



Women and Conflict Management in Selected Market Places in Southwestern Nigeria

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Abstract

Most markets in Africa are of the informal type with the women being, perhaps, the most important stakeholders. Since the pre-colonial period, women, even though under the indirect control of their male counterparts, are the 'market-women' responsible both for buying and selling. It is hardly an accepted norm that men sell their products themselves, neither are 'responsible' men expected to purchase their needs from the market. To date, these are still common practices as women, in a way, dominate activities at the informal market place. Consequently, these women are important stakeholders in the management of conflict within the market space. However, not much attention has been given to an in-depth consideration of this all-important role of women in conflict management at the market place. This paper attempts a critical assessment of how peace is sustained within the market space, courtesy of the 'market women'. Through a triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies involving the use of secondary and primary data, the paper reveals basic causes of conflict within the market place, and its maintenance and the process of engendering peace by the women. The paper posits that a neglect of women in conflict management at the market place is a negation of peace in any society.

Résumé

La plupart des marchés en Afrique sont de type informel dans lesquels les femmes sont, peut-être, les acteurs les plus importants. Depuis la période précoloniale, les femmes, même si elles sont sous le contrôle indirect de leurs homologues masculins, sont les « femmes du marché » responsables tant de l'achat que de la vente. Que les hommes vendent leurs produits eux-mêmes n'est guère une norme acceptée, et les hommes « responsables » ne sont pas non plus censés acheter eux-mêmes ce dont ils ont besoin au marché. À ce jour, ce sont encore des pratiques courantes étant donné que les femmes, d'une certaine manière, dominent

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les activités sur le marché informel. Par conséquent, ces femmes sont des acteurs importants dans la gestion des conflits au sein des marchés. Cependant, peu d'attention a été accordée à une analyse approfondie de ce rôle primordial des femmes en matière de gestion des conflits au sein des marchés. Cet article tente de mener une évaluation critique de la façon dont la paix est maintenue au sein des marchés, grâce à la courtoisie des « femmes de marché ». Grâce à une triangulation de méthodologies de recherche quantitatives et qualitatives impliquant l'utilisation de données secondaires et primaires, cette étude révèle les causes fondamentales de conflit au sein des marchés, et le processus de consolidation de la paix par les femmes. L'article pose comme principe que la négligence des femmes dans la gestion des conflits au sein des marchés est synonyme de négation de la paix dans toute société.

Introduction and Statement of the Problem

Nigeria, a member of the United Nations, has signed many international instruments, treaties and conventions. Such instruments have emphasised that member nations put in place all the necessary mechanisms needed to eliminate gender discrimination, ensure equality and human dignity to all men and women. In recent times, especially since the 1970s when there was increased attention to gender as a vital issue in development, within the context of improving the participation of women in the development process, gender roles in managing conflict have come to the fore (FGN 2006:8).

With the declaration of the United Nations Decade for Women 1975-1985, issues regarding the marginalisation of the vast majority of women in African societies were taken seriously. In addition, during this period the discourse of Women in Development was articulated. The argument here was that women's work and roles in the society have been devalued, and the different ways in which development strategies have contributed to women's marginalisation and oppression have been denied (Sen and Grown 1988:12).

Women in Development emerged, to a large extent, as a response to advocating greater involvement of women in the economy, but neglected to consider the context within which women do their work. With the introduction of the Millennium Development Goals, attention is now drawn to pursuing gender sensitive policies – goal three of the MDGs – aimed at achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. To meet these, there is a need to further understand how women contribute to peacemaking and peace building in all facets of human society (FGN 2010:9).

It is a well known fact that the social relations and activities of Nigerian women are largely governed by patriarchal systems of socialisation and cultural practices which favour the interests of men. A high percentage of women's employment is restricted to low income generating activities

concentrated within the lower levels of the unregulated informal sector. Even the men engaged within the informal sector have the upper hand over the women for they are predominantly engaged in higher income-generating activities. Women represent 87 per cent of those employed in the service sector, which involves predominantly informal and unregulated forms of employment (Nwaka 2005:16). Being more visible at the informal market place, therefore, their roles in maintaining peace can be best understood with a view to explain how they may be better empowered.

Aims and Objectives

In order to address the problem identified above, this paper focuses on the following objectives. First, the paper examines the importance of markets in any society as a focus of interaction, whether it is economic, political or social. Second, it identifies women's roles in informal markets. Third, attempts are made to identify the roles of women in conflict management. Fourth, using the data collected in two selected major markets in Ibadan, the paper highlights the type of conflicts that arises in the market place and the processes through which women tend to resolve conflict. The paper further analyses women's own peace initiatives. Finally the paper suggests strategies for improving upon how women manage conflicts in the market places.

Conceptual Clarifications for the Study

- Conflict is defined as a struggle or contest between individuals with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values, or goals.
- Conflict Management is the long-term management of disputes and conflicts, which may or may not lead to resolution.
- Illiterates are individuals who have little or no education; especially being unable to read or write.
- Literates are described as individuals who are knowledgeable or educated in a particular field or fields.
- Traditional markets: Marketing takes place, mainly, on 17-day basis; without standard shops and located in traditional compounds.
- Modern markets: Organised in a well structured pattern; marketing is on a daily basis; and located around middle class areas.

Theoretical Conceptualisation of Conflict and Conflict Management

Conflict can be said to be an integral component of human functioning, and an unavoidable component of human activity. Though it has been manifested in diverse ways over the years, the concept could be classified according to a myriad of parameters and variables, and this creates difficulty in formulating an operational and exact definition. Conflict refers to disputes, disagreements,

quarrels, and struggles, fights and wars between individuals, groups and countries. Since different groups and individuals have diverse interests, the aims of some groups conflict with those of others. Thus conflict is an integral part of human life that often emerges when parties involved compete over certain goals, values or interests. Conflict can be referred to as a situation of dispute between and within interest groups. It can also be as a product of healthy competition for power or views within organisations or between individuals. That is, a sort of disagreement between two parties or group over something vital to both of them. According to Adesoji *et al.* (2012:165), irrespective of any phenomenon that results from conflict or those accompanying it, conflict is itself a sociation.¹ As such, Albert (2001:59) posits, conflict is also a critical mechanism through which goals and aspirations of individual group or group of individuals are articulated.² Robbins (1998:434) postulates that:

Conflict is a process that begins when one part perceives that another party has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect, something that the first party cares about.

Throughout history, particular perceptions have developed regarding conflict. The so-called traditional view, which was primarily based on attitudes that prevailed about group behaviour in the 1930s and 1940s, maintained a rigid, formalistic approach to conflict. Conflict was regarded as dysfunctional and had to be avoided at all costs by role-players. The more modern approach originated in the discourses and precepts of human relations. It is now generally accepted that conflict should be measured in terms of functionality, that is, whether it is manifested as functional and contributes to personal or organisational growth, or whether it is dysfunctional and impedes groups or individual performance (Alper, Tjosvold, and Law 2000; Caudron 2000). It remains a fair assumption that if an individual experiences conflict as destructive and dysfunctional, subsequent behaviour will be adjusted correspondingly, and that such behaviour will impact negatively on the individual's wider sphere of influence (Womack 1998). Under such conditions, within an organisational context, non-achievement of stated goals and non-performance then becomes a logical consequence. This essentially argues that dysfunctional conflict between individuals will impact negatively on organisational performance. In short, the concept of conflict is two-fold in nature. It can either be dysfunctional which is destructive, and can lead to loss of lives, properties and strikes. On the other hand, conflict can be constructive in nature. This reflects the differences and variety of human opinion and activity which exists in any free society. This view, one should note, is applicable in the market which is situated in an informal setting.

Coser (1967:232) defined conflict as a struggle over values, claims, status and scarce resources, whereby the aim of the opposing parties is not only to gain the desired values but also to neutralize, injure or eliminate rivals. As individuals or groups interact, the method used and their consequences may generate or lead to conflict. Conflict is synonymous with hostile engagement between or among individuals or groups of individuals due to perceived incompatibilities. It is largely a state of incompatibility among values, when the achievement of one value can be realised only at the expense of some other values which may arise within a single organisation pursuing multiple goals.

Conflict, be it communal, religious, ethnic or otherwise, which is a form of struggle to resist or overcome the contest of opposing forces or powers, a state or condition of opposition, antagonism or even discord between two people or between a group or another, in recent times has increased tremendously and it has become so rampant that it has become a daily affair. It is however important to note that no matter how hard we try to avoid conflict it does periodically enter our lives.

According to Wall and Callister (1995:520), conflict is a process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party. The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD 2002:4) also argues in a similar vein that conflict is '... a state of human interaction where there is disharmony or a perceived divergence of interests, needs or goals'. There is a perception that interest, needs or goals cannot be achieved due to interference from the other person(s).

To Rahim (1992:25), conflict is an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities. When conflict occurs, the following factors seem to be present. There are at least two independent groups.

(a) The groups perceive some incompatibility between themselves.

(b) The groups interact with each other in some way (Rahim 2002:208).

In many cases, a simple disagreement between people, if unresolved, may escalate into avoidance, inability to do things together, verbal assaults and resentment. It causes a great degree of discomfort, anger, frustration, sadness and pain. Conflict in most cases is inevitable. However, the results of conflict are not predetermined. Conflict might escalate and lead to non-productive results, or conflict can be beneficially resolved and lead to general satisfaction. Therefore, learning to manage conflict is integral to a high-performance team. Although very few people go looking for conflict, more often than not, conflict results because of mis-communication between people with regard to their needs, ideas, beliefs, goals, or values. Conflict management is the principle

that all conflicts cannot necessarily be resolved, but learning how to manage conflicts can decrease the odds of non-productive escalation.

Conflict management involves acquiring skills related to conflict resolution, self-awareness about conflict modes, conflict communication skills, and establishing a structure for management of conflict in the environment (Khun and Poole 2000:560). Conflict management involves implementing strategies to limit the negative aspects of conflict and to increase the positive aspects of conflict at a level equal to or higher than where the conflict is taking place (Bodtker and Jameson 2001:262). Furthermore, the aim of conflict management is to enhance learning and group outcomes effectiveness or performance in organisational setting (Rahim 2002:210). It is not concerned with eliminating all conflicts or avoiding conflict. Conflict can be valuable to groups and organisations. It has been shown to increase positive group outcomes when managed properly (Alper, Tjosvold, and Law 2000:627). Conflict management styles have been and continue to be measured by a variety of different conceptual schemes. One of the first conceptual schemes for classifying conflict revolved around a simple cooperation-competition dichotomy (Deutsch 1949). While numerous researchers proposed revisions of this framework, Rahim and Bonoma's (1979) conceptualisation has been one of the most popular. They differentiated the styles of resolving interpersonal conflict into two basic dimensions: concern for self and concern for others. The first dimension explains the degree (high/low) to which a person attempts to satisfy their own concerns, while the second dimension explains the degree to which an individual tries to satisfy the needs or concerns of others. Combining the two dimensions mentioned above results in five specific styles of conflict management. These are integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and compromising. Integrating is characterised by both high concerns for self and for others, while an avoiding style is associated with both low concerns for self and for others. An obliging style involves low concern for self and high concern for others; conversely a dominating style is characterised by high concern for self and low concern for others. Compromising is associated with intermediate concern for both self and others. It has been argued that individuals select among three or four styles in managing conflicts.

It is this position that seems to inform conflict management in informal markets in Southwestern Nigeria. Conflicts and their management seem to arise due to misunderstandings bordering on divergent needs, ideas, beliefs, goals, or values. And the intention to manage is to enhance a deeper understanding among parties to any conflict. As such, it seems, conflict management in the informal markets studied enhances learning among participants. To ensure this, the market leaders, in the performance of their roles as 'third parties' are not expected to take sides as such behaviour

would not enhance their relevance as executives.³ Or else, their continued existence would be threatened.

Mary Parker Follet (1886-1933) analysed conflicts in the organisation and she regarded conflict as a natural adjunct of the working of the organisation. She advocated the constructive methods of dealing with conflicts and hence viewed conflicts as 'constructive conflicts' and not always as 'destructive conflicts'. She advanced three methods of resolving conflicts in an organisation.

Domination: This is the easiest way to resolve a conflict where victory of one side over the other side usually results. However, it is not suitable for the health of the organisation in the long run.

Compromise: Under this, each side gives up a part of its demands and settles the conflict. However, rarely would one side wish to compromise, since it involves giving up a part of the demands and hence a compromise solution always has to be brokered down by mediation or by an external party. Even then, it is the most widely accepted method of resolving conflicts.

Integration: Here the desires of both the parties are integrated and a 'win-all' situation is created where neither side has to sacrifice its desires. This author also outlines the following steps to achieve integration:

- (i) Bringing differences into the open is the first step for the integration of conflict. It becomes easier to integrate when one actually knows the real discordant issue between the two parties. Often it is observed that the real issue is of a very minor nature and is hidden behind the plethora of disputes of a secondary nature. Hence finding the real issue is often very difficult and once it is found the rest of the exercise is fairly easy.
- (ii) Breaking up the whole is the second step in integration. Here the demands of both parties are broken down into constituent parts. It means analysing the psychological implications of the demands of each side to see which could be specifically met and which were merely symbolic of a desire and could be satisfied in any other way.
- (iii) Anticipating the way that the conflict would head once certain proposals are prepared and presented to the parties. It is akin to playing a game of chess where all moves are prepared responses.

Mary Parker Follet is seen as one of the earliest behaviouralists, as she was among the earliest scholars to analyse organisational behaviour. She analysed the concepts behind conflicts which resulted inside organisations, and provided meaningful ways to solve conflict by suggesting the concept of 'conflict integration'. She also talked of leadership, authority and control. She rejected

the 'Trait Theory' of leadership style and advanced the concept of situational variables regarding leadership roles.

The leadership style in a given setup is a function of three variables, namely, the leader, the follower, and the situation. She hence advanced the concept of situational control. Follet also suggested the concept of 'Cumulative Responsibility', which, according to her, should be inculcated in the workers. According to her, it is important that the workers realize their individual responsibility, but the realisation of just individual responsibility does not help. Instead, workers should be made to realize 'joint responsibility' via their units as it automatically solves the problem of coordination. The study adopts this line of argument in explaining conflict and conflict management in the market place.

Informality within the Market Space: The Place of Women

Gender inequalities are complex. They are embedded and reflected in the political and economic structures of a country which generate specific types of exploitation and domination. Such inequality also reflects the way the society is structured in terms of cultural values and social norms, which in most cases are patriarchal in nature. Inequality thus, can lead to the exploitation of women, subjecting them to discrimination, exclusion and violence (Fraser 1997:12).

Access to employment in many countries is characterised by sharp inequalities. Such inequalities in labour markets are remarkably persistent and deeply embedded across diverse development actions. The overall structure of employment and the distribution of employment across sectors and gender have significant implications for the well-being of a nation and for poverty reduction. Women tend largely to be more disadvantaged compared to men in most spheres, including the labour market.

In many developing countries, economic liberalisation has given rise to an increase in informal employment, which has affected women disproportionately. Informal employment is a greater source of employment for women than men in most developing countries. Such patterns include their being concentrated in the most casual and exploitative segments of informal work (ILO 2008:14). The concept of informal employment captures employment relations that are not governed by formal economic regulations and/or basic legal and social protection. It includes different kinds of work which are akin to survival strategies with low returns that people resort to when economies stagnate (UNRSD 2010:111). Research has shown that workers in informal employment earn less, have more volatile income, lack access to basic public services and protection, and face high risks of poverty compared to workers in formal employment (Chen *et al.* 2005). Women are over-represented in the informal sector (Heintz 2009).

In recent times, as many countries including Nigeria were hit by the global economic crisis, many people in the formal sector have been forced to look for income in the informal sector (Horn 2009). The informal sectors in Nigeria, as in other countries, are made up of two groups which reflect the opportunities created by the world capitalist system. These are the workers who have traditionally been occupied there, and latterly those whom the global economic crisis forced out of formal work, mostly men.

The informal sector in the economy, under which the market falls, is more easily accessible to the masses of Nigerians than the formal sector. Thus women constitute the majority in the area of self-employment in trading and running of informal business ventures. This is because only small capital in the form of money and technology is usually required. Participants in this sector include traders, transporters, carpenters, hairdressers, tailors, food hawkers and sellers, amongst others. Studies have shown that the informal sectors employ about 40-60 per cent of the population in developing countries (ILO 2012:9).

The dominance of women in the informal sector was the case even before the nation's contact with colonial masters. Today their roles have expanded in that they do not trade only with farm produce, but sell virtually all items. They also travel both far and near to get these goods into the markets. Women also have important marketing skills and capabilities, and they travel all over the country to make a living (Odubogun 1996:72).

The informal sector, according to Byron and Chant (1989), is referred to as all economic activities which do not meet the criteria used to define formal sector employment. They are usually informal enterprises, small-scale, and are operated with traditional labour-intensive technologies.

Women's economic enterprises typically have been smaller in scale and subordinate to those of men. Despite very high female participation in petty trade, the trading structure has always been stratified to the relative disadvantage of women, with men in charge of most major long-distance trading enterprises. In addition, women were excluded from most, but not all, traditional political offices (Afonja 1990:84).

Prior to the 1970s, the informal sector was not considered as a separate sector. Activities in this sector were classified variously as traditional crafts and petty trade in the subsistence sector, or as small-scale industries within the formal sector, and treated as such. Some efforts were made to upgrade what was considered their low level of productivity and low standards of workmanship through the establishment of small industrial development centres (IDC), and later the Small-Scale Industry Credit Scheme (SSICS), to provide technical advice and training, and to offer small loans. No effort was made to protect informal sector products from competition with imported

and mass produced goods, hence many informal sector operators tended to gravitate towards trading.

With the expansion of the oil industry in the 1970s, after the disruptions of the civil war, the urban population expanded rapidly because of the increase in urban-based opportunities in administration, construction, commerce, and services, along with the gradual decline of rural agriculture. The optimism generated by the oil boom and the prevailing international policy posture of trickle-down effect, as reflected in the 1976 United Nations-Habitat conference, (Habitat I), has unfortunately not been realised (Nwaka 2005:16).

Gender-based inequalities in terms of access to and control over land, capital, skills and time not only hinder women's ability to escape from poverty but constrain the performance of whole economies. Thus most women have their own source of income, which is mainly from markets.

Women's equal participation in decision making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy, but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Women have different experiences that ought to be represented. Women and men have partly conflicting interests and concerns, thus men cannot act as the exclusive representatives of women. As a result, without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspectives in all levels of decision making, the goals of equality, development, peace and a better life for all cannot be achieved.

Women and Conflict Management at the Market Place

Market trade is by tradition essentially a female activity and market places have always been important transactional centres under the control of women. Here they sell all sorts of things such as farm products, manufactured or handicrafts items, clothing and even local food (Rosa Cutrufelli 1983:20).

In the market place where conflicts are likely to exist, there are different representatives of the various associations who are the leaders. They are aware of the different types of conflict that can occur and are exposed to the different approaches to conflict management. This enables them know how to reduce conflict or get to the roots of the conflicts and solve them. The joint problem solving approach to conflict management aims to bring parties involved together, baring their minds and expressing their feelings, to listen to the views of other parties and then jointly to find solutions, which are generally acceptable to both parties.

When conflict is overt amongst women they may externalize it by direct and indirect insults, and resolve the issue by involving outsiders. According to Nilesan (2004), the first of the three phases is an outburst of hostility, usually in the form of insults, ridicule, or, more seriously, imprecations and

curses. The second phase brings an audience of friends and supporters for both sides. Resolution, the third phase, results from mediation by neutral parties, during which responsibility for the conflict is fairly apportioned between the sides (DeChurch and Marks 2001:102).

The *iya-oja* of a market or a head of a particular association is the elected representative of all the retailers selling the same goods. There will be one elected representative each for the yam sellers, pepper, for cassava sellers and so on. Her chief task is to protect the sectional interests of the retailers she represents. If she should fail to do so or take advantage of her position for her own benefit, she will be removed. In a situation where there is limited space for market place, thus limited or restricted number of regular traders, she ensures that retailers have a fair share of space and supplies. She is also called to ensure the highest selling price possible or act as a guarantor for retailers. The elected representative also arbitrates in disputes between traders belonging to her own group or represents them in agreements and disputes with other market traders or a wholesaler.

Some of women's informal associations actively strengthen the economic position of women. Through this informal sector, women learn about work, find jobs and accomplish their various tasks. They also establish webs of economic support for themselves and their families and ultimately forge alliances for both economic and political power in the community (March and Taggie 1996).

Research Methodology

The study, carried out in two major markets in Ibadan, Nigeria, set out to shed light on the role of women in the market-place, specifically regarding conflict-management. Here women are numerically dominant. The two markets chosen were Bodija (modern) and Oje (traditional). Bodija market, organised on a daily basis, is situated along the University of Ibadan road and it is a kind of modernised market because you will meet both illiterate and literate traders. It is a newer market which was carved from the old Oritamerin, a traditional market. Due to its new location, it seems, not all the people from the old market relocated and the middle class people in the area also became traders in the market. Consequently, the goods at Bodija market consist not only of foodstuffs but also of household utensils and other modern wares.

In contrast, Oje market is situated in a traditional part of Ibadan and the majority of the traders are illiterate. The market women at Oje have direct contact with the rural farmers from whom they purchase their goods. Thus, they mostly sell foodstuffs and other traditional goods. Due to the nature of their goods, the market is, effectively, organised on a 17-day cycle with some traders from Bodija sometimes shopping there. The responses from

Oje market show that the market is still traditional. That is, the women there still believe strongly that the market is by custom meant for the women, and this trend persists to date. As such, just from looking, one can see that women constitute the majority. The men do not sell wares which are traditional to the women; rather they sell farm tools and the like. This is contrary to what holds at Bodija market where both men and women sell the same products. Nonetheless, the men at Oje do have men in positions of authority and leadership as in Bodija market. Interestingly, this trend is also observed in another study this researcher undertook at another market in Abia State in the Eastern part of Nigeria.

Unlike in Bodija, Oje market women have large family sizes because their husbands are married to more than one wife. Their ages, in both markets, fall within the range 45-60 years. The respondents represented both the new and older generations with equal representation of both literate and illiterate. Given the prevalence of polygamous marriages, one hears that 'it is our culture to give birth to many children'. Consequently, it is not unusual to find many of their children helping them at the market. Indeed, it seemed, trading is almost automatically passed down to these children.

In the traditional division of labour, the husband provides capital for his wives. With their profits, the women cover many of the costs of food, clothing, and sundry needs for themselves and their children, and take turns feeding the husband (Guyer 1980). The husband provides housing, staple foods, and some money for education and children's clothing. The wife provides her own clothes, the rest of the children's clothes, and other items of food (Eades 1980). In this study, as explained below, the women seem to be the providers of almost everything for the family.

The study adopted an approach utilising in-depth interviews. Thus it comprised a qualitative methodology. It is a comparative study, then, of two markets. Respondents for the study consisted of 15 market women leaders from each market, purposively selected in respect to their activities in the market associations. The respondents were mainly women who were married, widowed or separated.

The in-depth interview was found useful as a method of data collection because the women are always very busy. It was thus not possible to organize any focus group discussions. Even at that, the interviews had to be rescheduled many times, except for those that we were able to interview before or after their executive meetings. Indeed, these had to be facilitated, after much persuasion, by the secretaries and chairpersons of the associations. Therefore, we had to resort to the sampling technique of snow-balling at a stage in the research process. With this, the referral given to us by one respondent greatly assisted us in locating and successfully interviewing our new respondent.

Discussion of Findings

From the data collected from the two markets, it was realised that the market is a very important and vital institution in any country. According to the respondents, from Oje market, the market is where trading takes place and it is very important for this is what sustains the country. Market activities, an interviewee claims,

are very important because without it the country would not develop and it would be sick.

This is because the market is the outlet through which farmers sell their farm products, thus making food available to the urban population. The response given above seems to reflect the fact, without food, the health of the population is at risk. Furthermore, it reduces the unemployment problem because there are no white collar jobs as the few vacancies are occupied by the well connected in the society. The respondents from Bodija market emphasised the importance of the market with the example of government workers trading. They asserted that

even government workers do trade to make ends meet. The market initially was a place for the old and illiterates, but today both the young and even university graduates own stalls.

To a respondent from the Bodija market, the poverty level of the people explains why people have to add trading to their formal employment. Yet, the survival of the market hinges on the financial strength of formal employment workers. The respondents put it this way: 'When workers don't have money it affects the sales in market'.

The history of the market is said to stretch far back into the past, because

ever since the inception of the society during the times of our forefathers markets had existed.

This statement contradicts the assertion that the pre-colonial economy of Southwestern Nigeria was only a subsistence one. Indeed, it was the colonial economy that relegated the importance of markets by differentiating informal from formal markets with gender and education as important variables. As one respondent from Oje market claimed:

It is a well known fact that in any country not everybody will be educated; there would be some people that would be in the informal economy, which in time past constituted the illiterates. But today even the so called educated ones do own stall in the market, they also engage in one business or the other to make ends meet.

This situation is further compounded because, usually, the respondents (from Bodija market) observed:

governments are not fair to their workers. They use them and at the end sack them. Those who are lucky to get to retiring age some (times) are denied their entitlements, but a trader would always have something in hand.

According to many of the respondents (from both markets):

... the (informal) market creates an avenue for trade to take place, which is, buying and selling activities, where one can get things at a cheaper rate compared to items sold at supermarkets and you get varieties whereby you can select fresh and neat items according to your taste. It is also a place through which the women making a living and profits to cater for their family especially their children since they are the ones that are in charge of their upkeep.

Socially, they claim:

...it is also a place of interaction where you meet different people all over the place both from far or near whom one can help or help one another and ensure that the needs of co-traders are met, their welfare taken care of and their interests promoted. It is a place where information concerning prices, governmental policies or decisions is disseminated. In addition it is an institution that fosters unity among members and creates an avenue whereby people can tolerate and accommodate one another.

Politically, respondents (at Oje market) view the informal market:

... as an avenue for politicians to campaign and use the various groups for election purposes and the market women can exercise their civil rights through there.

These women, because they tend to be under-represented in the decision making circles, felt that their voices are not heard by government. Thus, they

...use the market place to participate actively in politics, express their views and feelings on issues affecting their lives. Politicians do come to the market asking for support, some forget their promises as soon as they win and get into power whilst a few keep to their promises. In addition, the women representatives do benefit from politicians some get gifts or even positions. They are the ones that enforce laws in the market.

The women, to a very large extent, perform various roles in the market which make them distinct and important. It is a well known fact that without women in the market things would not move smoothly because the market itself is meant for the women, they are the ones that dominate buying and selling activities. In addition the predominant Yoruba culture of the area allows women to be involved in market activities. They are seen to be movers in the

market; without them there would not be stability and progress. For them, it is the women who:

... make sure that the market is kept clean. They ensure peace and order in the market and they make sure things go on smoothly, they make sure the women are happy. They fight for the welfare and progress of themselves and help those in one problem or the other because they all make money to settle their families, since their husbands leave the education and upkeep of the children to them so they trade to train their children and support their families.

The women from Bodija market consider the roles of the men at the informal market place to be of fundamental importance, especially with the decreasing importance of the formal market. They were of the view that:

... the roles the men play in the market are not too different today because they are now interwoven since the men now sell items which are traditionally meant for women. They are also involved in maintaining peace and order in the market. Also, if any problem arises in the market that involves the police, the men intervene and plead on their behalf so that they are not kept in custody.

On the other hand, respondents from Oje market believe the fact that the market is dominated by women is good and that the relatively few men only trade in farming tools, but they both work together to make trade move on smoothly.

In addition, they are of the view that:

... the men also go to the village market, neighbouring towns and even travel long distance which is traditionally the roles of the women to buy different items and bring them to the markets to re-sell in wholesales to other traders. A lot of them have more capital to expand their business which gives them more advantage over the women in terms of buying some items in bulk. They both buy and sell from each other. They sell to the women in wholesale who then sell in retails. If we don't interact it would affect trade.

Despite the interwoven roles of both genders, the women were of the view that they still cater for each other's welfare more than their male counterparts.

Women have been in charge of the market at least from the time of our forefathers, they claimed. Furthermore, it is posited: Woman play prominent roles in the market. We were the ones that solely engaged in trade. The role of the men or their responsibility is to go to the farm, plant different things, harvest them and bring them for the women to sell in the market. But today the trend has changed with modernisation and expansion in the market forces and the global economic crisis which have sent many out of the formal sector to find solace in the informal sector. Now, men do sell things that are originally sold by women.

The respondents agreed that conflicts do occur in the market place. Conflict as we are aware of is universal phenomenon which takes place at different levels. The market place is not an exception. It is a place where people from different backgrounds interact, thus conflict can be high. The respondents identified the following types as those who tended to bring about market conflict: those who engage in physical fighting, are malicious, abuse one another, say negative or derogatory things about one another, and some go to the extent of doing evil towards each other.

The respondents from the two markets also brought to light the different causes of conflict in the market place. One of such cause was termed 'Orogun Owo', that is a situation whereby someone sees a fellow trader

... who is selling the same item, and she is selling more of them and if you don't have the fear of God it can breed conflict this is so because market activities are full of competitions and every trader would want to outwit the other person at all cost.

Also,

since people are from different backgrounds with different levels of tolerance, staying together for some time in the market, there is that possibility of disagreeing in decisions made which might eventually lead to conflict. In addition, where there is hatred or someone exhibits certain elements of dishonesty between one or more traders either because they are married to the same husbands or from the same neighbour or even selling the same goods any little misunderstanding can easily lead to conflict.

Other causes identified by the women include the fact that when the government improves facilities for stall-holders, and one group is seen to benefit at the expense of the other, and this could lead to conflict.

Since it is something that takes place almost every day, the different leaders of the different associations have devised different methods for resolving whatever conflict that might arise amongst market women. The first precept as agreed by respondents from the two markets is: Do Not Fight. That is, they try as much as possible to encourage the women to be at peace with themselves, so if there is any misunderstanding, the parties involved should resolve it amicably even without the intervention of a third party. The women in their various associations are also advised to be of good behaviour and always maintain a good working relationship with one another.

Different measures adopted to reduce or manage were identified from the study. One was that women involved in any conflict would pay a fine of between 1,000 to 2,000 naira to the association, depending on how grievous the offence was. In some instances, the two parties might be called before members of the association to explain their differences so as to help them

resolve it. And, if the conflicting groups refuse to adhere to the different steps, they are either suspended for three months or expelled from the market. In sum, the following are the identify steps taken at the two markets:

1. They might be called before the association to answer queries.
2. They call the people that have a misunderstanding together and try to resolve their differences. If this does not resolve the conflict, then they inform the head of the association they belong to.
3. Depending on the outcome of the previous step, they may be suspended for two or three months from the market. And, finally,
4. They can be expelled from the market if the gravity of the conflict warrants it.

The womenfolk try as much as possible to ensure that peace is maintained at all times by preaching peace amongst them and encouraging honesty. In spite of all these measures, however, according to the women,

Conflict cannot be resolved completely or stopped totally. Even husbands and wives do fight. It can only be reduced because we are all human beings. We can only advise one another. But future conflicts can be prevented by warning firmly those involved, preaching peace at all times, ensuring that the appropriate punishment is given so that they would know the gravity of their offence and encourage members to be of good behaviour.

Although there are police stations at the two markets, the women try as much as possible to avoid inviting the police into their affairs. This, they assert, is because:

The policemen and women are interested in what they would 'eat'. In the process, they expand what is taken to them beyond what is expected.

More so, they refer to it by using Yoruba proverb:

'Aa kii re kotu pada wa sore' meaning:

We do not go to court and come back to be friends.

This implies that they perceive the police and court as being the same. To some extent, this shows that the women in informal relationship tend to avoid formal organisations. Formalities seem to be seen as going beyond normal course of interaction. Implicitly, the market women believe, it seems, that they are more than capable in settling their disputes being *'omo iya'* no matter how distant they may be in terms of family association, which, interestingly, may not even exist.

Nonetheless, and since it has not always been possible, however, to enforce their rules of suspension and/or expulsion, especially at Bodija market,

the women have had to take some cases to the police. On all occasions, they state, especially when it had to do with men, they say:

Men would always support men. Indeed, the police, even when they are women, believe we are incapable of taking care of ourselves. They regard us as children and this is very insulting. Because of these, some cases cannot be handled effectively.

It is not therefore surprising that there have been more conflicts, leading to violence, in Bodija market, when compared with those at Oje market. It seems the informal measures of resolving conflicts have been more successful at the latter even though the indirect control of men continues to be the determining factor. This comes to the fore where the ownership of 'houses' as they normally refer to the stalls is dominated by men. The moment conflicts are adjudged 'feminine' by these men, mostly because it would affect their rents from the 'houses', women's attempts at resolving conflicts in their own way are hampered.

Conclusion

Though the women constitute the majority at the informal market place, the men still seem to be of fundamental relevance. This unequal relevance is attributable to formal institutions like the police, who seem to give more importance to men over women. Indeed, with the global recession, men have come, along with women from educated elites, to take over the regulation of the informal markets from uneducated women. Politically influential people may distribute some favours, but most often to the educated among them. Peace making and peace building has tended to shift out of the hands of the traditional women leaders. What they can achieve, it seems, are mere palliatives. Their relevance is increasingly limited to their own associations which are often ineffective, since the market structures have been taken over by men, and the law enforcement agencies do not fully respect the older customs. It is not therefore surprising that conflicts are now a recurrent phenomenon in the market place with very grave consequences for society. Unless there is a fundamental transformation of the social structure, engendered through a restructuring of the socialisation processes, conflict in market places will continue to recur, thus affecting the larger society.

Notes

1. However, it is important to mention that conflict can bring to light problem areas which can lead to a search for solutions and even bring about fundamental changes in important aspects within the market sector. See Cauldron 2000, for more details.
2. However, properly managed conflict can contribute to improved decision making within an organisation.
3. With an increasing number of women heading different association, it would help if they could move into decision making positions alongside men.

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