to separate these different activities too sharply, because specialization is notably incomplete in peasant economies and it is sometimes not useful to distinguish the agricultural producer

<sup>1</sup> A preliminary version of this paper was presented at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, during the winter of 1965. I wish to thank the Department of Anthropology there, and its then Chairman, Philip Dark, for the opportunity to speak, and Professors Bo Anderson, Cyril Belshaw and Bernard Siegel, and Jacqueline W. Mintz for help and advice on subsequent drafts.

from the trader. Yet the required talents are to a noticeable extent different; both farmers and traders acquire their skills over time, and the development and employment of these skills further affects their attitudes toward the work they do.

The role of women in trade has been much remarked upon in certain societies, including many of those of West Africa, the non-Hispanic Caribbean, and parts of mainland Latin America. A few illustrations will suffice. Herskovits (1952: 220 *et seq.*) and Claude and Claudine Tardits (Bohannon and Dalton, 1962: 90–2) assert that market trade in Dahomey is preponderantly in the hands of women. Hodder, discussing Yoruba rural markets (Bohannon and Dalton, 1962: 110), states that only ‘. . . rarely will a Yoruba rural market contain more than 5 percent men’, while Marshall (1964: 71) contends that ‘. . . virtually all [Yoruba] women are traders’. Nypan’s study of the Accra market places reveals that the percentage of female stallholders there varied between 79 percent and 95 percent (Nypan, 1960: 14). In the West Indies, women traders also predominate in the market place; Katzin (1959) and other observers have made this clear for Jamaica. In Haiti, the preponderance of woman in market trade is well known (Métraux, 1951: 122; Herskovits, 1952: 85; Mintz, 1959); and in some parts of mainland Latin America as well, women are important or even dominant in market place activities (Tax, 1952: 72–3; Tax, 1953: 122 *et seq.*)<sup>2</sup>

The kinds of female traders in these situations, the scale of their enterprises, the relative independence of their capital and of their activities from those of their spouses or families, are highly variable features; so, too, are the services they sell in order to achieve and to hold positions in the distributive system, and to accumulate capital. First, and most important, such traders convey needed produce from the agricultural and craft producer, or from the import house, to the consumer. Second, and as part of such carrying, they bulk produce and break bulk, both activities facilitating exchange at quantity and cost levels appropriate to the scale of production and the buying habits of customers (Bauer, 1954: 22–6; Bauer and Yamey, 1957). Third, they may process items they carry, as in grinding corn, winnowing rice, cooking food for resale, and the like. Fourth, they may serve as credit sources for their clients, both those to whom they sell and those from whom they buy.<sup>3</sup> These are the principal

<sup>2</sup> There undoubtedly exist certain factors that distinguish those peasant societies in which women are important in trade from those in which they are not. Such factors would probably include the type of commodity traded (in terms of bulk, perishability, ultimate use, associated prestige, etc.), features of local social organization, and the like. No attempt is made here, however, to deal with such factors in the abstract.

<sup>3</sup> Of course such services are not lent exclusively by women and, in systems in which men predominate, comparable services are provided. The point here is the manifold contribution of the intermediary to the economic system, which is often overlooked. Particularly important is the credit function; too little is known of its variety and distribution in different marketing systems.

(though not the only) services such marketers sell, and must be distinguished from other very important services they provide to the economy as *incidental* aspects of their intermediation. The main value of such incidental service is in linking the subsistence sector and the commercial economy (Bauer, 1957: 70). In their search for gain, intermediaries constantly make contact with agricultural producers not yet involved in production for sale, or only marginally so involved, increasing the integration of such producers with the wider exchange system. In competing for their stocks of produce for resale, they bring agricultural producers into closer alignment with outside demand for their products. If an agricultural producer must choose between marketing his own products at some distance from his farm and selling to but one buyer, his bargaining position is less satisfactory than when a number of would-be buyers are competing for what he has produced. But a market intermediary in West Africa or Haiti or Mexico, who has located a particularly cheap source of supply, will inevitably attract to the producer others like herself, thus eventually driving the producer's asking price closer to the going price for such produce in other, more commercialized, producing areas. In such instances, it is not that trade follows the flag, but that more effective vertical integration follows the successful competitive intermediary.

A second such incidental service provided by the intermediary consists in her contribution to the economy through the payment of shipping, storage and market fees, and taxes. The truck fleets of Nigeria and Jamaica, for instance, emerged in part as an aspect of the activities of distributive intermediaries. The increase of such transportation and communication facilities has meaning for the development of the economy as a whole, and not only with reference to market trade. A third incidental service supplied by the intermediary is expressed in her constant substitution of labor for capital while doing her job. It is perfectly true that, under some circumstances, small-scale distributive activities may not represent the theoretically most efficient use of resources; but in dealing with the realities of underdevelopment, one begins with what is possible at a given point in time. To establish that the massive substitution of labor for capital results in economic redundancy requires that some alternative and more economic use of labor resources can be made available.<sup>4</sup> Other incidental services supplied by the intermediary include the economic use of such 'waste materials' of western society as tin cans, bottles, and burlap bags; deliberate or unintended provision of market intelligence; and some measure of entrepreneurial training for the young. Thus the activities of traders—in this case, of trading women—can contribute both directly and

<sup>4</sup> Thus it may be more distracting than enlightening to contend that traders in these situations are redundant and would accept alternate and better-paying employment if it were available.

indirectly to the economic effectiveness of so-called 'backward' economies.

Facilitating the operation of such economies is not the same as making them grow, however. In situations where economic growth is retarded, it is not clear that these intermediaries can provide much more to the economy than continuing service. In fact, some observers contend that the great subdivision of distributive activity characteristic of economies of the West African and West Indian sort is a barrier to economic growth, since it forestalls the concentration of capital either in few enough hands or in large enough quantities to make possible other sorts of investment (Lewis, 1958: 400–49; Geertz, 1963: 11; Kaplan, 1965: 92).<sup>5</sup>

Internal market systems replete with small-scale distributive intermediaries occur commonly in so-called underdeveloped societies. It is not, of course, that all underdeveloped societies have these kinds of market systems, but that nearly all such systems are associated with small-scale agricultural production in tropical or subtropical areas, where the labor force is predominantly rural, engaged in agricultural production, and typified by low productivity. That internal market systems of this kind are one corollary of underdevelopment is suggested by the tripartite classification formulated by Bohannan and Dalton in their introduction to *Markets in Africa* (1962: 1–26, esp. pp. 25–6). In effect, the authors suggest that market places express the absence of full capitalist development, rather than its presence: 'the market place is a characteristic of economies in which the market principle is peripheral. The more pervasive the market principle, the less the economic importance of the market place' (*ibid.*, p. 25). While the decline or elimination of market places is neither the inevitable result, nor even less the prerequisite, of development, such a decline expectably marks the increasing importance in the society at large of the purchase and sale of factors not readily negotiated in the market place setting.

At the same time, there are portions of the underdeveloped world where internal market systems based on market places have emerged only comparatively recently. Perhaps paradoxically (from the vantage-point of the Bohannan–Dalton generalization), these new market systems have accompanied greater westernization; rather than being destroyed by it, they have, at least in part, been its creation. Thus, for instance, Mukwaya (Bohannan and Dalton, 1962: 643–66) describes the growth of internal distribution in feeding Kampala, while Miracle (Bohannan and Dalton, 1962: 698–738) states that the internal market complex of the Copperbelt is entirely new. There is no reason, after all, why internal market systems should not

<sup>5</sup> At times even the compulsory elimination of large numbers of small-scale intermediaries is put forth as a 'solution' (e.g., Brelsford, 1947). It is not really clear how arbitrary legislative elimination of some of those who compete for customers will result in lower prices, nor how the economically most efficient number of intermediaries can be divined by economic planners; but this part of the controversy is tangential here, in any case.

be gaining in some regions while declining in others, and that 'westernization' should not be partly responsible for both trends—if, in fact, that is what is happening in Africa. Hill (1963: 443) questions Bohannan and Dalton for implying that African internal market systems 'are almost colonial institutions'. Their contention is rather what has been stated earlier: that such systems will decline as the economies within which they are found develop. Yet Hill's critique is well taken. At least some of the internal market systems of Africa are expanding, as the materials in the Bohannan–Dalton volume make abundantly clear, in line with the increasing urbanization, additional movement of the labor force into non-agricultural activity or into commercial agriculture, and other modernizing changes. Hill believes (*ibid.*) that 'the total quantity of goods sold in African markets is increasing proportionately far faster than the population'—and also notes in passing that the Bohannan–Dalton volume carries no piece on the great market places of the West African forest zone, such as Onitsha, Accra, Kumasi, and Ibadan, which may have been expanding fastest of all—at least, before the start of hostilities in West Africa. The growth of market place trade in East and West Africa was the concomitant, in fact, of the penetration of the market principle, since transactions in the labor market and other factor markets are actually stimulating the internal market systems in these cases. What seems likely is that the *percentage* of total economic activity represented by market place trade is declining in these societies, even while the market places themselves continue to grow. Hence the growth of market place trade may or may not be associated with greater commercialization of other sectors of the economy. If this is correct, then it is conceivable that the expansion of economic opportunities within the internal market system can occur in ways and at rates that lag far behind the growth of other economic opportunities in the same society.

The next question has to do with those internal market systems where women are predominant or very important in trade and where the position of women is linked in some way to trading activity. If female role-playing is associated with trade, and if the relative importance of such trade is declining as the whole economy grows, what implications does this growth carry for the future sex-role differentiation of women? The question may be a significant one, and its answer might not only throw some light on the 'ethnocentrism' of economic development theory, but also upon the questionable side of what is grandly called 'modernization' or 'westernization'. Data to illuminate this notion are both fragmentary and inconclusive, but discussion of a few cases where trade by women is important and more or less well-documented may be useful.

Among the Afikpo Ibo studied by Phoebe Ottenberg (1959), trade is but one of women's major activities, together with pot-making and agricul-

ture. Though nearly all Afikpo women market (Ottenberg, 1959: 208), they are also almost all agriculturists; moreover, their opportunities to farm are largely linked to their husbands' land claims. Furthermore, Afikpo women are enjoined from long-distance trade, unlike women of certain other groups in the same region. Of this restriction, Ottenberg writes:

Afikpo women are discouraged from engaging in this trade, and the few who have attempted it have stopped after a short time. This seems to be associated with women's lack of wealth for trading capital, the restrictions placed on their mobility by their household economic responsibilities, and controls exerted over them by the men of Afikpo (*ibid.*, p. 207).

One economic innovation that increased the capacity of women to deal as equals with men was the introduction of cassava processing and cultivation, apparently from Yoruba groups of western Nigeria. Since men grow only yams (and only men grow yams), with which prestige, ritual power, and ceremonial wealth are associated, it was left to the women to grow all else.

There is a strong suggestion here, of course, that yam-growing is viewed as more important than other kinds of agriculture, and that female trading is less prestigious than full-time and long-distance trading by males. Ottenberg indicates that the other crops formed a residual category, cultivated by women mainly on the same land their husbands used for yams. However, the introduction of cassava led to the use of entirely separate plots by women; men rejected cassava cultivation as beneath them, and the yam plots were not suitable for cassava inter-cropping. Cassava gained rapid acceptance as a subsistence crop, and cassava processing became a source of subsidiary income through the sale of the meal (*gari*). Control over cassava—both its production and its marketing—is referred to by Ottenberg as the 'major source of economic change' for women (*ibid.*, p. 214).

Nowadays women do not care if the husband does not give them any food, for they can go to the farm and get cassava. If a woman has any money she buys [rents] land and plants cassava. The year after she does this she can have a crop for cassava meal, which she can sell and have her own money. Then she can say, 'What is man? I have my own money!' (*ibid.*, p. 215).<sup>6</sup>

Ottenberg gives us no information, however, to suggest that Afikpo women can parlay their opportunities to grow, process, and market cassava, or anything else, into larger-scale operations, or to transfer trading capital into other ventures. In fact, the apparent inability of these women to move into long-range marketing, their continuing commitment

<sup>6</sup> Le Vine (1966: 190), who cites the same passage from Ottenberg, claims that 'Afikpo husbands have found it increasingly difficult to keep their wives at home in their formerly subordinate positions', but adduces no supporting information except evidence of a local literature of 'masculine protest' in Onitsha.

to agricultural production, and the lack of full-time women traders, are facts that suggest the failure of marketing activity to serve as a major ladder of economic mobility for females.

Whereas in traditional Afikpo society both men and women formerly worked to acquire status-endowing titles, women now show less interest in title acquisition. Instead, Ottenberg tells us, they will use what capital they amass to buy a sewing machine (to be used in dressmaking for profit), to educate their children, or to raise their level of consumption. Women with some schooling seek opportunities for regular employment as dressmakers, teachers, and nurses, and Ottenberg sees these opportunities as part of the modernization of Afikpo Ibo society—as indeed they are. What may be provocative about this picture, however sketchy, is the apparent inability or unwillingness of Afikpo Ibo women to transform themselves readily into full-time or large-scale traders. Ottenberg herself points out that non-Afikpo Ibo females apparently do succeed in becoming traders on a large scale, in many Nigerian cities.

The difference may be no more than one of rural and urban norms, in which case the point loses its possible significance, but there seems to be more involved. If we can suppose that Afikpo Ibo women invest their slender trading capital in expanded cassava cultivation and sale, sewing machines for dressmaking, and schooling for their children because they cannot move into trading or producing ventures that could yield a richer return, an important additional question remains. Cassava cultivation, processing and sale can make a woman economically independent of her husband; Ottenberg nowhere suggests that it can serve as an important means of capital accumulation. A sewing machine can serve similar ends, but Ottenberg describes no female entrepreneur of the dressmaking trade. And schooling (for one's female children, at least), long the best way to raise the status of one's offspring to a point higher than one's own, seems directed mainly toward moving those children into the occupations (such as nurse, teacher, and welfare worker) long regarded in western society as the most obvious non-manual, low-status slots for women. Perhaps we are entitled to ask ourselves whether this sort of westernization among the Afikpo Ibo will not eventuate in a lower status for women than was true traditionally, rather than a higher status, in at least some regards.

This may not be an idle question. The weight of inexplicit justification for the modernization process has rested to at least some extent on the belief that economic development will increase individual opportunities, make greater room for individual fulfillment, and eliminate certain sorts of traditional inequalities. Indeed all this may be so. But surely anthropologists need to take special account of the possibility that certain sorts of modernization and of economic growth may have the opposite result. Implicit here is the suggestion, of course, that a gradual increase in the

number of females who can become nurses, say, or elementary-school teachers, may be counterbalanced by a decline in the number of women traders whose particular position in society depends in some part on their economic independence from their husbands. The point here has to do with what happens to sex roles as society changes. Even should economic opportunities for women expand, there is no assurance that they will be able to maintain the stakes associated with female sex roles if growth in other sectors of the economy come to dwarf their activities or to forestall traditional opportunities for reinvestment when they are successful.

A recent publication (Le Cour Grandmaison, 1969) provides West African data—in this case, for Dakar, Sénégal—that qualifies the preceding materials in some ways, while supporting them in others. Three-quarters of the female wage-earners in Dakar are domestics and, as in comparable ‘underdeveloped’ countries, their economic circumstances are poorly protected. Twenty-five percent of the salaried females in Dakar work as secretaries, teachers, stenographers, midwives, nurses, school supervisors and, though the work is both seasonal and irregular, in fish canneries. Self-employed females in Dakar, according to the author’s estimates, nearly equal in number those who are salaried; all are engaged in some sort of intermediation as fishmongers, cloth jobbers, retailers of truck garden products, and market women. Le Cour Grandmaison makes plain that the growth of the urban economy has not rewarded women proportionately in economic terms: *‘L’extension de l’économie urbaine ne s’est donc pas accompagnée jusqu’à maintenant d’un accroissement parallèle du salariat féminin’* (1969: 143).

In three spheres of trade, however, traditionally feminine activities have been expanded under modern conditions: cloth jobbing, fish retailing and the selling of truck produce. Cloth jobbers, who are the most prosperous of self-employed Dakar females (the author points out that they often make credit advances to weavers, in some cases at interest rates quoted at 50 percent for three months) enjoy special advantages in the local economy; their activities are consistent with tradition, yet they have expanded noticeably with the spread of urbanism and the cash nexus. Other forms of female intermediation are concentrated in fishmongering (about 25 percent of retailers) and truck garden products (about 60 percent); only about 15 percent of the total engage in the sale of miscellaneous market products, including cooked food, flowers, meat, spices, curdled milk, couscous and the like. In the retailing of fish and truck produce, Lebou and Wolof women predominate because of their long-established control (maintained by both ethnic and familial solidarity) of the most advantageous selling locales, according to Le Cour Grandmaison. These retailers also enjoy the advantages of traditional forms of economic privilege as related to their spouses, and the author points out that such forms are by no means limited

in West Africa to Senegalese peoples. Women have an inalienable claim upon profits from the sale of garden produce they have grown themselves, or from the sale of fish their fishermen-husbands give them for this purpose. Moreover, as Le Cour Grandmaison remarks, the Islamic prescription that the husband is inalterably responsible for the support of his family reinforces the rights of women to use as they will their own marketing profits.<sup>7</sup>

Individual economic rights for women are especially clear in the case of fishing and fish retailing, and the author gives us good examples of women whose wealth and influence far exceeds that of their husbands. Awa G., who owns three motor launches and their nets, employs her husband on one; her annual money income is triple that of her husband, and she has invested her additional profits in a small truck and a taxi. Though such cases are rare, we are told, they do dramatize the separateness of husband and wife in economic terms (not diminished by the wife's employing her husband), and help to explain the importance of investment by market women in transport, house construction and the acquisition of capital goods, '*groupe minoritaire, mais qui utilise étonnamment sa double appartenance à l'organisation sociale ancienne et au secteur économique moderne*' (Le Cour Grandmaison, 1969: 150).

The significance of these materials is plain. The *Dakaroise* who can maintain her traditional rights as an independent trader simultaneously reinforces older patterns while gaining in wealth and influence; but the *Dakaroise* who seeks to become a wage-earner in the western sense faces serious difficulties. Urbanization (or 'modernization') in Sénégal has enhanced the position of at least some female traders; but opportunities for female wage-earners have not increased in proportion to those available to males. The author does not, unfortunately, deal with the question of male traders, so that it is not clear whether men have begun to preempt any of the traditionally female trading activities; nor are we told whether female traders train their daughters for trade, or for other occupations.

<sup>7</sup> That Islamic tradition may sometimes work to the advantage of economically active females is suggested by a recent paper by Polly Hill as well:

Despite their virtual incarceration for the first 35 years of their married lives, the women of the *gari* [town] enjoy a considerable degree of economic independence—thus having somewhat more in common with their sisters in southern forest country than might be supposed. Just as the economic relationship between fathers and sons (and between brothers) often involves cash transactions identical to those between non-kin, so it is between husbands and wives: thus, to take two examples, fathers pay their married sons in *gandu* [a form of economic cooperation between fathers and married sons] for evening work on the farms, this being outside the range of their customary duties, and a husband will pay his wife at (or near) the standard rate for 'threshing' groundnuts, her obligations being confined to domestic duties, mainly cooking. Just as fathers are apt to sell farms to their sons, so a wife who makes groundnut oil for sale will pay her husband the proper 'market price' for any groundnuts she buys from him. Although, of course, husbands and wives are apt to help each other in numerous different ways, a wife's economic autonomy is often sufficient to insulate her from her husband's poverty—as shown by the examples of prominent house-traders whose husbands are notably poverty-stricken (Hill, 1969: 398).

One may describe with somewhat more assurance the trading activities of Haitian market women, their place in Haitian society, and the relationship between their economic endeavors and the sex-roles they play. Whereas Ottenberg suggests that women did not range freely or widely in their marketing in traditional Afikpo society, due to the lack of civil security, Haitian women are said to have taken over marketing activities precisely because the men were in danger of conscription and forced service (Leyburn, 1941: 202). In any case, while market places predate Haiti's independence—the slaves cultivated and sold items, as they did in Jamaica under slavery (Mintz, 1955; Mintz and Hall, 1960)—apparently women did not begin to predominate until after Independence, in 1804. And though Haiti's wars and ephemeral military regimes may have encouraged women to do the marketing, at least as important (and again, as in Jamaica) was the gradual accumulation of land by an expanding peasantry, and the concentration of males in agricultural production. In Haiti, as in Jamaica, the critical factor may have been the acquisition of land by a reconstituted peasantry, land enough to free women from cultivation but not land enough to produce a yield sufficiently large to make it profitable for the peasant cultivator to go regularly to market himself.

Haitian market women vary from the peasant wife who sells a handful of produce at irregular intervals in the market place to obtain cash for needed commodities, to the large-scale, full-time urban and rural wholesalers, retailers, and stallholders who handle large amounts of trading capital. Young girls—and, often, even babies—are taken along on trading trips, and girls always learn how to trade from their mothers, other female relatives, or foster mothers. A few cents constitutes initial trading capital for youngsters; a successful adult female wholesaler may deal in several hundreds of dollars' worth of stock each week. And whereas Afikpo women are restricted by custom and by their husbands' authority from increasing trade earnings through long-distance trips, Haitian market women travel readily and widely in their operations. Ottenberg gives us a picture of Afikpo women in the setting of their homes, and in terms of their relationships to their husbands, where traditional male authority remains strong. Full-time professional Haitian market women, however, are not significantly restricted by their familial obligations, or by rigid patterns of male authority. Many Haitian market women—quite possibly a majority, though there are no statistics to express the situation nationally—are single, or live in common-law (*placé*) relationships that permit them maximum mobility. Many of the most active and successful rural trading women are away from their homes for four days in seven, engaged either in the sale of produce or in its accumulation for resale. Métraux (1951: 147) tells us that some Haitian farmers are left at such a loss by

their marketer wives' absence that they 'fast stoically for two or three days' until their spouses return. And while a preponderant number of Afikpo women carry on agricultural labor, Haitian women say they dislike farm work, and avoid it as much as they can. Market trade, as the Haitian rural woman's best means to acquire additional wealth, is also the best excuse for avoiding agricultural work. My own findings, partly supported by the work of others (cf. Métraux, 1951: 120-6, 146-7), indicate that men are not prepared to insist that their wives or common-law wives forsake any trading activity, merely in order to fulfill their domestic obligations. Though market women use their profits in domestic upkeep, for the education of their children, for *vodoun* ceremonial payments and in other ways, their husbands have no recognized claim on their capital. Marketing, moreover, is generally regarded as women's work; while there is hardly a Haitian rural woman who has never engaged in petty trade, male traders are a minority, and their efforts are concentrated in certain limited (though often especially lucrative) sectors of the internal market system.

While Haitian market women appear to be more important and proportionately much more professional than their Afikpo counterparts, and though they are far less restricted in their business operations, their situation resembles that of the Afikpo women in certain regards. Surely one of the most significant similarities inheres in the absence of new or different investment opportunities toward which trading profits may be redirected. A Haitian market woman can, by a combination of hard work, commercial acumen and good fortune, increase her capital holdings from a few cents to a few thousand dollars, and though the nature of her trading operations can change as her capital accumulates, the most she can probably hope for is the acquisition of a permanent city stall, additional farm land, or widened educational opportunities for her children. Le Cour Grand-maison's data imply that the field of maneuver for the Dakar female trader is much wider. The character of the Haitian economy is such that the female marketer can neither generate any substantial growth in that economy as a whole, nor find investment opportunities other than in somewhat expanded trade. Many of her maneuvers (Mintz, 1964a: 271-4) have to do with the preservation of capital in relatively liquid form from one harvest season to another, so dependent is her trade on the general level of economic activity in the countryside. And while she has no obligation to transfer capital to her husband, there may be pressure by husbands to secure use of their trading wives' capital for their own agricultural activities.

A Haitian market woman will risk some substantial part of her capital as often as once or twice a week, especially during the harvest seasons. While the details vary with the level of trade and with the sorts of stock acquired for resale, the essential features of these risk situations are simple

enough. A rural wholesaler acquires stock from her neighbors, and on buying trips to other regions; when she has acquired stock to the limits of her capital and in line with her judgment of the future market in the city, or in the regional market place where she plans to resell, she goes with her stock to the market center and begins reselling. Métraux (1951: 125) estimates that Haitian market women seek a profit of 20 percent on their gross investment, but are satisfied with 10 percent; other figures for a group of onion wholesalers from the St. Raphaël region of northern Haiti suggest that a profit of 5 percent in that line of trade is considered very satisfactory (Mintz, 1964a).

Needless to add, such traders often lose. The demands such marketing make upon the intermediary in terms of energy, wit and resourcefulness are severe, and a woman who loses her investment may have to work long and hard in order to acquire new capital. She must deal with many different individuals, and is not always sure whom she can trust; if her stock is of perishables, she knows that she must sell off her stock before it begins to rot, and this puts a special premium upon her energy and decisiveness, as well as upon her powers of persuasion. She must guard herself at all times against thieves, and thieves of many sorts—magicians who can steal her money without touching it, others who will cut her purse out of her dress while she sleeps, those who attempt to sell her poor produce by concealment, ruse, or adulteration, and those who promise to pay and then do not. She is, moreover, in constant and overt competition with others like herself, all seeking the razor's edge of profit.

These circumstances reward the intelligent, those who can be daring without losing their judgment, the experienced, the energetic and strong; they penalize the stupid, the foolhardy, the inexperienced, the sickly. It is not necessary to argue that the Haitian internal market system always rewards the 'best sorts of people' in order to assert that it clearly rewards some talents more regularly than others. Women learn to be marketers; the knowledge they acquire in the process is valuable. In a situation where the same quality of commodity was being sold at the same price by a number of different women on the basis of clear-cut competition, and without any price-fixing or sellers' combination, I asked one of my best informants what she and her fellow-sellers would do if a new woman appeared, selling the same item at a noticeably lower price. This can and does occur, as when a seller comes from a distant region and has acquired her stock at a price low enough to enable her to pay transport and long-term supply costs and still undersell competitors. My informant, smiling, answered my question with another, equal to an economist's best. 'How much stock does she have?' she asked. 'Let's say very little', I countered. 'We would merely permit her to sell out', she said. 'And what if her stock were substantial?' I asked. She smiled again. 'Ah, then we would buy her

out!' she responded.<sup>8</sup> In Haiti as in West Africa, market women display a firm grasp of economic principles having to do with capital as opposed to 'money'. The term for money is *lajâ*; the term for capital is *mâmâ lajâ*, or 'mother money'. I have even heard Haitian women refer to the profits from a particular trading venture as *pittit yo*, 'the children'. Their skill and resourcefulness often reveal themselves especially well in their credit manipulations. As in West Africa (Bauer, 1954: 17), women will sometimes get their trading capital by buying wholesale on credit, selling retail at reduced prices, lending their earnings in even smaller amounts at higher rates of interest—5 percent for three days' use is not unusual—and then repaying their suppliers, showing a profit at the end of such a maneuver.

These anecdotal materials illustrate that special talents are required, evoked, and rewarded by market trade; such talents might prove transferable to other spheres of investment if the opportunities for reinvestment were wider. Moreover, since such talents tend to accompany the division of labor between men and women, at least within the rural peasant sector of the societies in question, they are more likely to characterize the female trader than the male farmer. The writer's experiences in Haiti support these assertions, at least impressionistically. Haitian market women usually seemed to be more sociable, more lively, more sophisticated, less distrustful of outsiders, and more daring than their husbands.

But the Haitian economy provides such women with scanty space for innovative maneuver, and with little or no opportunity to reinvest in new forms of production. It is the men who control coffee, sisal, and livestock production and sale, for the most part; men, and foreign firms, who control the licensed purchasing and bulking of export commodities; men who engage in most craft activities and artisanship; and men, of course, who dominate the governmental and military apparatus of Haitian society. Thus it is not surprising that market women often give over much of their earnings to the education of their children, as the major means of 'reinvestment'. As in the Afikpo case, girl children are trained when possible for careers in teaching, nursing, and similar jobs. In her work with a group of seventeen poultry-sellers in a Port-au-Prince market, Legerman found that only one such woman was assisted by (and training) her daughter in trade, and this woman was a marginal marketer, based in the countryside (1962: 146–7). Legerman writes: 'While the majority of the women learned about commerce from their mothers or some other close female relative who also sold poultry, their own children are attending school.' Legerman also discovered that none of these women was co-

<sup>8</sup> I never saw this happen, in more than a year of study. The assertion provided me with the only evidence of a potential for price-fixing combination I could discover among Haitian market women. Of course this may be no more than a comment on ineffective fieldwork; but my observations gave me no evidence. Is it conceivable that informants may describe something they never do?

residing with a man in the city, and that at least ten of the seventeen were no longer joined in any kind of union to a male (*ibid.*, pp. 148–9). The picture we get here, then, is one of substantial economic independence, but restricted opportunity for the enlargement of one's enterprise, and a commitment to the education of one's children, rather than to hereditary trade, as a means of advancement.

Hence, while Haitian society and its internal market system seem to afford women a much more active and independent economic role than that provided to the women of the Afikpo Ibo, and though certain prerogatives appear to be available to Haitian women in accord with their economic activities, there are also upper limits to the expansion of these activities. Once again, the desire for advancement is handled in good part through the use of education for one's children; and here, as in Dakar, the woman of limited education is trained to the lower-status, non-manual occupations so typical of the western social and economic pattern.

An additional description deals with the Yoruba of Nigeria (Marshall, 1964), supplemented by some materials collected by Comhaire-Sylvain (1951) and Katzin (1964). Probably no people on earth has institutionalized women's rights to engage in trading activity so fully as have the Yoruba (cf. Ward, 1938, *passim*); Yoruba women not only have a wholly acknowledged right to trade and to use their capital largely as they see fit, but they also dominate the internal market system. Comhaire-Sylvain's brief but very informative study in Lagos was based on a questionnaire given to 207 schoolgirls, who were subdivided into three class groupings by the investigator on the basis of their fathers' occupations. Eighty-two percent of the respondents' mothers worked at least part-time; by 'class grouping', 62 percent of Class I, 82 percent of Class II, and 93 percent of Class III worked. When divided along lines of monogamy vs. polygamy, it turned out that only 2.9 percent of the women in polygynous unions, or three out of 103, stayed at home; two were the first wives of lawyers, one the first wife of a tailor. Of the 104 women in monogamous unions, 32.7 percent or thirty-four in number stayed at home; the heaviest concentration of non-working women was expectably in Class I, while the heaviest concentration of working women was in Class III. One-hundred-fifty-four of the 207 respondents were daughters of Yoruba women. All but eighteen (11.7 percent) of their mothers worked, and of the Yoruba in Class III, fifty-nine of sixty-one women worked. Generally speaking, non-working women were more commonly monogamous and non-Yoruba; and of course the lower their class position, the more likely that they worked.

As is well known, Yoruba wives are expected to make a very substantial contribution to the upkeep of the family, particularly toward expenses connected with children's schooling. The main source of income is trade. Comhaire-Sylvain's figures indicate that nearly 85 percent of the working

mothers in her sample engaged in trade, and more than 95 percent of her Class III working mothers were traders; even in Class I, more than half of the working women were traders, though the author notes that trade is generally regarded as less prestigious than the professions, particularly by those who have had some schooling. Many Yoruba women have demonstrated incredible business acumen, and have acquired great wealth and considerable prestige through trade; Comhaire-Sylvain notes that some Lagos women traders have capital holdings of £20,000 or more, while those with more than £5,000 are common. Bauer (1954: 2) refers to 'an African lady whose annual turnover with one of the big European trading firms runs into six figures'—she is probably a Yoruba—and to a three-woman trading firm (Ibo?) in Onitsha whose purchase on credit of £9,000 worth of tobacco he personally witnessed (*ibid.*, p. 3).

These data indicate the enormous importance of trade in the life of Yoruba women and some of their achievements. Marshall's study is concerned with less spectacular but nonetheless impressive trading activity by women on a more modest scale, and with the relationship of such activity to the patterns of authority and family organization in Yoruba life. Yoruba women were traders long before the twentieth century, and their importance in trade has, if anything, grown in recent decades. Marshall makes clear that while trading activity is considered appropriate for almost all Yoruba women, the nature of such trade varies in accordance with age, child-bearing and child-rearing obligations, and a woman's particular position among the wives of her spouse. Moreover, this adjustment is doubtless very old; Marshall rejects the speculation that 'insecurity' for traveling males led to a predominance of trade by women (Pedler, 1955: 139).<sup>9</sup> In the case of the Yoruba, women traditionally traded, while men engaged in agriculture; both men and women had some craft specializations. Before the widening and increased integration of the economies of Nigeria, Yoruba women largely conducted their trading on the local level, as well as participating to some degree in the periodic 'fairs' or markets that were part of Yoruba life. In recent years, their trading activities have increased and, in important ways, changed qualitatively. Marshall argues that their importance as traders was related to the concentration of men in agriculture—partly determined by the need for men to work at great distances from their settlements—and to the highly-developed regional and craft specialization of the Yoruba and their neighbors. In this century, the growth of commercial agriculture, especially in cocoa and palm kernels, has kept most men on the land, while opening new trading opportunities for their wives.

<sup>9</sup> Though Hodder (1969: 24–5) seems to accept it, it may be of some interest that 'civil insecurity' has been used both to explain why Haitian women have long been the marketers, and why Afikpo women have not. Market and highway peace probably have affected the economic roles of men and women in various societies; but it is difficult to weigh this factor.

The women traders of the town of Awe studied by Marshall are mainly engaged in relatively small-scale trade, principally in agricultural products. But very importantly, these traders do not take part in the marketing of export crops, which is the sphere of male trading (Marshall, 1964: 137–8). This exclusion of women from what is economically the most important sort of peasant production is interesting indeed. Marshall writes:

At the beginning of each season, the licensed agents for the Marketing Board make advances to their buyers for the purchase of export crops. These licensed firms guard against default on the debt by taking security from the buyer to cover part of the advance. The terms of security accepted are 'deposit of cash, deposit of deeds, of buildings, and guarantee by sureties'. Even though women earn money and own property, it is the men who own and control most of the real property in Yoruba-land and who have been able to accumulate the greatest cash and surety reserves. Therefore, men have been in a better economic position to take advantage of the trade niches created by the necessity to decentralize the process of collecting export crops. Then too because the men cultivated the crops, it was they who received information from the government and other sources concerning the procedures by which the crops were to be marketed and hence some of the farmers themselves negotiated for jobs as buyers (commission agents or middlemen traders) with the firms licensed by the Marketing Board (Marshall, 1964: 138).

In this same connection it is worth noting that those palm kernels circulating in internal trade are almost entirely handled by female intermediaries. Similarly, Haitian coffee to be sold in the internal markets moves through the hands of female marketers, while that destined for export moves through the hands of mainly male traders and licensed buyers. The point to be stressed here, I think, is the neat separation of the internal market system from the channels by which agricultural commodities reach the export houses; this is not a difference between subsistence crops and cash crops, but rather one between locally-produced goods for local consumption, and those for export (Mintz, 1959). Such division in many cases circumvents female intermediaries, even in societies where they are important, as in the cases of Nigeria and Haiti.

Marshall dealt mainly with small-scale village intermediaries, whose capital might range from a few shillings to perhaps £40. Though she collected too little specific data to be certain, Marshall believes most of these women can rarely accumulate much additional capital, since such family expenses as children's school fees and kinship obligations usually soak up their profits. While husbands were expected to contribute to their wives' initial trading capital, Marshall found that few did and, in any case, the wife's trading activities constituted a separate economic sphere. How very separate is suggested by some amusing anecdotal material Marshall offers. A farmer who sometimes sells cassava meal to his trader-wife made clear that he expected her to pay a competitive price; if she would not, he would sell to another intermediary. 'There is no question here of

responsibilities toward a wife', he said; 'here it is a matter of trading' (Marshall, 1964: 187). Marshall goes on to mention that farmers sometimes ask their wives to take crops to market for them '... since it is generally felt that men are more easily cheated in the bargaining process than are women' (*ibid.*, p. 188). Though husbands and wives of course give each other gifts, they do not confuse gift-giving with business: 'a man who smokes *buys* cigarettes from a wife who sells them; one who drinks palm wine buys the quantity he wants' (*ibid.*). There is no common household budget; in effect, men appear to make the bulk of the contribution.<sup>10</sup> Mothers are also responsible for the costs of feeding and of basic care of their children and themselves.

The biggest expense men listed when questioned by Marshall was that of securing wives. Yoruba rural society is such that men often reside for long periods away from one wife, and this arrangement, together with severe taboos against sexual activity during lactation, predispose men to take secondary wives. On occasion, a single wife will even urge her husband to obtain a second wife. Among other things, the presence of a second wife usually frees the senior wife for more trading activity.<sup>11</sup>

The remainder of Marshall's argument is taken up largely with the relationship between trading and family structure; her major contention seems to be that trade by women is not disorganizing in the Yoruba case and that, in fact, culturally-defined obligations require that women trade in order to maintain a preexistent structure of relationship and obligation. Especially interesting, I think, is the woman's commitment to her children's education. Marshall does not deal with the urban women traders, nor with those whose level of operations is very grand; some of the points that concern us here must hence be answered, if possible, from other sources. Regrettably, there is little available concerning the large-scale female traders of the cities, but a short paper on the traders of Onitsha, Nigeria by Katzin does provide some provocative data.

Katzin's study of the small entrepreneur in Onitsha (Katzin, 1964) documents some distinctions between male and female traders in that city. Perhaps of particular interest is the fact that it is the men, not the women, who have pushed their way into certain types of trade in Onitsha in recent years. The men who first became produce buyers reselling to European firms as full-time intermediaries were resented by women traders as interlopers, and teased by other men as well. One successful male intermediary reported that he was unable to marry a woman of what he regarded as

<sup>10</sup> But women appear to be charged heavily with the costs of the children's education; in a case known to me personally, a textiles-jobber in a Nigerian market town was paying entirely on her own to keep one son in a United States medical school, another in an undergraduate college.

<sup>11</sup> It might be asked whether polygyny in the Yoruba case does not in fact confer greater economic independence upon *some* women.

appropriate status for years, because his trading profession was considered unbecoming. Yet, he said, he would have not had this trouble if he were a full-time agriculturist or if he had remained in his previous occupation as a teacher (Katzin, 1964: 186–7). It may be significant that this man gave up teaching to become a trader—at the same time that many women traders in Yorubaland are using their profits from trade to educate their children to become teachers.

Yoruba men are also described by Katzin as the innovators in Onitsha trade. She writes:

All 12 outstandingly successful woman traders at Onitsha were established customers of one or another of the great European trading firms, from whom they bought goods on credit to resell to the large clientele of smaller traders, which each of them had built up over many years of trading. Innovating and imitating entrepreneurs seem all to have been men. As far as could be ascertained, not a single woman trader had done any direct importing, though occasionally they place special orders with the European firms; and among hundreds of Nigerians using current accounts with one Onitsha bank for business purposes, only two were women (Katzin, 1964: 189).

Moreover, Ibo and Yoruba men appear to be taking over some sectors of trade formerly controlled by women. Whereas, at one time, female fish-retailers in Onitsha would make credit advances to fishermen in the Northern Region who would bring their stock downriver for their creditors, male Ibo traders now travel to the Northern Region, circumventing their female counterparts in the city. Women have complained bitterly of this practice, Katzin reports, but without effect. Again, Ibo males are estimated to be importing directly about one-quarter of the overseas merchandise sold at Onitsha, and ‘. . . appear to be displacing Ibo women as regular customers of non-African firms’ (*ibid.*).

These facts suggest that the traditional predominance of female traders in much of Nigeria is being threatened by the expansion of men’s commercial activities. When this development is added to the virtual exclusion of women from export commodity activity, we can see that expanded market and commercial opportunities in some spheres of West African trade are probably redounding more to the benefit of the male trader than to that of his spouse.

These admittedly sketchy and only barely comparable collections of data suggest certain tentative conclusions. In those societies where women are economically important in trade, their sex-role differentiation will be expectably linked in some ways to their trading activity. In some cases, moreover, it can be hypothesized that internal market systems may expand, rather than contract, as an aspect of economic growth of other kinds, even while economic changes of a more massive sort are occurring outside the internal market system. Implicit in this hypothesis is another: that these wider and more complex sorts of economic growth will probably

afford women fewer new opportunities than those available within an ongoing (or expanding) internal market system. We have some evidence for these assertions. In societies such as Afikpo Ibo, Haiti, Yoruba, and Sénégal (Dakar), sex-role differentiation does indeed tie in with trading activity. Furthermore, these are societies in which the internal market system appears to be expanding, as in Iboland, Yorubaland and Sénégal, or at least remaining stable, as in Haiti. In Nigeria and Sénégal, internal market systems have expanded as an aspect of increasing commercialization and, probably, higher average incomes, while increasing urbanization and the shift of more of the labor force away from agriculture has stimulated market trade in some items.

Under these conditions, some women traders have been able to expand their operations greatly and to locate new opportunities in trade; the information noted earlier suggests the scale of success of the preeminent few. But for reasons that are not always entirely clear, we have little evidence that women traders in these situations have demonstrated a continuing capacity to expand their operations, to innovate significantly in trading, or to get firmly inside the sphere of export intermediation. Instead, we note the predominance of men in the export business, and their growing importance as full-time traders and innovators. One imponderable may be a preference on the part of the representatives of European firms to deal with men. In any case, while the economic growth induced by westernization has doubtless increased opportunities for (at least some) female traders, it may also and simultaneously limit the range of their activities, as economic changes outside the internal market system continue to multiply.

It appears that women traders in these societies may be inclined to shift their interest from increasing their commerce to increasing the opportunities for their children. Such opportunities are dearly bought in so-called underdeveloped societies, and they rest mainly upon the use of education as a mobility device. While the most successful women traders may be able to give their sons university educations and even legal or medical training, these are very much in the minority. Probably most such women are more fitted by their scale of operations to provide some of their children with elementary education, and perhaps with commercial or service-rendering training of the sort leading to jobs as teachers, nurses, clerks, welfare workers, and the like—that is, low-ranking employee positions of a familiar sort. This educational direction is quite in line with ‘westernization’ and ‘modernization’ as these terms are commonly used; but the jobs they lead to represent a sharp shift away from individual enterprise, risk-taking, and independent endeavor of certain sorts. Admittedly, this may be true for men, as it appears to be true for women. But it seems that this direction is particularly telling for women since, in

societies of the West African and non-Hispanic Caribbean sorts, the idea that a woman conducts at least a major part of her economic life independently is deeply embedded and generally accepted by all. With reference to domestic organization and family structure, the difference for women between independent trading activity and a regular but low-paying job as a beautician or nurse rests particularly with the fact that a husband cannot safely tamper with his wife's conduct of her trading business, while he may, indeed, lay serious claim upon her earnings at a job without endangering her performance. Granted that many other factors enter into the picture, it still remains that *independent* economic activity means just that—and a salary-paying job does not confer independence upon the female in quite the same way that trade does.<sup>12</sup>

Among the features of trade that help to define this difference is the trading woman's right to travel widely, to consign the care of her children to others, and, to a variable extent, to use her profits as she sees fit. We have even seen that some women in West Africa urge their husbands to take another wife in order to increase their maneuverability. Some criticisms of full-time female trading activity that have begun to crop up are of considerable interest because they strike precisely at the woman's range of choices. It was Nadel (1942: 168, 334), Marshall points out (1964: 246), who first suggested a close connection between trade and prostitution; McCall has also referred to this connection as an aspect of long-range and urban trading among the Ashanti (1961: 298); and other writers have dealt with the same idea (e.g. Little, 1948). It may be that independent urban living by self-supporting women may be positively associated with prostitution; but it also seems worth stressing that it is not trading activity as such that can be held responsible. Marshall calls the claim into question: '... in Yoruba society... since virtually all women are traders, one would not look to this as the variable which could explain the deviant sexual behavior of a relatively small proportion of women in the society' (1964: 247).

Another criticism of trading activity by women treats of its effects on family life and the care of children. Marshall shows quite convincingly that Yoruba rural society, at least, is designed to provide proper care for children while their mothers trade; in fact, their mothers' trade seems to lie at the basis of many of the children's future opportunities for personal

<sup>12</sup> Le Cour Grandmaison (1969: 151) argues that salaried females lack a traditional standard for the separation of their incomes and those of other family members, and are committed to more expenditure and less capital accumulation accordingly. '*Les femmes indépendantes, par contre, insérées dans le cadre familial où se perpétuent les valeurs attachées à l'ancienne société, sont encore protégées pour un temps de la séduction de la consommation urbaine.*' I would suggest that the very nature of salary payment also limits the female's opportunities for independent economic maneuver. The shift away from independent economic activity raises some worrisome questions about the definition of class position, particularly since Westerners often confuse middle-class consumption norms with middle-class ideology, as in Latin America. Cf. Mintz, 1964b: 8.

advancement. Admittedly, in situations of total familial breakdown, the difficulties in providing proper child care may be compounded. But a casual comparison with more westernized societies than Nigeria provides little evidence that, generally speaking, the children of working mothers are better cared for elsewhere. In fact, the complaint that an economically active mother is incapable of providing adequate care for her children has a strikingly familiar western ring, and its mention suggests a brief concluding comment on westernization and economic development.

It is generally recognized that the mastery and acquisition of the technical achievements of industrial society has its own *quid pro quo* in social, cultural and psychological terms. Citizens of western societies are deeply concerned with individual fulfillment and individual freedom; yet westerners have their own difficulties in separating the technical and the social, since they, too, are the products of particular cultural conditioning. North Americans, for instance—perhaps particularly those of us who are male—fail to reflect sufficiently upon the sexual division of power in North American society. This claim may be advanced in homely terms fitting our academic identity. Which male professional among us seriously entertains the possibility that where his equally professional wife works is more important than where *he* works? Which of us is prepared to accept a job at a very small or very isolated or very undistinguished institution, merely to enable his tender comrade to accept a job at a large or distinguished institution? Even worse, which of us is prepared to take on the duties of housewife, on the mere grounds that his wife is generally regarded as a better scholar than himself? Underlying our professions of equality and the need for individual fulfillment is the inescapable premise that the husband's career comes first—not equal, not next, but first. This premise is entirely consistent with the history of *western* society; so is the concentration of women in elementary school teaching rather than university teaching, nursing rather than doctoring, stenography rather than business administration, and so on. If this is so, it behooves anthropologists to entertain the possibility that certain undeveloped and non-western societies may, so far as sex-role differentiation is concerned, provide fuller opportunities for individual freedom and choice of certain kinds than does our own. It follows that the use of such terms as westernization, modernization, and economic development may continue to be rather more culture-bound than is always noticed. If the multiplication of individual alternatives in the economic sphere is a useful index of westernization and modernization, it may be that some forms of modernization are regressive, in that they actually reduce individual prerogatives for members of one sex. All of these concluding assertions are, of course, impure surmise. One may terminate with an additional impurity. Who is more modern, more western, more developed: a barefoot and illiterate Yoruba market woman

who daily risks her security and her capital in vigorous individual competition with others like herself; or a Smith College graduate who spends her days ferrying her husband to the Westport railroad station and her children to ballet classes? If the answer is that at least the Smith girl is literate and wears shoes, one may wonder whether one brand of anthropology has not been hoist by its own petard.

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