By Canoe and Speedboat: The Recent Expansion of the Ìlànje Fishing Trade

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Abstract

Competition has remained a significant feature of trade, particularly in regions with diverse social groups like the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. This article examines the expansion of trade among the Ìlànje communities of Òndó State in the coastal area of Yorùbáland, which to the best of our knowledge has not been documented. Historical method of data collection and analysis were employed in the study. These include primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are mainly comprised of interviews of key informants and participants’ observations. The secondary sources consist of journal articles and texts. The results were analyzed qualitatively.

The growth in coastal trade in the Ìlànje area from 2010 onwards was largely due to the construction of new roads along the coast, which linked Ìlànje to the wider road network. Between 2009 and 2013, new trading routes emerged along the road from Ìgbòkódá to Aráromi via Atiøjere on the western side to Ògun and Lagos state, passing through towns like Ipàrà, Oko-Èlá, Òbínèhin, Òkè-Ìdígbá, Òsíkà, Èrikè, and Àbòtò. Another route linked Ìgbòkódá with Òde-Ûgbò and Úgbò-Èlá coastal market in the east. As traders and goods came into Ìlànje from various parts of Nigeria, new markets sprang up to facilitate the exchange.

1. The author appreciates the contributions of the following people in the process of collecting data for the study. Mrs Oke, Chief (Mrs) Akinyomi (Ìyálòjá of Ìgbòkódá Market), Mr and Mrs Abilogun and Family in Ìgbòkódá, Miss Janet Abilogun and Tunde Abilogun my anchors from Ìgbòkódá to Òkè-Èlìdì Ògbá. Mr Adeogo Akintola, Mr Banjo Omoboye and Mr. Abilogun Jnr for providing information of the fishing economy, The Bàbálòjà and Ìyálòjá of Òbínèhin market, Mr and Mrs Adeha and the Secretary of Òbínèhin main market, Mr Akingboyé Lohan and Baba Òyìnbo, the Bàbálòjà of Óde-Ôgbò market for providing informations on new markets in Ìlaje.
of upland goods for fish products. The construction of new roads also encouraged social and economic development by bringing into the area goods and commodities hitherto not transportable on water, such as ‘modern’ building materials. However, far from reducing water-based activity, the overall increase in trade has also contributed to an increase of water-based traffic, especially for fishing.

Introduction

Formerly important trading towns on the local caravan trade routes [when] bypassed by modern lines of communication ... declined as trading centers²

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2. Hodder and Ukwu in 1969, quoted in O. O. Olubomehin, “Road transportation as lifeline of the economy in Western Nigeria 1920–1952,” *African Journal of History and Culture*, 4.3 (2012): 37–45.
As this quote shows, many scholars emphasize the relative decline in Nigeria’s coastal trade compared to overland trade by railway or road in the second decades of the twentieth century. This, however, does not mean that the absolute importance of water-based trade declined. As many coastal Yorùbá settlements were not linked up to the road network until the twenty-first century, the growing population of these communities contributed to the trade in a range of goods, including fish, both along the coast and lagoon and uplands from the major harbor towns.

Studies on the coastal regions of Nigeria have noted the contribution of the lagoon trade to Nigeria’s economy up to the twentieth century. While many have highlighted the contribution of the fish trade to the coastal economy, Olúkọjú has also explained how this was linked to population movements and socio-economic interactions within and across the coastal belt over the past millennium. He explained the intense struggle and competition for fish markets that dovetail with the quest for wider markets for maritime products that also resulted in inter-group relations. As the Ìlàjẹ ideological and religious orientation supported inter-group relations in a particular ways, it also led to the convergence of new maritime towns from the late 1940s onwards, including Ayétòrò, Úgbò-Nlá, Zion Pépê, and Oriòkè-Iwàmímó, all of which participated in the fishing trade on the Ìlàjẹ coastline.

This article takes Olúkọjú’s argument further into the present and examines the expansion of Ìlàjẹ trade in recent times, as both a significant contribution of the coastal region of Yorùbáland and to Nigerian economic development more generally. The article’s focus on the recent expansion of trade, and the description of the emergence of new markets, fill a gap in historical scholarship and humanistic studies. The article is divided into five sections: the first section offers a background of Ìlàjẹ history, the second looks at the patterns of Ìlàjẹ trade in the nineteenth and twentieth century, the third discusses the rise of new markets and trade routes, the fourth discusses the new Ìlàjẹ fishing economy and trade, and the last is the conclusion.

### Patterns of Ìlàjẹ trade in the 19th and 20th century

The Ìlàjẹ people occupy the Ìlàjẹ Local Government Area and lay between 4° 50’ and 5° 15’E and 6° 00’ and 6° 25’N. Ìlàjẹ country is bounded by Ìjèbudú...
the west, Ìkálè to the north, Ìpóí and Àrógbò Ìjáw to the north east, Itsekiri to the east, and the Atlantic Ocean to the south. The Ìlàjẹ people are spread over four hundred communities that are historically divided into four kingdoms, namely Òde Ìgbó, Òde Máhin, Ode Etíkàn, and Àhérì, all settled along the coastline. These four kingdoms claim Yorùbá origin from Ìlè-Ìfẹ. Akinjógbín and Àyándélé linked the time of their departure from Ìfẹ to the beginning of Odùduwà dynasty. However, there are other migrant settlers on the lagoon from areas as far as Àkòkó, Ibàdàn and Calabar that have been incorporated into the fishing trade.

The Ìlàjẹ part of Òn Ìdò-state and is composed of several fishing communities located within the river tributaries discharging into the Atlantic and along the coastline. The Ìlàjẹ are believed to have the longest coastline in Nigeria, measuring about 78km. Akegbejo Samson noted about 80 communities along the coastline, whose inhabitants are mostly engaging in fishing and the fish trade. Fishing, trade, and the availability of unclaimed land, but also environmental changes, such as oil pollution in parts of the lagoon waters, have encouraged population movement from the more inland Ìlàjẹ communities towards the coastline. However, numerous rivers and canals enable easy communication between coastal and inland communities by canoe or speedboat, which until recently remained the main means of local transportation.

Among the diverse population exploiting the lagoon and coastal environment, the main routes of trading, migration as well as social and political relationships were the waterways, and transportation was by canoe. Since the only means of transportation was the canoe, which relied on the water ways from the coast to the hinterland, Ìlàjẹ social and economic development relied on accessibility by canoe. Due to their location on often sandy and poor soil, Ìlàjẹ settlements were difficult to sustain by agricultural production alone. Hence, they have a long history of artisanal fishing, and obtain many goods through exchange for fish and other sea products like shrimps, crayfish, prawns, crabs, and snails. These different types of water-grown protein have helped to develop the people beyond the subsistence economic level and also form the basis of interaction between the Ìlàjẹ and their neighbors.

5. S. Akegbejo, “Ecology of the fisheries resources of coastal wetlands of Òndó state and its management Implications,” (PhD thesis, Federal University of Technology, Àkúrè, 1995), 1–297.
6. This information was given by some of my informants who claimed their father or grandfather migrated from Ibàdàn, Àkòkó and other Yorùbá towns.
7. Edith Osiruemu, “Water transportation in the Niger Delta, c. 1500–1900”, in A. Ogundiran, ed., Precolonial Nigeria Essays, in Honor of Toyin Falọla (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2005), 411–424.
Studies of the patterns of trade in pre-colonial Nigeria reveal that economic production was geared not only towards immediate domestic needs, but also to the facilitation of external trade. Lively trading relations, where they existed, often also facilitated the movement of people and their practices from one region to the other.\(^8\) The Ìlàjẹ people, located in the agriculturally poor but fish-rich eastern Delta, exchanged fish for agricultural products from the adjoining communities, including the Ìjèbú in the west, the Ijaw in the north and the Ìkàlè in the east, which supply most of the food items like cassava (gàrí), yam, plantain, and palm oil. Moreover, the Ijaw areas also provided canoes and timber from the mangrove forest.\(^9\) In other words, there was a well-established south-north and westward commercial trade between the Ìlàjẹ and their Ìlàjẹ, Àpójì and Ijaw neighbors, which also facilitated a westward commercial transaction between the Ìlàjẹ and the Ìjèbú port of Ejìnrìn, which in the eighteenth and nineteenth century facilitated much trade towards Lagos through the canoe system.

Commenting on trade in Yorùbá coastal areas after the abolition of slave trade, Adéùyán explains that in addition to spirits, gin and gun powder, European goods like buckets, house utensils and chinaware were traded in Yorùbá coastal markets. He noted that the imported gin, or trade spirit, had no match for the locally manufactured Ògógóóró.\(^10\) Oguntomisin states that palm products exported by Ìlàjẹ people at Atijèrè, Àbòtò, and Àrògbò markets were transported by canoe to markets in Ejìnrìn, Ìtòkìn and Ìkòròdú, and also to Orímédù and Lékè [Lekki] for sale to the Europeans.\(^11\) In Ìlàjẹ, trade by canoe can be undertaken by male and female members of the community. Trade across the lagoon or along the coast took individual traders as far as Gabon, Cotonou, Togo, and Ghana.\(^12\)

However, due to the largely informal nature of the trade, and the existence of many smaller ports and markets in addition to those where available documents and reports allow for estimation, it remains difficult to assess the volume of trade overall. Certainly, the impact of the fish trade on the Ìlàjẹ economy cannot be over-emphasized. It has been the mainstay of the people’s economy and a significant bedrock for rural development at least since the

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8. Ibid., 413.
9. D. O. Olubomehin, “The Impact of Road transportation,” in Hakeem Ibikunle, ed., Nigeria’s Urban History: Past and Present, (Maryland: University Press of America, 2006), 45–56.
10. J. O. Adeuyan, Contributions of Yoruba People in the Economic & Political Developments of Nigeria (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2011), 56.
11. G. O. Oguntomisin, The Transformation of a Nigerian Lagoon Town Èpè, 1852–1942 (Ìbadan: John Archers, 1999), 31.
12. Mrs. Oke, Oral Interview, 62 yrs, October 7, 2016.
nineteenth century. Popular articles of lagoon trade in the twentieth century included fish, prawn, coconut, gárí and cassava flour, all of which are sold in exchange for commodities from the neighboring communities of Ìjẹbú, Ìoyo, Òndó, Òkítì, Òde-Áyé (Ìkálẹ), Ìbàdàn, Lagos, Onitsha, Port Harcourt and Enugu among others.\(^\text{13}\)

However, an informant from Ìbiadé, a border town between Ògùn State and Ìlàjẹ in Òndó state, claims that for much of the twentieth century, Ògógóró or local gin has been the second major article of trade on the lagoon.\(^\text{14}\) Local Ògógóró consumption is high, at least since the twentieth century.\(^\text{15}\) As Ògógóró is often produced without close adherence to official processes and regulations regarding foodstuffs or drugs, it is often produced in inaccessible parts of the coastline or Delta. Its trade by water is also a means of avoiding close scrutiny of the product. Most Ògógóró trade is done in stages, from the locations of its production to nearby markets in Abígì, Ìwòpin, Ìgbògùn, or Òmi, from where it is taken to Òpé and finally to Lagos.\(^\text{16}\)

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image}
\caption{Canoe with a MAN Diesel Engine on the lagoon arriving at Òde-Úgbò Wharf. Source: Author’s image, November 8, 2016.}
\end{figure}

\(^{13}\) Personal Interview, Mrs. Oke. 62yrs. Mrs Oke has a long history of trading relations with the Ìlàjẹ people dated back to 2001.

\(^{14}\) Adébukóla Saidat, oral interview, 60yrs, Ìbiadé, August 9, 2016.

\(^{15}\) In the second decade of the twentieth century, Lugard already referred to the high consumption of the local gin, Ògógóró, in the area. He believed it was on the increase in the region. See Adeuyan, *Contributions of Yorùbá People*, 56.

\(^{16}\) Adébukóla Saidat, oral interview, 60yrs, Ìbiadé, August 9, 2016.
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Cassava has also been an important item of east-west trade in the twentieth century. It is usually processed into a product known as púpúrú among the Ìlàjẹ, and the fact that it has become the major staple food of the Ìlàjẹ means that it plays an important role in the coastal markets. European and locally made printed cloth is also traded regularly, though the trading networks for cloth have been transformed as many goods formerly traded by water could be transported by road. Sixty years ago, most locally traded cloth came through the ljèbú coastal towns and by boast, but now cloth increasingly comes by road from either Ôñó (Àkúrê and Ôñó) or Ôyó State (Ìbàdàn), or from Onitsha, Owerri, Aba, and Port-Harcourt in south eastern Nigeria. This shift indicates the growing importance of national trade. Illustrating the impact of a growing global trade, Chinese wares have increasingly replaced European electrical or consumer goods over the past two decades.

Fishing and Fish Preparation in Ìlàjẹ today

Essentially, canoes have been fundamental to life by the water. In Ìlàjẹ communities, almost every traditional occupation involved the use of the canoe, and more recently the speedboat. In this vein, fishing has a long history in the Ìlàjẹ areas. Over time, a differentiation of different fishing practices has emerged. Thus there are three main forms of fish production. The first is artisanal fishery, which involved the capturing of fish by individuals or small groups for subsistence or sale, which usually requires intensive labor. Today, artisanal fishing coexists with local aquaculture and with industrial fishing.

Artisanal fishing remains very common within the Ìlàjẹ communities, possibly due to the people’s long historical practice of it, but also as subsistence fishing because of financial constraints. The artisanal system relies on locally manufactured canoes, which have been improvised and modernized. Ikuejube explains that fishing instruments include Àwò (nets with hooks on which earthworms are hanged for bait), Akaṣe or Epòrò (bamboo poles used as spears) and Ìyànmà (basket placed in shallows streams and fixed to the bottom of the creek with sticks). These have remained traditional instruments of fishing among the Ìlàjẹ fishing communities.

Olúkọjú claims that fresh water fishing was traditional to the Ìlàjẹ and was predominant until the 1950s, when different groups also embarked upon canoe fishing in the brackish water along the creeks and in the lagoons. Olúkọjú

17. Osiruemu, "Water transportation in the Niger Delta," 411–421.
18. G. Ikuejube, Ilaje: The Yorùbá Fishing People of the Niger Delta (Ôñó: Novec Printer, 2005), 5–6.
further states that in the 1960s, coastal fishing took over from fresh water productions. Because of the openness of the Atlantic coast, coastal fishing requires the use of larger canoes, and it often involved industrial fishing with fishing trawlers fitted with set-nets and other advanced equipment.  

Today, most canoes are fitted with engines, usually by Yamaha. There are different types of engines, ranging from 40hp to 150hp. The category of motor chosen depends on the size of the canoe or speedboat and of course its use. Canoes that carry foodstuffs and goods from the Ìkálè to the Ìlàjẹ markets, from one coastal market to the other or from Ìlàjẹ to Lagos are bigger in size and can transport as much in volume as a 25 tons MAN Diesel lorry. These types of canoe are fitted with a MAN diesel or Mercedes 911 engine (see Figures 2 and 3). Such heavy canoes are used for both goods and passengers to and from the coastal markets.

Like canoes, speedboats serve two purposes. First, speedboats are means of transportation from one location on the coastline or lagoon to another. For

**Figure 3.** Boat with a MAN Diesel Engine at Ayétòrò Wharf. Source: Author’s image, November 8, 2016.

19. Olukoju, “Fishing, Migration and Intergroup Relations,” 69–85.
20. Hp refers to horsepower. A unit of metric horsepower equals 4,500 kilogram-meters per minute.
example, from Ìúgbò-Ǹlá to Ayétòrò, a speedboat carries about twenty passengers, four in a row of five or six, excluding the anchor man. Secondly, engine-powered boats are used for fishing on the high sea. In Ayétòrò, Ìdíògbá and Òkè-Ìdíògbá, all communities that are located directly on the coastline, fishing done by boats fitted with Yamaha engines is prevalent. Both the locally improved canoe and the engine-powered boat have enabled the fishermen to extend their activities beyond the lagoon toward the high seas. A member of Abílógun family of Òkè-Ìdíògbá explained why saltwater fishing did not rely solely on speedboats; saying that

The small and light canoes are being used due to the temper of the ocean, which could rise at any time. Thus the need for very light and flexible equipments [sic] which the fisherman could handle and control in time of [the] oceans’ wave and surge.21

Traditionally, fish was consumed when it was freshly harnessed from the sea. However, if only fresh fish is sold, the profitability depends largely on high patronage. Once fish are produced in commercial quantities, it becomes diffic-

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21. Abilogun Oke, oral interview, 60yrs, November 6, 2016.
cult to sell fresh fish within the short period of its suitability for consumption, which is between 12–14 hours depending on the species of fish. To circumvent this problem, various means of fish processing have been developed. The processing starts from when the fish changes hands at the coastline. Fish is first washed to prepare it for gutting, which is the removal of the intestine, and then cut in preparation for tenting, which means hanging the fish so that a large part of its surface area is exposed to the air, as if in a tent (Figure 4).

Once the fish has been tented, it is subjected to smoking over a local furnace made of drum (Figure 5). The smoking aids the removal of water from the flesh through heat, thus inhibiting the action of micro-organism and prolonging the shelf life of the fish. Smoking therefore, combines three main effects, drying, cooking and preservation.22

Like in many coastal communities in this part of the world, fishing is segmented along gender lines. The actual fishing, or fish production, is undertaken by men and male children, and a man’s wife or wives and female children usually take on the processing and marketing of his fish.23 However, some fish

Figure 5. Fish smoking at Òkè-Ìdíògbá community. Source: Author’s image, November 7, 2016.

22. G.C. Rawson and F. A. Sai, A Short Guide to Fish Preservation (Rome: FAO, 1966).
23. Personal Interview, Mrs. Oke. 62yrs. Mrs Oke has a long history of trading relations with the Ilâjë people dated back to 2001.
is also sold by fishermen to businesswomen who operate on a larger scale, and then sold on – fresh or processed – in various markets. The peculiarity of the Ìlaje environment and distribution of labor has also influenced more general traditions of social and economic behavior.

As women are the main processors and producers of fish, markets are generally under women’s control. They formulate, administer rules, regulate and settle all questions on market matters, and generally exhibit a lot of zeal in the conduct of trade.24 In the Ìlaje areas, the Ṣanyí (these markets have bàbálójà and Ṣesí) is the head of the market. The periodic nature of the markets, usually held every 9 days in the Ìlaje area, encourages bigger markets, because local trade in the interval is limited. Also, it allows smaller communities to make preparations for traders from other regions and localities.

All markets are part of larger networks of markets, which operate one after the other. As individual markets are usually located at a day’s (or at most two day’s) distance from each other, such networks allow professional traders to travel between them. The traders who travel far are usually men, and in the past, they often slept in the markets, though many also develop local relationships and stay with patrons. In markets that attract long-distance traders, many articles of trade are sold that cannot be found in daily markets, such as clothing materials, exotic foodstuffs and household materials.

Road construction in the aftermath of the 1998–9 Ìlaje-Ijaw war

Until the first decade of the twenty-first century, Igbokoda market was the major market in Ìlaje. Igbokoda is probably the most central Ilaje town; and it is also the local government headquarters of Ìlaje Local Government. However, Igbokoda now coexists with markets at Ipáre, Òbínhin, Òkè-Ìló, Ìgbó-Ìlé, Ìwó and Ìsàlò.25 These markets emerged between 2009 and 2013 largely due to the construction of roads between Igbokoda and Ìwó and between Abòtò and Arármí between 2003 and 2007.26 The Abòtò-Araromí road is an important trading route that links Òndó state with Ògún state, because Araromí is a border town through which traders from Ìlaje coastline to reach Atiëré, an important historical trade centre of the Ìlaje.

The construction of the road that opened up Ìlaje for road traffic was partly the outcome of the war between the Ìlaje and the Ijaw Àrógbò between Sep-

24. L. Olurode, “Economic Culture,” in L. Olurode, ed., Nigeria: People and Culture (Lagos: Rebork Publications, 1999), 46.
25. Personal Interview, Mrs. Oke. 62 yrs.
26. Ondo State Economic Development Strategy (SEEDS) Document (Akure: Government Printer, 2004), ix-xii.
tember 1998 and 1999, because it was built in order to reduce the enmity and competition between the two neighboring groups. The history of the war between the Ilàjë and their Àrógbò Ijaw neighbors has not been well documented. The Ijaw Àrógbò group inhabit a very swampy inland part of the Niger-Delta. In the past, the Àrógbò-Ijaw were palm wine tappers and canoe builders, but long years of interaction between the Ilàjë and the Àrógbò Ijaw people have resulted in cultural diffusion between the two groups. Some of the Ijaw now practice fishing while some Ilàjë have adopted canoe building techniques from the Ijaw which made their occupation and products complementary.

In 1998, disagreements over the distribution of government funds for oil-producing communities erupted into a fight between the two groups. The supposed discovery of oil in Àpáta created an ownership problem. The disagreements centered on the question of which group had settled earlier and was thus the ‘landlord’ of the other in different locations, which meant that they would receive a larger share of government funds. The most important disagreement was over the ownership of Àpáta town, which was claimed by members of both groups. Once it became clear that the town might be eligible for ‘resource control’ funds, members of both groups took up arms against one another.

Eventually as the crisis escalated into serious conflict between the two groups, the violence led to the loss of human lives, the destruction of property and even the displacement of whole communities. Eventually this war affected a large number of settlements including Obè, Àwòyè, Ìlepètè, and Òròtò among the Ilàjë settlements attacked by the Ijaw Àrógbò ethnic group. Many Ilàjë fled their towns on the coastline, easily accessible by canoe, to communities further west and inland, such as Mahin, Etiðàkàn, Àhèrì, Òpè, Ìwòpin, Òkitipupa, and Àkúrè. At one point, the Zionist town of Ayétòrò was the only coastal town left for the Ilàjë people.

The war caused serious socio-economic challenges beyond the destruction of settlements. For instance, refugees from destroyed settlements, called bó-gundè (war refugees), caused population explosions in places like Ìgbòkòdá, Oriòkè-Iwàmímò, Ògógóró, Òkèkè, Aráromì and Holy Centre to mention a few of Ilàjë communities untouched by the conflict. The influx of new entrants into these towns challenged the social and economic structure in two ways. First, it put pressure on the lagoon as larger numbers of people attempted to make a living from its wealth, and second, it increased trade and economic activities. As a result of the latter, the only existing market at Ìgbòkòdá became congested due to the increased number of traders, which created tension.

Unlike in the pre-crisis period, when middlemen moved from one Wharf (Èbúté) to the next to purchase fish in exchange for goods, the crisis prevented these traders from gaining access to the coastal wharfs. This meant that just as
larger numbers of people had moved to Ìgbóbòdá, fewer exchange commodities found their way to its market. After government intervention to end the war in 1999, the combination of scarcity and the increased demand for trade goods was felt strongly by those who had been refugees in larger urban centers. Eventually the government responded by planning and building new roads to support the re-establishment of trade in Ìlàjẹ.

**The emergence of new markets**

Since the mid-2000s, the introduction of road transportation has greatly increased the quantity of goods traded. Not only did the roads make it easier to move commodities into Ìlàjẹ, but they also reduced the typically long chains of intermediaries associated with trade by boat or on foot. The roads have reduced the time needed to move between different locations, and they have also reduced the insecurity associated with transportation on the lagoon. Since the completion of the road network, the traffic in trade has continued to increase, making a significant contribution to the socio-economic development of Ìlàjẹ communities and the Ìlàjẹ people generally.

The growing trade has been supported by the Òndo state government in different ways. In response to the pressure on the market at Ìgbóbòdá, which often resulted in parking and accommodation problems, and even occasional conflict, government renovated the market in 2012. The renovations made the markets more habitable and comfortable for traders and customers alike. One peculiarity in the trading culture on the coastal market was that almost all markets open from 3:00 am in the morning and close very early, usually before 3:00 pm. However, after the renovations, trade at Ìgbóbòdá was extended to very late in the evening.

The renovation also increased the capacity at Ìgbóbòdá in other ways: many markets operate the àwágún system, which means that non-perishable goods can only be sold when the market is officially open, which in the case of periodic markets could only be once in 4, 6 or 9 days. (Most markets in Ìlàjẹ are 9-day markets, but perishables may be sold on the day of arrival.) Many markets also limit the goods that can be sold, which could be fish and ingredients like pepper, onions, and other vegetables. Once the Ìgbóbòdá market was expanded, it offered a greater choice of wares. Also, while the market officially

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27. The Bàbálójà of Òbínéhin. Mr. Adeha told us that before the establishment of Òbínéhin market in 2010, they used to trek a long distance before they could get to Atijèrè market.

28. Bàbálójà of Õgbò market, Bàbó Òyínbó, Oral interview, November 6, 2016, 65 years.
remains an eight-day market some traders now display their wares, including fish, every day. This development encouraged traders and people of other ethnic groups to take up trade in these markets, and some even settled permanently within the new market areas.\textsuperscript{29} Hotels and rest houses have also sprung up to cater for the need of travelers from the east and northern part of Nigeria.

However, the renovation did not resolve all problems at Ìgbókòdá. This had been anticipated by different parties, including the Ìlàjè Traders Union. Once the new roads into Ìlàjè had been completed, the Ìlàjè Traders Union, then based in Ìgbókòdá, sent a request to Ìgbókòdá local government to call for applications from towns that wanted to set up separate markets in their communities. Several communities submitted applications, which were, however, not processed until 2009. Keen to find a different solution, people from the settlement of Agbá (Etíkàn) went to the neighboring (Ìkálè) Òkitipupa local government council where they were granted permission to establish the Etíkàn market in July 2009.

In 2010, Ìgbókòdá local government, with permission and financial support from Òndó state government, granted permission to establish Ipárè market as well as several other markets on the Àbótó-Aráròmí road. This road, which leads to Atijèrè market, presently accommodates about six new markets established between 2010 and 2013. Ipárè market was established in 2010, Ôkè-ñlá, Òbínéhin, Erèkè, and Aráròmí in 2010, Èrànmónlá in 2011, and Ùgbò-Ñlá in 2013. The second new road from Ìgbókòdá to Ùgbò-Ñlá has two important markets, the first in Òde-Ùgbò and the second at Ùgbò-Ñlá, which links to Ayétòró, Ìdògbá, and Ìdíògún by water.

In addition to the markets established with help from local government, the rising volume of traffic also encouraged the expansion and development of independent markets in communities that wanted to raise the local standard of living. The babalójá of Òbínéhin, market Mr Adéhà explained the reasons for the establishment of Òbínéhin market as follows,

Going to Ìgbókòdá for all our needs was becoming very difficult particularly for the aged among us and [due to] the difficult terrain of the rivers. You cannot get anything to buy in this town except fish; for buying pepper, onion, tomato, vegetable [sic] or meat you have to visit Ìgbókòdá. This made the leadership of the town in consultation with Òbínéhin Youth Movement and Òbínéhin Development Association to request for the market in 2009 [sic]. We were not supported like Ipárè and Ugbo [neighboring communities] even till now but we

\textsuperscript{29} The Igbo of eastern Nigeria settled on the bank/Èbúté of the lagoon at the back of the market.
By Canoe and Speedboat: The Recent Expansion of the Ilajë Fishing Trade

organized the leadership and the youths of the town, entered the bush to cut woods which we installed to start the market.\(^{30}\)

Improvements to the road infrastructure have increased traders’ profit margins and enabled them to make ventures into waterways that were previously financially untenable. Road transportation to Ìgbò-Ínlá for example, opens up trade to several smaller communities in the coastal areas, and draws them into regular relations of exchange. Today, on the water system, Ilajë traders are found hawking imported foods like bread, rice and beans, as well as clean drinking water and drugs, even to remote riverine villages. Ijaw canoe-based traders are engaged in the sale of firewood across the coastline.

As road traffic has not replaced but encouraged traffic by water by increasing profit margins on imported goods, many canoe owners have been able to modernize their fleet by building larger boats. The continuing profitability of trade by boat is also illustrated by the survival of extensive trade routes; for example, from the coastal town of Òríókè-Iwàmímó to Stone Wharf market at Òyingbò in Lagos. There are currently four canoe transport companies that transport goods from there to Lagos. Each of the canoes has the capacity to

\(^{30}\) The Bàbálójà of Òbínehin, Mr Adeha, +60 yrs.

*Figure 6. Òde Ìgbò Market site. Source: Author’s image, November 6, 2016.*
move 25 tons worth of goods to the different market on each market day and usually accommodates about fifty passengers and forty drums (200 liters) of Ògógóró, fish, and other items such as prawn, periwinkle, and coconuts.\textsuperscript{31} Depending upon the commodities that are carried, these canoes can make the journey to Lagos in between eight and ten hours.

Ọparinde and Ojo state that from the 1980s fish production has increased across the coastal region. They further explain that at least over 70\% of total fish in Nigeria have been produced in Ìlàjẹ communities in the last two decades of the 20th century, and suggest that about 10 million people are engaged in fishing trade across the coastal belt.\textsuperscript{32} The opening up of the Ìlàjẹ area to roads has further strengthened the fish trade.

Reducing middleman costs, the improvement of the transport system has enabled traders to offer more attractive terms to local producers. This in turn has encouraged an increase in production output in particular in the fishing industry. In the absence of formal systems of accounting, the high volume of trade transacted on the lagoon is only indicated by the large number of traders and vehicles, including lorries, canoes and speedboats that visit on market day.

But as most fishing is artisanal, it is also illuminating to study the income of successful artisanal fish producers. One of our informants, a fisherman who has been in the fishing trade since his youth, explained that he fishes by night to leave the day for other activities. Since fish can be caught at any time of the day, he makes sure that by midnight he is on the lagoon with the aid of a lantern or locally made lamp to set his net. He then returns by 6–7 a.m. to draw out his catch in his canoe for sale at the nearby coastal market.

Depending on the nature of the fisherman, fish is also caught in the morning, and it is usually offered for sale thrice daily at 6–7 a.m., 10–11 a.m. and 12–1 p.m. to middlemen, who in turn sell them in baskets to the marketers. Adéògo Akíntọlá of Òkè-Ìdígbá claimed he could make as much as three to four hundred thousand naira weekly, equivalent to two thousand dollars, from shrimps and crayfish during the peak period. The profit reduces to about 40,000–50,000 naira at off-peak period.\textsuperscript{33} This was confirmed by other fishermen.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{31} Oral interview from Mr. Aroma, Driver and Engineer on Òlá-Olúwa Transport company from Òrí-Òkè-ìwàmímó.
\textsuperscript{32} Lawrence Oluṣọla Oparinde and Sylvester Oluwadare Ojo, “Structural Performance of Artisanal Fish Marketing in Òn `dó State, Nigeria,” American Journal of Rural Development, 2 (2014): 1–7.
\textsuperscript{33} Adeogo Akíntọlá, oral interview, Òkè-ìdígbá via Ayétòrò, 65yrs.
\textsuperscript{34} Abilogun Snr, oral interview, Òkè-ìdígbá, via Ayétòrò, 73yrs.
Conclusion

The emergence of new markets in Ìlàjè resulted from the conflicting challenges that faced the Ìlàjè during and after the 1998–99 war with the Ijaw. Because fish traders and fishermen were no longer able to conduct business at the local wharfs, and because of refugee movements following the destruction of some coastal communities, the existing Ìgbòkòdá market became overcrowded. As access to imported goods became difficult for Ìlàjè residents, the government invested in road construction in order to support trade intro and out of the area.

However, road construction did not simply provide a substitute for water travel, but it provided an important economic stimulus on its own. Because transport costs declined, profit margins went up and trade greatly increased. As new markets were set up to cope with the growing volume of trade, and the growing demand of local populations who had encountered new goods while they were war refugees, some trade routes that were previously unprofitable became attractive. As canoe- and boat-based traders plied new routes and upgraded their vessels, trade on the waterways did not decline. Finally, fishermen themselves also benefited from greater profit margins and increased their productivity.

Even so, much remains to be done to improve the situation further. Many new markets do not have enough space for car and lorry parks, and apart from Ipárè, no market has health facilities – not even Ìgbòkòdá. Security also needs to be improved further, because new markets constructed in places like Ọbînêhin, Ipárè and Ọkè-ńlá have attracted patronage from far and near. While local visitors understand the dangers of the terrain, markets must also reduce their vulnerability to criminals who move either by boat or by car. Finally, the increased attractiveness of modernized water transportation needs proper monitoring in terms of security and safety. Life jackets should be provided to the lagoon traders as this will enhance safety of traders and goods on the lagoon. As access to electricity has remained a problem in the area, except by generator, the problem of storage could be improved once communities are linked to the national grid.

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