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HISTORICAL ASSESSMENT AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF OJE MARKET IN IBADAN, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This study is an attempt to explain the historical origin of Oje as a community and as an important economic centre that has attracted different caliber of traders into Ibadan. It also show the dynamism of economic importance of markets in Yorubaland. It focuses on the brave warriors that established the community, their beliefs and culture. The study also examine the structural features of the market as it influences, in a unique manner, its uniqueness in the sale of traditional fabrics (Aso-oke) and other agricultural products brought from diverse sources of production. This study makes use of oral sources, by interviewing the family of Delesolu in Oje, the market officials and important personalities in Oje- Ibadan. Secondary sources such as textbooks, journals and records were also explored, The study is divided into five sections and concludes by suggesting further measure through which government could improve the condition of the market.

INTRODUCTION

Ibadan which housed Oje market is the largest city in tropical sub Saharan Africa and the capital of the western Region of Nigeria¹. Its origin is shrouded with mysteries and one of them is the mystery surrounding the formation of Oje market. The market is one of traditional markets in the city of Ibadan which possess the biggest and richest cultural outlooks². It is centrally located in the city of Ibadan near the domain of the paramount ruler. The oldest market is commonly known as the home of the Yoruba traditional fabrics and this had been since the second resettlement of Ibadan. It is

less than a kilometer to the palace of Olubadan of Ibadan and the daily growth and development experienced in the market informs this academic discourse of the market. It combines two faces of modern market and also daily or periodic market (every seventh days' interval). Oje is a typical traditional market of what Ugboajah explained in his work as 'a demarcated site where traders and consumers met to exchange product, some goods were road side markets' goods were spread on the ground³. The market is well known as the home of assorted fabrics both local and international fabric, Yoruba traditional woven clothes such as 'Aso Oke', 'Sanyan', 'Alaari', others such as Tye and dye, Ornamental beads of different makes and sizes meant for different caliber of people in the society is also available in the market. Inside the market are the traditional pharmacist shops where different categories of herbs are displayed (lekuleja). The market is well departmentalized for easy access and sighting for the seller.

Etymology of Oje Community

According to Chief Deseolu (Gbonka of Ibadan) the name was derived from a town not far from Ijeru in Ogbomoso. These people were warriors and descendant of Ojela of Olaoju compound. The people migrated to Ibadan due to the political and religious pressure of the Fulani jihadist in 1800s⁴. On arrival, they settled at 'Ojaoba' area beside Oderinlo's house. Being warrior they assisted Ibadan in series of war and one of those wars was *Igbamu* war. Delesolu faced diverse challenges; among them was re-occurrence of still birth each time his wife got pregnant. He consulted the herbalist for divine intervention and he was specifically instructed to move further hinterland. He was bade farewell by his close associates and was escorted having collected some parting gifts of 15 slaves, 15 horses and 15 cowries. Among his associates were Oderinlo from Ojaoba and Counselor of Ayejeku, Opeagbe, Ojerinlo and Babalola⁵. Delesolu went in company of drummers having consulted his Ifa oracle as to where to settle. Ifa instructed him to carry the sacrificial mortal in his head and walk till he would be tired. Delesolu obeyed the instruction and walked round Ibadan until he got to a place called Idi-Ayunre. He moved further and there he cleared the bush and discovered Cowry- shell, Lead and Tuber of yam. He was surprised to have discovered 'lead' which is translated *Oje* in Yoruba language. His discovery reminded him of

the name of his hometown Ojele not far from Ijeru in Ogbomoso near Ilorin. Ojele means home of lead, so he became assured that he had got to where he would settle so he called the place 'OJE'.



Plate 1: *Baale of Oje market as at 24th of February 2016*

OJE as a Community

Oje is a community that consists of 131 compounds majority of the compound evolved as a result of Delesolu's hospitality and generosity. He accommodates strangers from different towns and villages to settle with him for one reason or the other having realized that the hostility of Fulani jihadist also brought him to Ibadan.

Adefioye a resident of Oje community remarks that only twenty seven compounds that are listed below remains out of one hundred and thirty one founded by Delesolu's regime. What has become of others could not be explained as different versions were given by different people.

The identified ones are listed below

Isole	Olafa	Amulegbosan
Igalafa	Ojulope	Akinajo
Emu	Poniki	Mimumi
Ogogo	Alagbade	Oto
Akinade	Agidi	Olokinda
Oloro	Jamiro	Abese
Ejeja	Ajadi	Baba Ajayiamoda
'Sade	Eyitolu	Ashipa
Ajenigi eye	Ikuro	Korukoro
Lalere	Olota	Adabale
Bolowojaye	Ayonidioro	Ishole

Source: *Field Work (2015)*



Plate 2: *Oje market Aerial View*

Record shows that Oje is the largest community in Ibadan town and that one-sixth (1/6) of the indigene of Ibadan hails from Oje compound⁶. The proportion exceeds that which might be expected taking in to consideration the area and population of Oje

but this need to be interpreted cautiously with official proof. These positive and negative factors of immersed accessibility countered any rules of exogamy, prelude a simple interpretation. Men are barred from marrying from lineage of any grandparents. As there exist family ties between the compound of Ojulope, Folasade, Agate, Oloro, Jaramero. Among middle-aged and old women, the choice was probably limited to younger 'Oje' men. It seems quite certain that the past intermarriage has knitted family ties which bind the community together along with impersonal effects of history and geography⁷.

Contemporary social relations also function to produce a sense of community bond. A organization with this avowed purpose is the Oje Progressive Union, its aim was to promote the general development and progress of Oje, to develop the spirit of unity and oneness among Oje people, to foster economic and social co-operation by given financial and moral support to members, encourages thrift union whose founding antedates the electoral ward system and tries to mention close contact with counselor from Oje community. Leadership and authority in the community were assumed by Dele's lineage and the area was able to unite for mutual cooperation. There are various socio-cultural activities observed in Oje market which are not obtainable in other markets.

Socio-Cultural Importance of Oje Market

Oje market was known as civic center of various activities. According to the oral interview granted by Baale of Oje, the name was derived from mysterious lead bangles first discovered at the site by their ancestors. The bangle resembled the one they have in their original homestead at Ijeru. This testified to them that they have reached the place where they could settle down. Another oral tradition attests that "Oje market was named after a food seller who wears *lead* bangles before the establishment of the market but the tradition given by Baale is more authentic being the direct great grand children of the founder. Situated at the center of the market is a *pond* housing a mysteries life Crocodile. The pond was designed by Delesolu's family and the crocodile was being worshipped. According to the religious belief of Ojele family of Delesolu and instruction received from Ifa oracle, a crocodile must be kept wherever the market was located. It must be kept within the vicinity of the market and this crocodile had been there since

the establishment of Oje market. Alhaji Jimoh testified that the present crocodile in the pond would be the third one since the establishment of the market. The first two had died and the third one had spent more than 100 years now. According to Ifa oracle's prediction; the crocodile must be kept where everyone could see it, worshipped and revered.

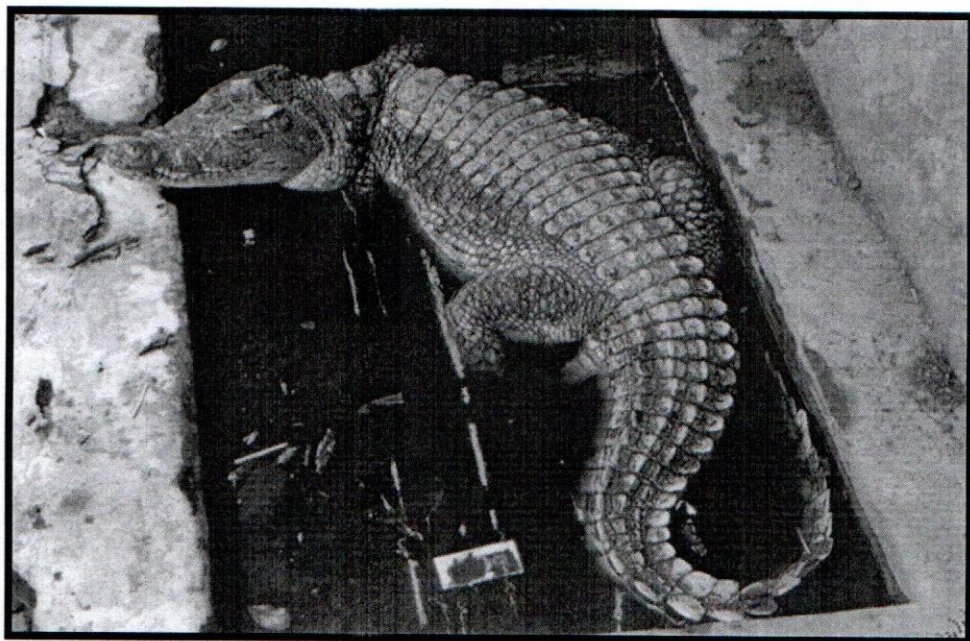


Plate 3: *The Totemic Age-long Crocodile (worshipped by the people)*

This totemic being was fed with chicken and the custodian observes rites and sacrifices at every market day. People do come from all walks of the country to either watch or worship it. The adherents of this mysterious animal believed that this mysterious creature possesses supernatural power to cure different types of diseases and human problems if it is offered food especially fowls. The barren women who are looking for the fruit of the womb and belief in this do usually take scoop of water from the pond for fertility, while the eggs of the crocodile are used by the herbalist. The custodian of the pond testified that different categories of people like Politicians, Governments, and white-men do visit the place.⁸

Masquerade festival is another annual festival observed in Oje market. The arrays of the masquerade are named *Baba Agbaa* and *Ara*. They believed in *Esu* which they worshipped under the 'Ayunre' tree and the Durokika masquerade pays homage to the god before the commencement of his annual masquerade festival. The masquerade was beautifully adorned with velvet cloth (*Aso-Aran*) which they collected from the European in exchange for slaves in the early nineteenth century.⁹

At the inner center of the market is Delesolu's court, this mini palace was strategically placed, to verse and monitor the affairs of his people. This traditional court as shown below called Delesolu palace was established in 1934 where different cases ranging from matrimonial dispute, communal clashes, disputes and many other related cases are settled. The minor cases of theft, stealing, fighting and other misdemeanor cases were not left out.

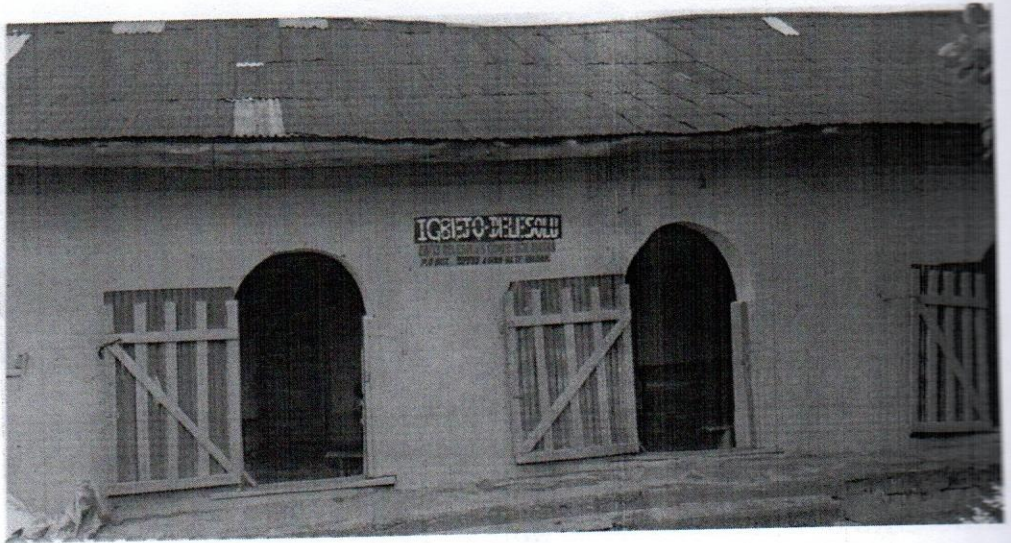


Plate 4: *The Delesolu's Court (Igbejo Delesolu)*

Other sacrifices are also observed in the market as the case may be. A times the Community crier moved round the market to instruct the community members on what Ifa oracle predicted or warned them of any natural disaster or request them to observe sacrifice to avert any impending danger.

Organisation and Management of Oje Market

Oje market developed as an important trading centre which attracts traders from all part of Yoruba land. The market started as night market under the 'Ayunre' tree. The travellers used to stop over to buy things. In the early years the major sellers in Oje market were the Aso-Oke weaver, traditional herbalist (Lekuleja). Only few number of people were selling agricultural products such as yam, maize, vegetables and so on which was only needed for homes. The close down of some small market around the Oje community aided the rapid growth of the market. For example, Atenda market was a neighboring market existed in the earliest time as food stuff market but went in moribund and many others. Due to this situation, Oje market metamorphosed in to day and night market to meet up the daily need of the people in the community. The initial cotton available in Oje was 'Kijipa' and 'Adire' (tie and dye) but later graduated to 'Aso-Oke'. Today the market was well known to be centre of traditional cloth and ornamental beads.

Oje market advanced and grew to become a centre of hand woven textile materials such as traditional *Aso Ofi*, Adire (traditional tie and dyed, and patterned fabric from Osogbo, Ede, Idikan, Okeseri, and so on. Other local products such as black soap from Lalupon, Jagun, chicken; fowls, basketry, and pottery began to find its way into the market. Because of the distance of some interested buyers, periodic marketing strategy was introduced, even though these materials are relatively cheaper during the market days.



Plate 5: *The Aso-Oke Traditional Woven Fabrics Stall*



Plate 6: *The Aso-Oke Traditional woven fabrics stall*

Between the year 1960 and 1984 Oje market had become well organized and as time goes on it was well laid out; some had trees to provide shade, while some had tents and stalls of thatched roof. Some of the modern stalls were built by the local government and demarcated with corrugated iron sheet and lease out to traders. Those who could not afford the price have their wares displayed in an open places and verandas. Record shows that the numbers of shops at that time was less than three hundred (300) and not less than hundred (100) people operated open market. At that time Yoruba people were the major ethnic group through other ethnics such as Igbos, Hausa and other one smaller in number that transact business in the market and trading is going on in the atmosphere of peace. The Hausa are involved in the livestock trade, smoked fish groundnut and onion. They also sell guinea corn and beans though some Yoruba are also good in the trade. Igbo women buy plantain from Oje market because is noted for the supply and distribution of plantain and other fruits in Ibadan city. The market officials are there to monitor the activities of both traders and buyers.



Plate 7: *Pepper Section*

Today, the market has been departmentalized; the traders are grouped according to their products. The section comprises of different categories of sellers. Aso Ofi (traditional hand woven fabrics) has its section. The traditional herbalists (Lekuleja) are grouped together while craft works such as ornamental beads, pottery, and basketry are grouped in another section. The groups of pepper sellers are found in an open place in front of the stalls. The market has extended in to compounds to the extent that veranda of residential bind things.

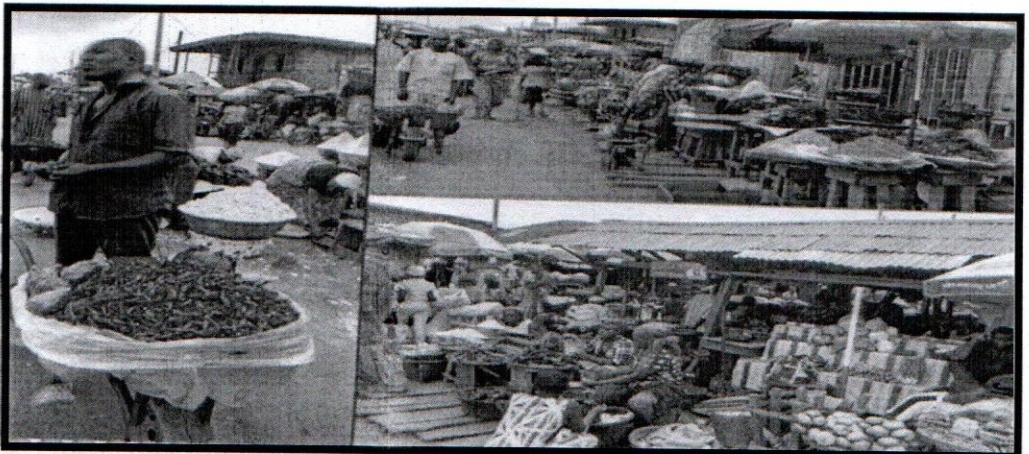


Plate 8: *Aerial view of Oje Market*



Plate 9: *Ornamentals – Bead store*

The market has grown in to wings (both periodic and daily market) due to increase in population. The weaver section (Aso Ofi) holds seventeenth days interval while black soap hold nine days interval. Each of these guilds have their administrative heads, meet among themselves on several occasion while important matters is being referred to the executive council of the market which shall be discussed later.

Guild association regulates the buying and selling of commodities. Some of these guild heads have been largely responsible for regulating the supply of some basic food items thereby creating artificial scarcity and higher price with a view to increasing the profit margin of their members. The extent to which they have been successful is corrected with the extent at which they have been able motivate and export various economies and social relationship as well as operational flexibility within the market structure.

Weaving Section

The traditional weaver fabrics has been an age long attire of the Yorubas especially during special festival or occasion such as traditional marriage it is made with different style and fashion. It

is the most commonly made by women from Okene, Ilorin, Omu, Iseyin and male weavers from Saki, Iseyin, Okeho and Ibadan. Mrs Olawunmi recalls that weaving materials such as cotton, loom, tanning line and one the first set of material that was introduced in to the market.¹⁰ The availability of different Aso-Oke fabric in Oje market contributes the uniqueness of the market among other market in Ibadan. To qualify as a member of this organization, the apprentice would undergo training for five years after which he obtained certificate of operation. Laws and order are maintained within the guild and the executives has veto power to suspend any recalcitrant except that members are not expelled no matter offence but may be requested to go on indefinite suspension

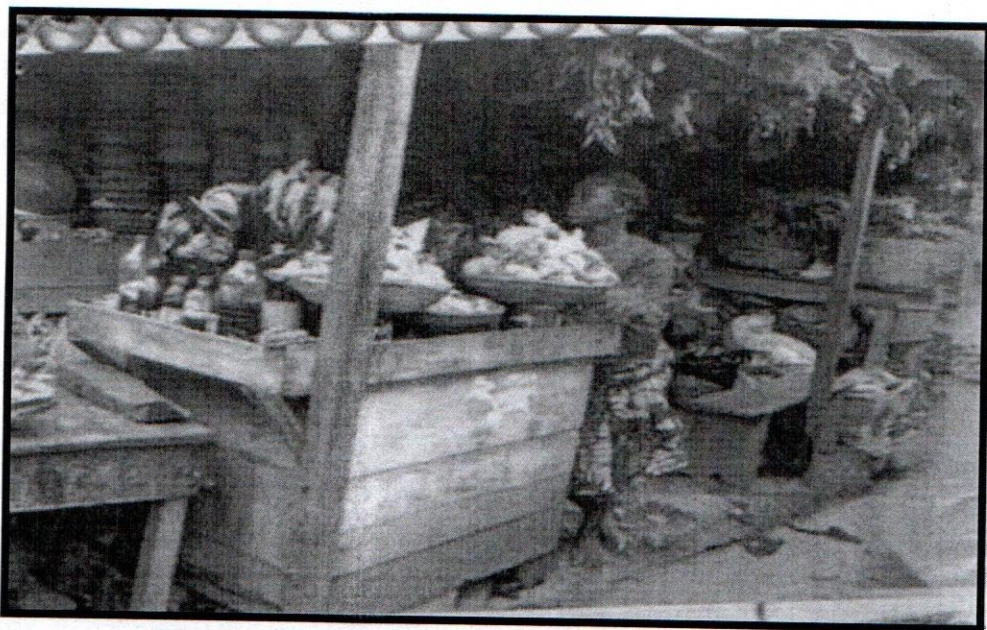


Plate 10: *Traditional Pharmacist (Leku-leja) stall*

Herbs are different leaves combined as therapy for ailment and diseases. Using herbs as traditional way of medication had been an age long tradition before the introduction of modern medicine.. Oje market hosts sections of Lekuleja stalls. The above picture is just a section of the stalls. The herbs and clay-pots are brought from neighbouring towns such as Oyo, Ibadan, Osogbo, Ede and Ilorin. A herbalist that was interviewed Alhaja Afusat 'the Apase' of the organisation remarks that the minimum learning

period for the apprentice was six years in those early years, but now due to negative effect of science medicine the period has been reduced to two years just to encourage the interested apprentice. The herbal section was one of the first major parts of the market in 1960s.¹¹

Oje market also has the taste of modernization that sets in as early as 1960s. Imported goods and manufactured goods also have its way in. Trucks from companies delivered canned food to their customers in the market. Goods from Nestles, Cadbury, P&G, Foodstuffs, imported wares can also be bought from the market.

Oje market had contributed tremendously to the socio and economic development of Ibadan. Till date the market attracted traders from different part of Yorubaland. The market is famously recognized for Aso-oke fabrics. Different modern syle of traditional wears for engagements, wedding ceremonies are found in the market. A mention of Oje market to any Yoruba man draws his mind to Aso-oke fabrics. It was also noted for traditional herbalists (lekuleja). The pottery works are brought from Ilorin in trucks to be sold to the herbalists in the market. Other products are also displayed in the market such as foodstuffs and boutique shops.

Roles of NGO cannot be over-emphasized in Oje market. Government also built modern shops to accommodate more traders in the market. Government of Oyo state needs to improve on the social infrastructures provided in the market as there were no visible modern toilets in the area except those in residential buildings around the market. A lot of problems which are deterrent to normal trading were also discovered which has to do with poor sanitation. The traders also lack culture of environmental cleanliness and sanitation. Olaoba in his work observed thesame problem in Bodija and suggested constant enlightenment programmes from time to time¹². Each market stall should be encouraged to have disposable aluminium dustbin. The local government can be responsible for clearing while the shop owners pay token. This in turn could serve as Internal generated revenue for the government.

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Oje market is very unique in its outlook when compared with other markets in Ibadan. The market is surrounded with residential buildings because it was founded by a community. Today, both indigenes and none indigenes such as Hausa, Ibo, Tiv and Fulani patronized the market with their goods being displayed everywhere.

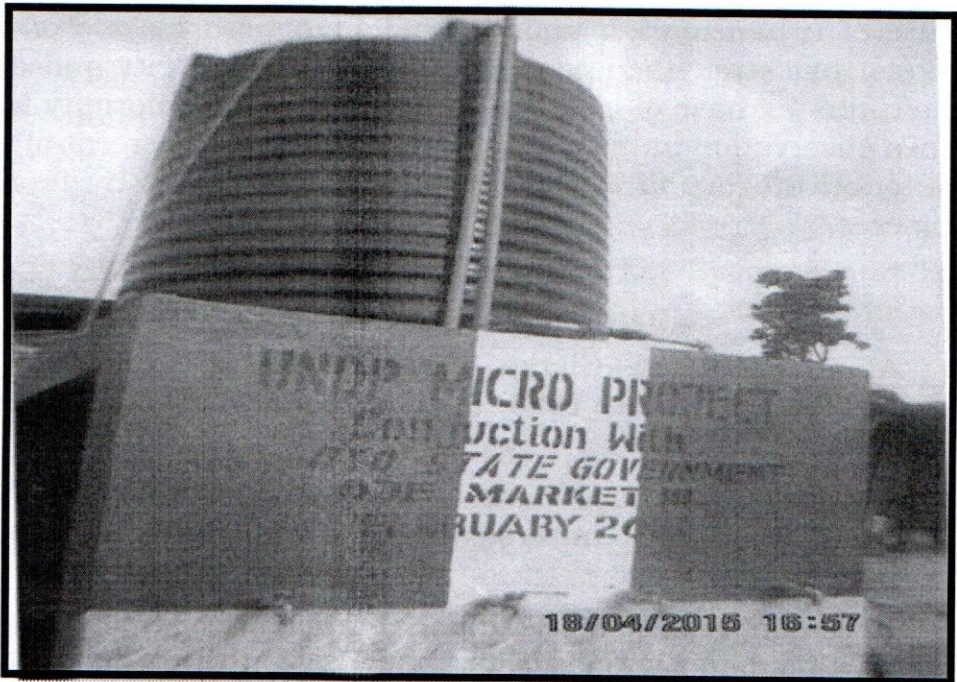


Plate 11: *NGO Project.*

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Markets play a vital role in the economic life of people and they are essential in the chain of commodity distribution as can be seen in the case of historical assessment of Oje market discussed above. It started as traditional market established by Delesolu family that hails from Ijeru in Ogbomoso. Oje market as discussed in this paper epitomises the traditional market in Nigeria, attracts often physical development which lead to the growth of the city with its attendant management challenges. From the date collected from management Committee of the market it can be assumed that Oje market had been in Ibadan for over five hundred years and was well recognized as the centre of selling the Yoruba traditional woven

clothes (Aso-oke) and also known as house of mysterious crocodile-the age long tradition of the founder of the market.

As Hodder and Ukwu¹³ comment on the features of traditional market in West Africa, the template at which they discussed the features of markets in African has been upgraded by contemporary historians. Oje market has the feature of both traditional and little feature of urban market and can be categorized as one of the markets that strengthen economic base of Ibadan city and also sustain the tax base of local authority. This is in conformity with Filani's observation in his work¹⁴ that thirty to forty percent of the population of Yoruba towns and cities engaged in trade and commerce.

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4. Oral Interview granted Chief Jimoh Adesina, The Baale of Oje Community, and Age: 72. Occupation: Retired Civil Servant, Date of Interview: 12- 03-16.
5. Oral Interview granted Mr. Lasisi Adigun(one of the custodians of Oje shrine), Age: 52. Date of interview: 12-03-16.
6. Records collected from the Oje Market Secretary, Oje Community during Interview with him. Date: 12- 03-16.
7. Intergroup relationship is promoted among the people of Oje community hence it is forbidden for any of them to marry from their maternal side.
8. The Crocodile was placed in a pond in Oje community. The crocodile has been there for the past 100 years.

9. Masquerade is one of the deities that are being worshipped in Yorubaland. It is also worshipped among the Oje people.
10. Oral Interview granted Mrs Olawumi, Occupation: Trader in Oje and hails from Oje community.
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