

## **ALABARU: HEAD PORTERAGE IN IBADAN, NIGERIA**

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The informal economy has remained a major part of Sub-Saharan African economic systems. Critical to this are market place transactions where people meet to purchase and sell wares. Due to the socio-cultural, geographic and economic infrastructures of many traditional African societies, goods to be sold and purchased are transported from one location to another for various purposes. The head porters (*alabaru*) are thus needed to transport market goods and wares particularly since the African urban market spaces are mostly unmotorable and heavily congested, and the adoption of related technologies is mostly traditionally and culturally determined. Also, against the backdrop of huge unemployment, especially of women, in Nigeria and Africa, head porterage has become and remained an important leeway. Unfortunately, head porterage is poorly studied in scholarly literature. Through comprehensive qualitative data collection and analysis, this article explores head porterage in Ibadan, Nigeria.

**Key words:** *alabaru*, head porterage, informal economy, Nigeria, Africa, Bodija

### **Introduction and Background**

In the absence of head porters (*alabaru*), informal market transactions, the most dominant business operations in Africa, would certainly ground to a halt. Most business concerns in sub-Saharan Africa operate in informal domains accounting for over 70 % of all businesses, and employ over 70% of the people. Yet, informal business forces are poorly regulated and the social processes are little studied empirically and socio-anthropologically, with dangerous implications for the viable sector and scholarly discourse. Head porters are a unique characteristic of sub-Saharan African market systems, yet the contours of head porterage remain poorly understood in contemporary literature. Describing who is an *alabaru* is necessary at this juncture. A head porter (*alabaru*) is someone who carries a load for another for a fee and as a means of

livelihood. Head portage is thus an economic activity in the sense that anyone that *helps* another carry a load without charging a fee is not regarded as an *alabaru*. No economic reward for load carrying is common in Nigerian and Sub-Saharan African gerontocratic societies, where the young are expected to help relieve elders of their loads as a sign of respect. *Alabaru*, however, usually operate in markets and they charge fees from whoever they carry loads for regardless of age. Literally, *alabaru* is a Yoruba (a major ethno-linguistic group in Nigeria) word for anyone that carries goods or luggage (usually on the head) for another person for a fee. Historically, this name refers to the method the *alabaru* adopted in moving the goods from one location to another. However, in the present day *alabaru* now use different methods in reality. They now move goods from one location to another using different kinds of methods depending on the gender and status of the *alabaru* in the trade, as will be shown later in this article.

In typical Nigerian markets, *alabaru* provide a link among the wholesalers, retailers, transporters and the end users. They carry items purchased by shoppers, sometimes following their hirers from stall to stall, struggling to find their way in congested, poorly laid-out and sometimes muddy urban markets. Head portage for commercial purposes was first introduced to Nigeria by male migrants from the northern part of the country and other parts of Africa; in Ghana, most of those who introduced head portage were from the Sahelian countries of West Africa, mainly Mali (Awumbila),<sup>1</sup> and it was virtually a male domain. Those who practised head portage were called “*kaya*” or “*mai kaya*”, a Hausa word for ‘load’. After the Aliens Compliance Order (ACO) of 1969 the *kaya* business almost died out as those who practised it were affected by the Expulsion Order, which led to a redefinition and natural restructuring of the trade in Ghana and other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa (Kwankye, et al.).<sup>2</sup>

Although sometimes it was men who carried the heavy loads, as women were traditionally and biologically seen as *weaker vessels* (a biblical allusion not necessarily representing real gender superiority but with salient implications for gender relations), different people and both genders are now involved in the trade; strength has now been seen and proven to have little or nothing to do with biology, but rather more do to with socialization and the determination to perform. In fact, women now form a significant proportion of *alabaru* in contemporary Africa’s urban markets except in the northern part of Nigeria and other parts of northern Africa with religious prohibitions of women from

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<sup>1</sup> AWUMBILA, M. *Internal Migration, Vulnerability and Female Porters in Accra, Ghana*. [online]. Available at <http://paa2007.princeton.edu/download.aspx?submissionId=70865>.

<sup>2</sup> KWANKYE, S. O. et al. *Coping strategies of independent child migrants from northern Ghana to southern cities*. Working Paper T-23.

engaging in outdoor business activities. Netting<sup>3</sup> linked increasing women's involvement to an increasingly high rate of migration of young women to leading urban market centres, with head porterage being the most accessible job for the poorly trained women. Rockel,<sup>4</sup> who studied women's business activities in 19th century Tanzania, however, linked such business engagements to their *enterprising* and their capacity to be *partners* in progress. In the same manner, White<sup>5</sup> demonstrated the gendered dimension of enterprise among the Creole women in the 19th century just as was the case among the Yoruba in long-distance trade. Guyer<sup>6</sup> also echoed this view in *Female Farming and the Evolution of Food Production Patterns Amongst the Beti of South-Central Cameroon*. According to Aggarwal,<sup>7</sup> it is therefore possible to trace gendered and feminist locations in informal business even originally considered out of reach of gender as they navigate business reconstructions for new engagements in the 21st century and *alabaru*.

The global economy today has been going through a difficult period and developing nations, including Nigeria, are not immune. The economic systems are under threat with huge consequences across nations. Survival today is tied to the availability and capacity to work even in societies with a hitherto strong welfare system as can be seen in the cases of Spain, Greece, other parts of the European Union and even America. Until recent times, many women in traditional African societies tended the farms and kept the home in order without much pressure to work outdoors. It was often said that *a woman's place is in the kitchen and the bedroom to be at the beck and call of the husband* and to care for the children. With an increasing level of male unemployment, changes in the structure of the economy and excruciating poverty in the developing world, women were introduced into employment and many have been forced into the informal sector as they lack the requisite capacities and skills to compete in the formal sector of the competitive economy.

In line with this, the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)<sup>8</sup> concluded that although there has been an increase in female labour participation and a reduction in the gap between women's and

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<sup>3</sup> NETTING, R. Smallholder, Householders Farm Families and the Ecology of Intensive Sustainable Agriculture.

<sup>4</sup> ROCKEL, S. J. Enterprising Partners: Caravan Women in Nineteenth Century Tanzania, pp. 748 – 778.

<sup>5</sup> WHITE, E. F. Creole Women Traders in the Nineteenth Century, pp. 626 – 642.

<sup>6</sup> GUYER, J. I. Female Farming and the Evolution of Food Production Patterns amongst the Beti of South-Central Cameroon, pp. 341 – 356.

<sup>7</sup> AGGARWAL, R. "Point of Departure": Feminist Locations and the Politics of Travel in India, pp. 535 – 562.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD). *Gendered Impacts of Globalization: Employment and Social Protection*, pp. 1 – 4.

men's labour force participation, these have not necessarily translated into gender equality in pay and status as women's entrance into the labour force has often been on unfavourable terms. In Zambia, for example, more than ninety percent of the women are employed in the informal sector (Kalala)<sup>9</sup> and the case of Nigeria is identical (Opore<sup>10</sup> and Awumbila<sup>11</sup>). This article is aimed at exploring the trajectories of head portage in a foremost traditional market in Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa: the Bodija market in Ibadan. The indicative research questions this article engages are "What is the history of head portage in Bodija," "What factors attract people to head portage," and "What risks are the head porters exposed to?"

## Research Methodology

This article was based on an explorative and heuristic research design. It was essentially descriptive. A purely qualitative method was adopted for data collection, but within this there was a method data triangulation for complementarities and robust processes that could enhance data quality and reliability as well as the validation of findings. The qualitative method was found very useful for this study because it enables an in-depth exploration of the research issues at stake, especially in heuristic studies such as this. It also has the merit of enabling researchers to understand the socio-cultural processes punctuating the actors, the actions, the patterns and the nature of interactions in the market. The processes and dynamics of social relations that were of interest among the *alabaru* and the significant others in the market were also significantly examinable through the qualitative approach. The data collection methods were in-depth interviews (IDIs), key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs) and extended observation. A total of 30 in-depth interviews were scheduled with different head porters (*alabaru*). 4 sessions of FGDs were also scheduled with them, while KIIs were scheduled with principal officers of the *alabaru* and market leaders. Extended observation was undertaken at the market to capture all the nuances of the research questions. The collected data was analysed and presented as verbatim narratives and ethnographic summaries.

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<sup>9</sup> KALALA, K. P. Assessment report on women and poverty and the economic empowerment of women. In *Proceedings of the 6<sup>th</sup> African regional economic commission conference on women*. 22 – 26 November 1999.

<sup>10</sup> OPARE, J. A. Head porters in southern Ghana, pp. 33 – 48.

<sup>11</sup> AWUMBILA, M. *Internal Migration, Vulnerability and Female Porters in Accra, Ghana*. [online]. Available at <http://paa2007.princeton.edu/download.aspx?submissionId=70865>.

## Study Area and Study Population

Ibadan is essentially a traditional yet modern city. Some traditional markets that have existed since the 18th and 19th centuries in Ibadan still exist today. Some of these markets are *Oja 'ba* ("King's Market") located right in front of the Olubadan (king/traditional ruler's) palace, *Oje* market (popularly known today for the sale of traditional artefacts like *aso-oke*, Yoruba handwoven textile, which has been documented by OLUTAYO, A. O. and AKANLE, O.),<sup>12</sup> and *Agbeni* market. Bodija market could be put into this category, but it has experienced more expansion and more cosmopolitan occupation and patronage in recent time than the three previous markets mentioned. Bodija market attracts traders and buyers from far and wide in Nigeria and West Africa. Many traditional and manufactured products and farm products are sold in the market. Although a correct official figure does not exist about the average number of people that transact business in the market at one time (including buyers, sellers and officials), an estimate could be 15,000 – 20,000 people.

Furthermore, the operation hours of the market are not officially documented and observed, but the market was observed to be open for real business between 8.00 am and 11.00 pm. Bodija market is a particularly major destination for farm products from the hinterland and other parts of the country and West Africa. Hence, Bodija is one of the very few markets in the country with quality yet cheap products (both manufactured items and food products) which are sold in the market in a very large quantity. People all over the south-west particularly come to Bodija to buy foodstuffs because they are known to be available there in large quantities and at a cheap price. The combined outcomes of these forces are large amounts of shoppers swarming into the market with trucks and cars even though the market lacks sufficient and well-organized parking spaces. Traffic congestion and gridlock are thus common occurrences in the Bodija axis of Ibadan and this is usually aggravated during festive seasons, when people come to the market in large numbers to shop for celebrations. Bodija market is a well patronized and busy market with heavy shopping traffic on a daily basis. This accounts for why there are large numbers of *alabaru* to service shoppers in the market. The studied populations were the head porters in Bodija market, Oyo State, Nigeria and they were purposively selected based on their consent to be interviewed and their relevance to this study. Relevance and consent to be interviewed were very important, as the *alabaru* keep very tight and busy schedules.

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<sup>12</sup> OLUTAYO, A. O., AKANLE, O. *Aso-Oke* (Yoruba's hand woven textiles) usage among the youths in Lagos, Southwestern Nigeria, pp. 062 – 069.

## Findings and Discussion

Based on results from the primary data, it was found that the origins of head portage in Bodija could be traced back to the 1960s, beginning with the Hausas. Women were *compelled* to join as the economy grew worse in Nigeria. This was consistent with earlier findings on the subject (Takyiwaa;<sup>13</sup> Krueger, Schiff, and Valdes;<sup>14</sup> Aryeetey, Harrigan, and Nissanke;<sup>15</sup> Opere;<sup>16</sup> Hashim;<sup>17</sup> Oberhauser and Hanson<sup>18</sup>) that traced the ascendancy of head portage to reversed economic performances in Africa. A long-serving head porter put this in perspective:

The head portage business started a long time ago around 1960. It was primarily common amongst the Hausas. The Hausa men were the ones involved in this business, then later in the 1970s the women joined. (IDI/Female/Ibadan/2011)

## Attractions of People to Head Portage

The factors that attract people to head portage are unemployment and poverty. Given the choice, most head porters would not engage in the trade especially as the trade is not perceived as prestigious. A respondent said:

[I do this job] because of unemployment and poverty. When the government did not provide jobs, many people became unemployed and rather than staying at home, women did this job. I got engaged in this business because I have to care for my children at school. What actually led to the emergence of the trade was a lack of employment and poverty. We have no helper, which is why we got engaged in this business. And some people have become debtors, so through this job they are able to pay off their debts. The relevance of the job is that it does not require any capital to start with. (IDI/Female/Ibadan/2011)

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<sup>13</sup> TAKYIWAA, M. Ghana: Women in the Public and Informal Sectors under the Economic Recovery Programme, pp. 277 – 284.

<sup>14</sup> KWANKYE, S. O. *et al.* *Coping strategies of independent child migrants from northern Ghana to southern cities*. Working Paper T-23.

<sup>15</sup> ARYEETAY, E., HARRIGAN, J., NISSANKE, M. *Economic Reforms in Ghana: The Miracle and the Mirage*.

<sup>16</sup> OPARE, J. A. Head porters in southern Ghana, pp. 33 – 48.

<sup>17</sup> HASHIM, I. Independent Child Migration and Education in Ghana, pp. 911 – 931.

<sup>18</sup> OBERHAUSER, A. M., HANSON, K. T. Negotiating Livelihoods and Scale in the Context of Neoliberal Globalization: Perspectives from Accra, Ghana, pp. 11 – 36.

The role this woman reported above is a role ordinarily expected of men, but women are now involved in these responsibilities as men find it difficult to meet these responsibilities on their own. This is because of two major reasons: first, the redefinition of roles within the households due to modernity, and second, and more importantly, economic hardship, which has disempowered many men's economic capacity. The concepts, sayings and principles of *being the breadwinner* and *oko lolori aya* (the husband is the head and provider for the wife) are thus being deconstructed in real terms with practical consequences for household role performance in the public and private spheres. Hence, the statement is significant and points to the strategic place and expectation placed on kinship system of Africa in supporting kin in need of assistance. It is taken for granted in traditional Africa that kin must come to the aid of kin to protect the kinship system. In contemporary terms, this is important as a formal state welfare system does not exist in Nigeria. Kinship is thus expected to hold sway and kin are relied upon for assistance and survival. Men as husbands are also expected to provide for their wives. It is within this context that the female *alabaru* said *we have no help [from husbands, traditional providers]*, and so they decided to help themselves, even through a laborious, unconventional, low-paying and less dignifying job. The subject of engaging in head porterage with the lack of a helper is significant and points to the strategic place and expectation placed on the kinship system in Africa in supporting those in need of assistance. It is taken for granted in traditional Africa that kin must come to the aid of kin (since ordinarily blood is thicker than water) to protect the kinship system. Kin are thus expected and relied upon for assistance. Men as husbands are also expected to provide for their wives, but present day socio-economic realities have put this expectation under pressure in Nigeria and most parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

This view was supported by another respondent who said:

I got into this business because of the economy of the country, because there is no money or helpers. What we generate as income (as *alabaru*) is not enough, but it can still cater for something. (IDI/Male/Ibadan/2011)

Discussions during FGD and IDI sessions were instructive. In one session for instance, a discussant captured the important issues in the following way:

As the government did not provide jobs, many people were unemployed and we had to look for another means of survival. It is not a job that is learnt, but because of unemployment we have to do it to get some money and invest in a more lucrative job. Some of us are

graduates, but because of unemployment we got into this job. We have an association, which we belong to because of the safety aspects of the job, which involves the offloading of goods, and because of the organization. We have a good foundation association and *ojuenimala* ("somebody that will be prosperous"), which means that the association is divided into two with at least fifty members. The association was formed in order for us to help one another.

(FGD/male/Ibadan/2011)

As used in the above ethnographic summary, *aju eni mala* is the short form of a Yoruba proverb. The complete version is *aju eni mala ari yonu* (somebody that will be prosperous will suffer). This summarily gives the worldview of the head porters. They realized that their trade is a tough one, but they see it as a normal and difficult path they must walk for their economic survival due to having been caught and entangled in the harsh socio-economic realities in the country. Therefore, they were not hopeless, as they believed they would survive and prosper in their trade against all odds. The above ethnographic summaries are very important. They show the entry orientations and exit mindsets of the *alabaru* which came to the fore during the study. Many of the *alabaru* entered the trade with the intention of getting money for more prestigious and less difficult jobs. Many have learnt some handiwork or a trade which they consider more professional and intend to practise as professions. Such trades and professions include fashion designing, auto mechanics, hairdressing, the buying and selling of wares, and auto parts sales. They were only compelled to join the *alabaru* as there were no other ways of raising capital to start the profession or trade since the government could not provide assistance, and urbanization and poverty have negatively affected the kinship support structures and economy people used to rely on. Most therefore did not intend to make a career out of being an *alabaru*. This was the usual plan of an average *alabaru*.

Many however get stranded in the trade as they get used to it because of the capacity of the trade to provide daily income and meet immediate needs. This is an *advantage* not available in many other trades or jobs. Also, the lifestyles of many later on trap them in the trade even though they claim not to like it due to its lack of social prestige and tediousness. Many later acquire lifestyles that are dangerous to their initial entry and exit plans and strategies. They engage in flamboyant social functions like the regular purchase of *aso-ebi*. *Ebi* is family/kin among the Yoruba. Family attire/uniforms are usually selected for celebrations like a naming ceremony, marriage or burial to show togetherness. Unfortunately, these ceremonies are never-ending and can negatively affect the immediate financial circumstances of people. Interestingly, it is not only the family members of celebrants that buy *aso-ebi*. Even non-kin, colleagues, acquaintances, religious members, neighbours, friends and people within the



larger social networks as opposed to the narrower kinship networks are sometimes expected to join celebrant families in buying *aso-ebi*. Unfortunately, *aso-ebi* are very frequent, usually expensive and often constitute huge financial burdens to poor folk like the *alabaru*. It is important to note that *aso-ebi* essentially resonate the African sense of togetherness and a primordial sense of oneness. There is also a sense of reciprocity in *aso-ebi* purchases. In other words, the sense and social significance is that “once I join you in buying *aso-ebi* during your social celebration, it is expected that you buy during mine”. And the circle continues with implications for the household, the survival economy and the original trade entry and exit strategies’ intentionality.

Many also engage in illicit sex and multiple sexual relationships which they sustain with their daily pay. Yet most lack decent accommodation and clothes. The educated ones get involved in order to raise money to further their studies or support poor and elderly parents until they get proper employment. The *alabaru*, particularly males, set up trade associations to regulate entry into the business and fraternize to encourage and protect one another in cases of abuse and violation by customers or authorities, who usually see the *alabaru* as down-trodden and easily exploitable. Interestingly, this trade association only exists and is effective among adult male *alabaru*, who usually use wheels to carry loads. Women do not have an effective association and only use their trays and head pans since they consider themselves less strong compared to men to carry or push heavy wheels and loads. This is only in comparative terms as the women also carry heavy loads as can be seen in the images above. It is only that there is a limit to the level and amount of weight a head pan can take. Also, socio-culturally wheelbarrow pushing is often seen and perceived as a male domain and practice in Bodija and Yorubaland generally.

Generally, based on the findings from this research article, head porterage is a quick way to make a living in the face of excruciating poverty, urban individuality and unemployment even with little or no skills. Unlike what is usually submitted about head porters in Africa, however, many head porters were actually trained in some other specialized skill and they were educated, but they found themselves in head porterage since they had to survive in the face of pervasive unemployment in Nigeria which is due to the high levels of government irresponsibility and corruption in the political realm. They must also protect themselves, which is why they form associations and make a financial contribution to safeguard themselves against being stranded. It is noteworthy that while the women usually do not have trade associations like the men, they collect daily savings among themselves from the proceeds of their trade. However, men also do this. This is called *ajo* among the Yoruba. Once the money is collected, it is given to an individual of perceived high integrity for safekeeping. Most times the money is traditionally kept at home by the

person. However, based on enlightenment and increasing security concerns in the country, the money is sometimes kept in the bank nowadays to reduce risk. This notable level of education of some of the head porters thus negates the findings of researchers in other places of Africa, such as Ghana, where head porters are presented as migrants, unskilled and uneducated (Hashim,<sup>19</sup> Opare<sup>20</sup> and Kwankye et al.<sup>21</sup>).

The organization of head portage in Bodija market somewhat follows gender lines. For instance, male head porters have associations to regulate entry into the business while women head porters have not been able to do this. This was partly due to the relative simplicity with which the women go about the trade – the use of only head pans – while many men use bogus wheelbarrows that are easily noticeable in case a new entrant is not officially initiated and recognized. According to a long-serving head porter:

We started the trade by making use of trays or basins for conveying the goods while the men carry the goods on their shoulders or most times use trucks. Trucks are mostly used by men because it requires strength to push it, and as women, since we do not have much strength to push trucks, we rather make use of trays or a basin. We do not have an association because we have not called ourselves together to form an association. It is only the males who have an association, because one cannot just come to the market with a wheel barrow without being questioned. (IDI/Female/Ibadan/2011)

This may also be an expression of deep-seated power relations and inculcation processes in African socialization systems of patriarchy. Socialization process in African traditional power systems train men to be assertive, confrontational and command power across domains, while women are summarily trained to be accommodating, ignorant and in many instances not to take orders unless they are from men. The male head porters were thus able to be more assertive in thwarting unwelcome entrants. There were attempts to regulate the trade from within by the male head porters themselves, as they use more professional implements and tools like the wheelbarrow.

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<sup>19</sup> HASHIM, I. Independent Child Migration and Education in Ghana, pp. 911 – 931.

<sup>20</sup> OPARE, J. A. Head porters in southern Ghana, pp. 33 – 48.

<sup>21</sup> KWANKYE, S. O. et al. *Coping strategies of independent child migrants from northern Ghana to southern cities*. Working Paper T-23.

## **The Risks Head Porters are Exposed to on the Job**

Occupational hazards and risks are realities in all jobs. Some jobs, however, are more risky than others, and some risks are shared positively between organizations and their employees, making such risks less significant in the final analysis. Some jobs also have inbuilt capacities to prevent risks, while employers in many cases bear the consequences of risks. It is thus important to explore the nature, processes and mechanisms of risk exposure, control and consequences for the *alabaru* in order to comprehensively explore their existences and world views. The major risks the *alabaru* are exposed to are health risks (body pain, head ache, back ache, etc.), the mistaken perception that they are worthless people, road accidents, on-the-job personal injuries and responsibility for product damage.

In most instances, the consequences of such risks are borne by the *alabaru*, even when sometimes it is not their fault. There are no systems to prevent them from such exposure or mechanisms to help them bear the consequences. However, they have evolved coping mechanisms over the years. Such coping mechanisms include resignation to faith, *esprit de corps* among the *alabaru* and the optimism that things will get better over time. They also believe that the risks are a normal part of the trade because of *oju eni mala a ri yonu*, as already demonstrated in the name of their association above, and have blatant self-denial and resignation. In fact many *alabaru* claimed they did not face any risks as they see whatever risks they do face as not being risks but rather that which every Nigerian faces, be they an *alabaru* or not. Focus group participants put these background issues into perspective.

Commercial motorcycles are known as *okada* in Ibadan and most parts of Nigeria. They are a common means of transportation in Nigeria due to the heavily congested urban roads in many parts of the country. The *okadas* move briskly and easily in the many urban roads, as they can more easily navigate and meander in the heavy traffic and gridlock. They regularly expose their passengers to road accidents and they are often reckless as many of them do not observe the road code and are mostly in a hurry. Many of the *okada* users/passengers patronize them because they are seen as faster even though the riders ride them recklessly to be fast. As they ride recklessly, they often collide with the *alabaru* as they are also navigating the traffic in the poorly laid-out Bodija market, which has congested roads and indiscriminate parking. The congestion in the Bodija axis of Ibadan accounts for car and *okada* accidents involving the *alabaru*.

The market women (sellers) usually engage the *alabaru* to carry their wares from storage points in the morning and at the end of the days'

business (at night). They carry the goods back to the storage points and in many cases they have to walk from place to place looking for clients and other times they have to follow female shoppers to assist them by carrying their luggage or goods as they shop and as they go to the car park after shopping. The risk involved in the job is when you accidentally fall, the goods could get damaged and when this happens you may be asked to pay for it depending on the goodwill of the customer. There was a case of a lady who was slapped by a client for mistakenly throwing away her goods and at the same time was asked to pay for them. (FGD/Female/Ibadan/2011)

As alluded to in the ethnographic summary above, the points of display of wares are usually different from the store itself, especially for those that occupy the roads and walkways. They keep separate stores where they keep their wares and get the *alabarú* to get the goods to the point of display by the roads in the morning and get them to return the goods to the store at night.

## Conclusion

This article has explored the trajectories of head portage in the Bodija market, Ibadan, Nigeria. Head portage is a definitive character of urban markets in West Africa. Head portage is very functional in Nigeria and in many urban markets in West Africa due to the peculiar market outlays and shopping as well as survival dynamics and experiences of such societies. It is impossible to imagine the urban market experience in Bodija and Nigeria without head portage. Shopping in Bodija and Nigeria differs from that in America, United Kingdom and most parts of Europe. The many gigantic shopping malls that dot the streets of London, Paris and New York for instance are very scarce in Nigeria. In fact, the very few that are available in the urban centres of Nigeria are new and very recent developments. Shopping centres like Tesco and Sainsbury in the United Kingdom for example do not exist in most parts of Nigeria.

Identical shopping malls that are now emerging in Nigeria and some parts of West Africa like Ghana are called *Shoprite* and *Game* and they still have very few outlets. Like many shopping malls in the United States and Europe, gigantic shopping malls are now just emerging in Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt (Nigeria) and Accra (Ghana). Shoprite and Game for instance usually occupy large spaces in shopping malls and sell different products ranging from raw foods, electronics, garments, groceries and many other common products people may need. *Alabarú* are not needed in these shopping malls as people only buy some things from the malls and go to the traditional/conventional

markets like Bodija when there is a need to buy in significantly large quantities or when particularly scarce traditional products are needed. Hence, the Shoprite malls are not as popular as normal traditional markets like Bodija.

It could be observed from the findings of this article that the *alabaru* job is a veritable job that meets the basic needs of the people in a society with huge unemployment and poverty. The head porters, however, face competition on the job and experience work insecurity. The job is largely unregulated. The *alabaru* also have evolved effective coping strategies to manage the occupational hazards they are exposed to. The job is generally not prestigious and the *alabaru* consider this to be major distraction on the job. The job is largely formally unregulated, making entry into and exit from the job easy once the informal networks are duly observed, especially among male *alabaru*. The health-seeking behaviours of the *alabaru* demonstrate traditionalism as they seek traditional healing through *agbo* (traditional herbs/concoction) even when they take Western/orthodox medicine as well. This somewhat demonstrates the efficacy of the traditional infrastructure of Ibadan on the people and reflects their general belief system.

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