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Price Control, Profiteering, and Public Cooperation: The Lagos Market Women's
Association and the Limits of Colonial Control

by

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I. Introduction

"Control, I submit, only brings our administration into disrepute unless it can be enforced - and we cannot enforce it." [Kano Provincial Commissioner, 1943]^[1]

With the outbreak of WWII, British colonial officials in Nigeria faced the imminent threat of food shortages. Broad wartime regulations were implemented to requisition food for military purposes, establish production quotas in agricultural provinces, and control food prices and distribution in the Lagos markets. These regulations extended the element of colonial control into the food marketplace, which was dominated by independent, self-governing traders, the vast majority of whom were women. These market women objected not only to the threat that food price control represented to their livelihood, but the threat that it represented to their economic autonomy.

The market women, many of whom were organized under the banner of the Lagos Market Women's Association, vigorously protested the price control plan popularly known as the Pullen scheme after its director Captain A.P. Pullen. Through protests, petitions, editorials, addressing Pullen directly, and intentional non-cooperation with his inspectors and his controlled food markets, Lagos market women defended themselves both economically and politically. They were defending their ability to earn a living for themselves and their families, and they were defending their ability to operate amongst themselves and their communities without colonial intervention. As the Pullen scheme wore on, their protests gained support from other sectors of Lagosian society, and by the end of the war opposition to the Pullen price control program was described in the press as unanimous.

The Pullen scheme was never able to achieve its goals of controlling prices and standardizing and regulating a market sector that Pullen described as “uneconomical,” “unbusinesslike,” and “irregular.” His project, therefore, can be seen as not only solely about prices. It was also about the extending colonial notions of rationality, standardization, efficiency, and even docility into market spheres dominated by women that operated by their own norms and customs, outside of the colonial framework dominated by men. When later reports mourned the Pullen scheme’s inability to achieve these aims, they placed blame on the particularity of the African context; “Nigeria is not a normal country,”^[2] so regulations that should have worked did not.

While the colonial authorities ascribed the Pullen scheme’s failure to circumstances they could not predict or direct, such as weather patterns or seasonal crop variations, the source material also shows that market traders’ protests and intentional non-cooperation played a large part in the program’s demise. The failure of the Pullen markets had many contributing factors, but it is incumbent upon historians to examine the explanations given in the colonial sources. The refusal of market women to undermine their own livelihoods, and the inability of the colonial bureaucracy to create viable alternatives that consumers would embrace, demonstrates the limits of colonial control in the African context.

This analysis of the limits of colonial control draws on Luise White’s study of prostitution in colonial Nairobi, *The Comforts of Home*. White demonstrates the way in which the creation and the maintenance of a labor force was beyond the colonial capability, and that relationships between individuals, often categorized as illicit, emerged to fill those gaps. In Nairobi, the state failed in its attempts to control African housing and the reproduction of African labor power that

took place within that context; by negotiating housing and domesticity among their own networks, Nairobi's laborers and prostitutes were constraining colonial control. White argues that the colonial state failed in its efforts to control its urban citizenry because "they could build walls and drains, but no lasting bonds."^[3] Likewise, the officials in wartime Lagos created structures, the Pullen market stalls and the barbed wire queues built alongside them, but they could not create cooperation. They were unable to replicate the network of economic and social ties that linked market women with their customers and suppliers.

This relationship between the economic and the political is another key question framing my work. Colonial sources took great pains to try to separate Nigerian workers' economic concerns from their potential for political agitation. This purported separation of economics from politics was rhetorically hollow. Economics and politics are wholly intertwined, perhaps especially so in the colonial context, and the colonial state relied heavily on its projection of power and authority in both spheres. Thus, we can see that its failure to engender the economic cooperation from traders and consumers that it assumed would be forthcoming was a challenge to its image of unassailable political control and competency.

In making this argument, I am also engaging the broader question of whether this resistance can be aptly termed "anticolonial." Historians of labor, work, and economic resistance in Africa may be familiar with the answer to this question provided by Frederick Cooper's seminal *Decolonization and African Society*. Cooper refuses to let the study of nationalist struggle subsume all other struggles, because this inherently glosses over the possibility of tension, at times profound, between the nationalist decolonization movement and other social movements working toward their own ends. "The danger lies in centering colonialism too much

in people's lives... Much is lost by reducing the life worlds of people into the category of colonized subject and shoehorning political action into the category of 'resistance' or 'nationalism.'"^[4] The actions of the LMWA can be viewed through the lens of that tension. On the one hand, they received significant support from prominent Nigerian nationalist politicians Herbert Macaulay and Nnamdi Azikiwe, and these leaders did much to publicize the market women's struggle and connect it to the decolonization movement. On the other, the LMWA's opposition to the Pullen market was founded on the simple economic reality that government-controlled prices were unrealistically low and would have put traders, who operated on extremely thin profit margins, quickly out of business. The LMWA operated at the intersection of political idealism and economic necessity.

Finally, it is important to address the failure of the Pullen scheme through a gendered lens. How does gender factor into this story? Some primary sources acknowledge it obliquely, some acknowledge it directly, some do not acknowledge it when it is clearly present. In the broadest disciplinary sense, history has accepted gender as a relevant analytical category, due in no small part to Joan Scott's classic essay "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis." Scott proposes that the use of gendered analysis in historical research introduces a "relational notion into our analytic vocabulary,"^[5] so that even when historians are considering a question of women's role in historical processes, it must be understood in relationship to the "social creation of ideas of appropriate roles for men and women."^[6] Gendered history is not exclusively the history of women, but rather history that centers an understanding of how social roles for men

and women are constructed and how those roles interact with questions of power, authority, class, labor, etc.

I am taking a gendered approach to the LMWA and the Pullen scheme both because of where gender is present in the source material, and because of where it is absent. Finding what is omitted, overlooked, or merely alluded to in the source material is a challenge, but a worthy one and certainly a common one among historians working at the intersection of gender and empire.^[7] Gender and empire must be examined together because of the colonial tendency to gender its own authority masculine. This gendered paradigm has led colonial officials to overlook or misattribute women's collective power and political institutions. For example, during the 1929 Igbo women's protest in southern Nigeria known as the Aba Women's War, the protest techniques that women used to address the colonial government were misinterpreted and the political power that women held was not recognized. The protests had very specific political aims and discursive strategies, but these were lost on the colonial officials who viewed these women's activities as a "nuisance." The Victorian socialization of British officials meant that they viewed political activity as men's realm, and thus did not see women's collective political power because they assumed it did not exist.^[8]

The gendering of political power also extended into a gendered approach to access to the public sphere. Cooper describes the "industrial man" that colonial governments hoped could inhabit that public sphere, and because waged labor was gendered masculine, "the kinds of things women did were more often labelled 'customary labor' or the 'informal economy,' with

all the insecurities and vulnerabilities that such a status implied.”^[9] Pullen attempted to transform the African marketplace into a regulated space whose labor relations aligned more with waged, supervised workers than with independent, autonomous traders. In this way, women’s economic space in the marketplace was transformed, discursively if not in practice, from an established fixture of urban life into a marginalized “black market.”

According to the colonial logic of economic and gender practices, while the male wage worker operated in the public sphere, the female domestic worker operated in the private sphere to reproduce the social conditions necessary for a stable, reliable workforce. Lisa Lindsay’s work on the Nigerian General Strike of 1945 points out the crucial irony that while male wage workers argued for higher wages based on their status as breadwinners, their wives were largely economically independent and made significant contributions both to the household economy and to the eventual success of the general strike.^[10] The Pullen scheme attempted to undermine women’s established economic autonomy in favor of a more homogeneously masculine public sphere. It is deeply telling that a later colonial reflection on the scheme’s failure stated that “the sooner the male ceases to rely on the economic contribution of the female to the family exchequer, the sooner the economy will be founded on a more correct basis.”^[11] The Pullen scheme demonstrated the limits of the colonial ability to remake the relationship in the marketplace between gender and autonomy.

Women’s economic autonomy has a long history in Yorubaland. A discussion of the ways in which economic structure and gender structure overlapped and influenced one another is

necessary to get a full picture of the precolonial Yoruba economy and the economy as it transitioned into the colonial period. When discussing Yoruba gender relations and structure, scholarly debate exists over to what extent Yoruba society was dominated by men, whether the Yoruba viewed women and men as separate categories with distinctive attributes, and in which areas of their lives Yoruba women experienced agency and authority, either individually or in groups?^[12]

First, did pre-colonial Yoruba society have separate roles defined on the basis of sex and gender, and if so to what extent did men inhabit the dominant roles? Most authors agree that women and men in Yorubaland occupied separate roles, but that “a ‘neutral’ complementarity, rather than subordination/superordination, more accurately describes the relationship between certain female and male roles.”^[13] Identity based on sex roles was generally less determinant in the kinship system than that of seniority based on when one had entered the family (thus a daughter could potentially have a higher social status than a junior wife).^[14]

Although the majority of authority roles in the public community were occupied by men, Marjorie McIntosh argues that it is inaccurate to describe Yoruba society as a patriarchy if one is using that term within its Western definition: an ideology that characterizes women as distinct from, often inferior to, men and a set of institutions that limit women’s roles and maintain male dominance. She stresses that “male dominance in practical terms... could thus exist even without a gender-based ideology.”^[15] The distinction between male dominance as social practice and male dominance as social ideology is an important one, and it requires that Africanist scholars

with an eye toward gender revise their understanding of the universality of patriarchy as an ideological structure.

Ample source material from the nineteenth century refers to women's crucial roles in the Yoruba economy, including trading in local markets, and organizing market associations, crafts guilds, and trade caravans.^[16] The earliest source records referring to women's trading activities come from the 1820s and 1830s, and these references increased after the 1850s. T.J. Bowen, writing in the 1850s, observed that "a good many men, and still more women, are engaged in traffic," and Richard Burton noted in 1861 that the Abeokuta market stalls were the "peculiar privilege" of women.^[17] Reverend Samuel Johnson, a Yoruba Anglican minister, wrote his *History of the Yorubas* in the 1890s, and observed that "Yorubas are keen traders... [and] both sexes are engaged in trade, but each in his own line.... [Female traders] are purveyors of cooked food, keepers of refreshment stalls, and other branches of dietary for the market."^[18]

As the primary producers of palm products, women played a significant role in the export and processing of Yorubaland's most valuable commodity for the export market. Women's economic access through cash crop production presented a quandary for European traders and missionaries in the early nineteenth century. On the one hand, agricultural labor was largely integrated into women's other domestic responsibilities, and women's role as agricultural producers freed up men's labor for other areas. Christian missionaries also promoted cash crop production as an economic alternative to the slave trade (the so-called transition to "legitimate" commerce). On the other hand, these same missionaries expected that cash crop production

would be controlled by male household heads, thereby contributing to the development of patriarchal nuclear families. Yoruba women's continued economic independence and role in cash crop production defied these gender assumptions.^[19]

Women were also predominant in trading caravans. Toyin Falola noted that Yoruba caravans were run by independent traders, rather than caravans run at the service of particular chiefs or large-scale proprietors.^[20] This made caravans an important avenue for independent capital accumulation, for women in particular. Women were more numerous in Yoruba caravans than men, and were present there as traders themselves rather than wives or concubines of traders as seen elsewhere on the continent. Falola argued that the predominance of women meant that Yoruba caravan routes focused more on short-distance trade, because women often had childrearing responsibilities that necessitated returning to their home more frequently. However, these short-distance routes formed a dense network over which women made frequent and regular trips on a schedule dictated by market periodicity.^[21] Women acted as traders both within their home markets and along dense, established trade route networks. The sources describe these activities as consistently lucrative; the oral evidence upon which Falola relies was unanimous on between 100 and 200 percent profit, and these caravans were an important economic boon to the marketplaces and market traders with whom they collaborated.^[22]

How did these economic roles change as British influence expanded into Yorubaland? The answer, for many scholars, is mixed. Mba argues that although colonialism significantly weakened many areas in which Nigerian women had previously exercised political power, that

sense of diminished autonomy led to greater political mobilization “through those traditional associations which were not destroyed by colonialism;”^[23] Denzer comes to a similar conclusion.^[24] In the economic sphere, women continued to play important roles as traders, processors of food products, and skilled craftswomen. Small-scale market trading, often at very low profit margins, continued to be the most important economic activity for women throughout the colonial period. This was a point of continuity, but it is important to recognize that assigning the label “traditional” gives these economic roles “the unfortunate connotation of changelessness... [and] fails to consider that these ‘traditional occupations’ underwent substantial change both in the precolonial and colonial eras.”^[25] For the majority of women, the increased dominance of European merchants in the import and export of cash crops diminished their access to these avenues of independent wealth accumulation.^[26] This is not to imply that colonial imposition was universally destructive for Yoruba women, or that they were passive subjects acted upon by external forces. My analysis is closely aligned here with McIntosh, who insists that any consideration of women’s changing roles during the colonial period must center and highlight women’s agency in their adaptation to changing conditions around them. Rather than simply being buffeted by the changing social conditions, Yoruba women took initiative to “develop alternative ways of functioning effectively in a modified environment.”^[27]

How did that agency change over time? Most scholars of Yorubaland eschewed using the terminology of “power” or “empowerment” when discussing women’s status. Power is an

incredibly culturally dependent term, which cannot easily be universalized across different groups (or universally understood by a reader, for that matter). Instead, authors have referred to “the concept of control... ability to plan their future activities... the individual’s ability to make decisions concerning the lives of others”^[28] or “the ability to make decisions... distinguish[ing] between making decisions about one’s own life and holding a position of authority that gives one the ability to make decisions that affect other people.”^[29] Overall, scholars propose that Yoruba women before and during the colonial period experienced a high degree of decision-making ability over their own lives. Their ability to make decisions that affected others (through formal political roles, for example) was more sporadic and largely dependent on age and position within a kinship structure or lineage.^[30]

Writing about gender in the African context requires, as ever, nuanced awareness of one’s own biases and expectations. I want to avoid the pitfalls described by Nancy Rose Hunt in her historiography of African women’s history, especially the “insidious... tendency to use African women’s political protest and rebellion as a means of articulating western feminist strategies.”^[31] Oyeronke Oyewumi’s critique of Claire Robertson’s work in Ghana has been useful as I have refined my research and analysis. Oyewumi asked why Robertson would start by studying women and then later realize that she was actually studying traders; Western “body-reasoning,” and the idea that biology determines reality, privileged body-based categories such as “women” over non-body-based categories such as “traders.”^[32] I recognize that I did

much the same thing; I began this process with a research goal centered on women as a fixed category. Over the course of my work, both within my primary research on the LMWA and the broader project of familiarizing myself with the historiography of gender and labor in the African context, my use of gender as an analytical category has become more refined. Naturally, this is an ongoing process and I recognize the limits of my knowledge and perspective, both with regards to the breadth of the sources and to the breadth of the debate over African gender histories and realities.

The primary source material I draw from here is predominantly the *West African Pilot*, a Lagos daily newspaper published by nationalist leader Nnamdi Azikiwe. The WAP's editorial tone reflected the left-leaning nationalist views of its publisher, although this did not always imply support for the interests of market women. The WAP also published transcripts of weekly radio broadcasts given by Pullen during the course of the program, which were a rich source for colonial discourse surrounding the price control plan and the market women's objections to it, and also for information on individuals convicted of buying or selling above controlled prices. This data provides a longitudinal view of how the prosecution and the official discourse changed over time as the scheme's inability to secure compliance became more pronounced. I was able to access these materials for the years 1941, 1942, 1944, and 1945, so my view of this period is significant but not entirely complete. However, the amount of material I did uncover was more than I had expected or hoped for, and I am grateful for such a rich archival source that includes the voices and actions of the African actors whose agency in this period I have prioritized in my analysis.

II. Price Control, Profiteering, and Public Cooperation

Lagos had been annexed by the British in 1861, decades before the formal establishment of the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria in 1914. By the turn of the twentieth century, the city was home to a significant British population, as well as a large contingent of socially and politically prominent Western-educated emigres from Sierra Leone, and Portuguese-speaking former slaves who had emigrated from Brazil. However, the city was dominated demographically and linguistically by the Yoruba, and the norms of Yoruba culture guided social and economic relationships.^[33] Lagos was very much a part of the larger Yoruba milieu in which women dominated the trade in staple foodstuffs, such as yam, pepper, palm oil, and *gari* (cassava root flour).

The tradition among Yoruba women of urbanization, autonomy, and economic participation in the market sphere is the historical context in which the Lagos Market Women's Association emerged. The LMWA, conservatively estimated at 8,000 members, was active by the mid-1920s, although there are earlier records of market women in Lagos taking collective action to protest specific policies, such as a 1908 protest over water rate increases.^[34] From its initial formation, the LMWA maintained a clear position as an organized pressure group designed to ensure market women's economic interests, not a political party. Although the LMWA did work closely in concert with nationalist leader Herbert Macaulay of the Nigerian

National Democratic Party, “the actual impetus for establishing an effective, well-disciplined market women’s movement came from the women themselves.”^[35]

The LMWA was an extension of a long tradition of market self-governance, through specific commodity sellers’ associations, and market organization and maintenance committees lead by an *alaga*. An *alaga* was selected by the market women on the basis of personality and leadership skill. Typically, markets would present a united front to other markets and the public, regardless of internal disputes, and the authority of the *alaga* was well-respected.^[36] The leader of the LMWA for nearly three decades, Madam Alimotu Pelewura, was Yoruba, Muslim, and herself a market woman well-established in the fish trade. By the early 1930s, she was elected *alaga* of the Ereko market, the largest meat market in Lagos. Under her direction, the women of Ereko market contributed three pence per week to a fund to hire lawyers and clerks to represent them to the colonial administration when necessary.^[37] Pelewura was married once but widowed soon after, and she never remarried nor bore children. However, she did raise several children of relatives and friends as her own, establishing herself as an independent female head of household.^[38] Pelewura continued to live and work among market women even after assuming leadership of the LMWA; she maintained her trade throughout her tenure as the organization’s head.^[39]

The LMWA had an ongoing history of representing the interests of its constituents based both on their economic role as market traders and on their sex role as women. For example, in

1939, when income taxation was extended to Lagosian women, the LMWA immediately organized protests, marching on the office of the colonial commissioner in Lagos on several consecutive days. The women created a petition detailing the history of colonial promises that it would not extend taxation to women and arguing that female taxation was contrary to custom. In response to the colonial commissioner's argument that the market women were not affected by these changes, as they would only affect rich women, Pelewura countered that "once the principle of female taxation was conceded, all women would eventually be included under the law." The opposition to the extension of taxation culminated in a mass meeting attended by 1000-7000 people (colonial vs. press estimates) and addressed by both Pelewura and the colonial commissioner: "The commissioner stated that English women paid tax; Pelewura retorted that England was where the money was made, whereas Africans were poor 'owing to many factors over which they had no control.'... She ended in Yoruba with a statement to the effect of 'votes for women or alternatively no taxation without representation.'"^[40] In the face of this opposition, the taxation plan was revised to raise the threshold above which women would be taxed from £50 to £200; the LMWA achieved a limited victory.^[41]

Here we see echoes of the phenomenon Lisa Lindsay describes in *Working with Gender*,^[42] where Africans are well aware of the gender expectations and discourses of the colonial structure, and use these discourses themselves to argue for improved status or particular reforms. The LMWA used two major lines of argument in expressing their opposition to the extension of taxation to women: economic and customary. These arguments would be used again, to even greater effect, as the colonial state extended its reach into the food marketplace.

The food price and distribution controls implemented during WWII presented the market women with a direct challenge to their economic position and customary autonomy.

Even prior to the outbreak of World War Two, British officials were forming plans to exert greater control over Nigeria's agricultural sector. Initially, these plans were focused on securing a regular flow of the export commodities deemed most important to the war effort, namely palm kernels, groundnuts, and their processed oils. In August 1939, the Secretary of State for the colonies sent a telegram to the governors of Nigeria and Sierra Leone, advising them that the "Government in these circumstances has, of course, the power to determine the price and their purpose will be the two-fold one of obtaining food for this country at reasonably cheap prices, but at the same time paying a rate sufficiently high to encourage production and meet the reasonable wishes of the producer."^[43] This message encouraged the governors to implement government-controlled export prices for these commodities, but also implicitly recognized that producers would need economic incentive to accept heightened bureaucratic intrusion. These wartime regulations were by no means specific to Nigeria. Britain and France relied heavily on supplies produced in their colonies during both WWI and WWII, and these types of quota programs and distribution restrictions were prevalent elsewhere in Africa.^[44]

These expanded wartime powers enacted through the Nigerian Defence Regulations of 1939 were far-reaching and often designed to limit the capacity of civil society to interfere with uninterrupted flows of goods and labor.^[45] The questions of inflation and food scarcity were sources of significant anxiety for the colonial state, and the disruptions to international shipping

caused by the War only further intensified those fears.^[46] Thus, the Nigeria Supply Board was established and given broad oversight of the economic aspects of the war effort, including foodstuffs. The Supply Board granted a Food Controller significant latitude to regulate food imports and set policies to control food prices and distribution internally.^[47]

Price control measures, however, were flawed from the start because they failed or refused to take into account factors such as transportation costs, buyer's commissions, middlemen and wholesalers, and produce inspection fees.^[48] These discrepancies affected Nigerian foodstuffs traders at all levels of the distribution chain: producers, middlemen and wholesalers, and the small-scale market traders that made up the LMWA's membership. As the war went on and colonial intervention into food price control and distribution intensified, these sectors became increasingly unwilling to cooperate with price controls.

Producers were often hardest hit by changes in the controlled commodity prices. Colonial officials used the contraction in wartime markets to justify lowering commodity prices, especially on goods such as cocoa that were deemed non-essential. The director of agriculture argued that the colonial government "ought in fairness to the British tax payer to show as low a price as possible."^[49] The lack of consideration of farmers' expenses or profits was well publicized. The *West African Pilot* argued that "farmers should have been consulted so that their problems might be taken into consideration... There is every reason to believe that farmers of this country do not wish to profiteer... but it was taken for granted that the natural procedure would be to be in consultation with the parties concerned so as to arrive at something

equitable.”^[50] Farmers would often hide goods and refuse to sell to government buyers at artificially low prices, choosing instead to continue to work within established African trade networks.^[51]

The food middlemen, wholesalers, and transporters with whom producers continued to cooperate received somewhat mixed treatment in the press. At times, they were viewed as the enemy of farmers and consumers alike, the “profiteering propensity of the insatiable middle-men” being a “menace to be tackled.”^[52] Elsewhere, however, African wholesale traders and provisions middlemen were described as “an important and influential group of business men in this country,” and that “no arrangement made with regard to the sale of provisions in this country can be said to have given full consideration to every factor involved without considering seriously the views of the Provision Merchants’ Union.”^[53] The failure to consult with the Provision Merchants’ Union is all the more damning when viewed in the context of the significant cooperation between the Nigeria Supply Board and the Association of West African Merchants, an influential guild of European merchants and wholesalers.^[54]

Finally, after passing through the hands of distributors and a transportation system severely overburdened by the war,^[55] foodstuffs would reach small scale market traders in Lagos. The impact of controlled prices on traders was felt almost immediately. Market traders were afforded no profit margin, and this situation was especially acute in Lagos because of the

distance over which foodstuffs had to be transported. Controlled prices also did not account for seasonal variations in availability and shifting expenses due to inflation. For instance, a bag of white beans from Kano province in northwestern Nigeria cost 8s at the point of origin; by the time that bag reached Lagos, its cost to a market woman was 19s. According to the controlled prices, she was supposed to sell that bag at 17s. As a result, as early as 1941 Nigerian sources were reporting that traders “would rather go idle than ruin themselves selling at that impossible price.”^[56]

These price controls were designed to combat the problems of inflation and scarcity, which were already significant by 1941, and were a site of ongoing confrontation between British administrators and Nigerian workers. On a number of occasions, colonial officials argued against adjusting wages in response to rising costs of living, saying that higher wages would only push prices higher and lead to a cycle of inflation.^[57] A Cost of Living Committee was formed in 1942 to examine the question of whether wages could or should be adjusted to keep pace with rising prices. Several of the Committee’s recommendations were adopted in July of that year, including a wage increase for all government workers in Lagos and an addendum urging private employers to raise wages as well,^[58] and Governor Bernard Bourdillon announced at that time that additional wage adjustments would be made in the future as the cost of living rose.^[59] The *West African Pilot* described these recommendations as the “basis for giving the Nigerian wage-earners a New Deal.”^[60]

These recommendations specifically addressed the issue of foodstuffs prices in Lagos, stating:

Retail prices of certain foodstuffs will be recorded, at regular intervals, in order that this most important aspect of the economic life of the people may be kept constantly under review....

There will be more rigid control of prices, if possible in co-operation with the local societies of market women.^[61]

The attempt to fix prices as low as possible was one strategy that the colonial government used to try to avoid raising wages further should inflation continue to increase. But even by this point, sources show that market women were not satisfied with the price control measures as they stood, and were not inclined to cooperate with them. In a speech shortly after these recommendations were adopted, the Inspector of Prices noted that “complaints have been received from the market traders.”^[62] Although no more information is provided here about how market traders voiced these complaints and made them known to the Inspector of Prices, several weeks afterward the Inspector invited Pelewura to his office to discuss the LMWA’s cooperation (or lack thereof) with fixed food prices.^[63] This response suggests that LMWA was involved in funneling complaints from market women to food price officials.

This lack of cooperation, both from traders and from the public, was a recurring theme for colonial officials. In a radio broadcast on July 18th, the Commissioner of the Colony addressed the issue of food price controls, stating that “nothing I can do can be of much value without the cooperation of the public. I am afraid that so far this cooperation has been conspicuous only by its absence.”^[64] He noted that market traders routinely sold above fixed prices, and that

consumers would regularly pay such prices. His broadcast also lamented that, despite the widespread practice of selling above controlled prices, “no one comes to the Police or me with the specific information which would make possible a prosecution.”^[65]

The discourse surrounding public cooperation was not limited to the market women themselves. The Inspector of Prices’ radio broadcast from November 5, 1942 was directed at consumers, emphasizing that the law required them to report market women selling at above controlled prices. According to the Food Control Order 1942, consumers “**must** report any case of profiteering if you are the purchaser... if a person pays more than the controlled price... he has committed an offence and he is just as liable to punishment as the person selling the article to him.”^[66] The broadcast goes on to note that “a great number of the public is very indifferent about obtaining the controlled prices,” despite the fact that those prices “have been published from time to time in the local newspapers.”^[67] The assumption that controlled prices were well known by consumers, and that information about them was readily available, needs to be treated with some skepticism. Although publication of controlled prices in newspapers was certainly regular practice, this would by no means ensure that all consumers received that information.

Throughout the duration of the Pullen scheme, market women and their consumers were treated at times with sympathy, at times with indifference, and at times with hostility in the press and colonial discourse. Market women were described as either helpless victims of a policy created without their input, or as heartless profiteers willing to make a profit on the suffering of their neighbors. Themes of responsibility, order, and cooperation came up repeatedly, and were

used to varying degrees and effects by colonial administrators, African elites writing about the Pullen scheme, and market women voicing their concerns. These discourses about women's appropriate behavior during wartime were strongly linked to the wave of prosecutions for profiteering that were used as a punitive measure to try to coerce cooperation with the Pullen scheme.

The most frequent framing strategy used to describe market women was the language of "profiteering." This term was used from the very outset of the price control measures and, despite being used frequently to describe a range of actual or theoretical behavior, was never clearly defined. Even though market women and other traders could be arrested for profiteering, the term, as it was used in this period, was more important as a moral signifier than a legal one. The description of a profiteer typically combined two elements: self-centeredness and placing desire for one's own material benefit above all other concerns; and a position of power over others.

The issue of selfishness or greed was present throughout the discourse surrounding profiteering. Descriptions of profiteering as a practice, as well as specific individuals convicted of profiteering, used words like "evil," "heartless," a "menace," "disgraceful," and "a blot on Lagos."^[68] These descriptors were then combined with a portrayal of the profiteers as having illegitimate power over others in their community. An editorial praising the Pullen scheme contrasted Pullen's bureaucracy against the "market oligarchy."^[69] Market women were described as holding disproportionate power over their communities, rather than being established members of those communities who were also struggling themselves between two

unfortunate options: financial ruin when selling at the controlled price versus selling above the controlled price and making themselves vulnerable to prosecution under profiteering laws. This language of profiteering was so prevalent to describe the market women, it has even been uncritically adopted in later secondary source material describing this period. Oyemakinde, for instance, suggested that the open and unregulated nature of foodstuffs markets “*enthroned* the market women and their *profiteering* tendencies,” and used the term profiteering to describe market women’s activities even before the war.^[70] The fact that “profiteering” can be used to describe market women’s activities during a period in which there was no legal use or context for that term shows how thoroughly it became a moral designator associated with market women beyond merely the context of the wartime price regulations.

The prosecution of traders under profiteering laws, intended as a deterrent to selling above fixed prices, was a question that emerged with increasing frequency in the weekly broadcasts by the Inspector of Prices. These broadcasts, which began in July of 1942, show the increasing concern of the colonial authorities over their inability to successfully use the penal power of the state to enforce widespread compliance with price controls. The language used to describe the prevalence of this “profiteering” is anxious, almost frenzied: “Following its recent declaration of war on profiteers, Government appears to have been conducting a serious campaign to purge the community of this menace.”^[71] The particular menace described here was a Syrian woman named Saba Nayif Fawaz, “a well known trader of Ereko street,” who sold a twenty pound bag of rice for 7 shillings instead of its controlled price of 6 shillings, 4 pence. For this difference of eight pence, she was fined £7.10 (225 times her supposed profit) and sentenced to four months

imprisonment. Her sentence was especially harsh because, when told to accompany the investigating sergeant to the police station, “she stonily refused to do so.”^[72]

Fawaz’s case was far from the only instance of harsh or disproportionate penalties intended to send a message to Nigerian traders. The Inspector of Prices’ weekly broadcasts included a wealth of information about all traders convicted for profiteering in the preceding week: their names and addresses, the prices and quantities of items they sold as compared to the fixed prices, and the fine and/or imprisonment to which they were sentenced. The stated goal behind sharing this information publically, both via radio broadcast and newspaper publication, was to encourage the public to avoid said traders in the future.^[73] However, we cannot discount the element of public shaming evident in these broadcasts. Pullen’s broadcasts featured headlines deriding “These Foolish People”^[74] who were convicted of disregarding price controls. When profiteering was routinely described as evil and disgraceful, the publication of the names and addresses of those convicted appears to be an attempt at a public moral rebuke.

These profiteering convictions were not limited solely to foodstuffs, but also covered everyday luxuries like cigarettes and alcohol, manufactured goods, and building materials. Despite these efforts to prosecute traders selling above market prices and to publicize their convictions, the Inspector of Prices was bluntly honest about these measures being far from effective. His August 28, 1942 broadcast was one solitary sentence: “It has been found that the fines imposed on persons convicted of profiteering are not having the effect on profiteering that was hoped and so the Police will in future ask for heavier sentences in hopes that would-be

profiteers will think twice before breaking the law in future.”^[75] The data from later broadcasts confirmed that heavier sentences were in fact becoming the norm. Fines increased, as did the lengths of imprisonment, corporal punishment was instituted for minors arrested for profiteering,^[76] and prosecutions were expanded to include not only market women who sold above controlled prices, but also consumers who demonstrated “public indifference” by buying above controlled prices.^[77]

From the perspective of market traders, these profiteering laws were unevenly applied and disproportionately targeted African traders despite these same practices being widely shared by European firms. An example from a provincial town compared an agent of a European trading firm who was fined £5 for profiteering on a bottle of gin, whereas two women who sold a forty pound bag of rice for fifteen pence above fixed price were fined £3 each. The editorial asks why these two women should be fined more harshly than a European merchant who would have much more familiarity with and access to the regulations in place. The author draws attention to the racial disparity through which the “Court seems to minimize or aggravate its punishment according to the offending party.”^[78]

As the inability of the government to enforce controlled prices became more and more apparent, a new strategy emerged in late 1943 which would popularly be known as the Pullen scheme, after the Deputy Commissioner for Native Foodstuffs, Captain A.P. Pullen. The Pullen scheme attempted to exert greater control over food prices through direct government intervention at all stages of the food distribution chain. Government agents would buy foodstuffs

from the provinces, ship them to Lagos at a subsidized transportation cost, and sell them in rationed amounts at official prices through government-operated market stalls. The hope was that these Pullen stalls, by selling at the controlled prices, would force down prices in all other food markets as a result.^[79]

These hopes for increased cooperation were not realized. The Pullen scheme was “nothing more than a paper declaration,”^[80] because the material incentive to cooperate and participate in the government’s plans simply was not present. At the point of production, farmers would often hide stockpiles of produce from government agents who paid substandard prices and instead sold their goods to local merchants who could offer more. These local merchants would then deal exclusively with market women operating outside of the regulated Pullen markets. Because producers and traders at all points along the distribution chain stood to lose money from business with the Pullen agents, there was little incentive to report their compatriots for failing to cooperate.^[81]

The irony of the Pullen scheme, from a marketing and distribution standpoint, is that it incentivized the types of business practices that Pullen had been encouraging among market women only two years prior. Pullen, responding to complaints from petty traders about their inability to make a profit when selling at the controlled prices, stated that “the obvious thing to do, therefore, is to buy in the larger quantities, and this can be done quite simply if several traders will pool their money for the purpose of the purchase.”^[82] Several months earlier, he advised traders that in order to remedy their “uneconomical and unbusinesslike methods,” they

should “organize their buying through agents at the various sources of supply and have the produce sent to Lagos.”^[83]

When market women did later adopt these tactics, strategies that had at one time been promoted heavily by the government, they were doing so in response and opposition to government interference into their livelihood. Their adaptation to the changing demands of the marketplace and the changing realities of food availability and price, which Pullen had once lauded as a necessary step to make their work more “businesslike,” was met instead with derision when it directly impacted the effectiveness of government control. Speaking shortly after the creation of the official Pullen markets, his tone toward the collective buying practices he had once championed, and the market women who engaged in them, bordered on contempt:

He complained that many people were antagonistic to the scheme and that he had found difficulty in giving satisfaction to the people of Lagos. If they could only co-operate with him there would be no experiencing of difficulties... He concluded that Lagosians were hard to please. “You can do everything for them, but they never seem to appreciate it,” he stated.^[84]

He also described the opposition of market women to the Pullen stalls as “sheer nonsense.”^[85]

At the initial stages of the controlled markets, Pullen announced, “I did not make an empty threat when I said that the Market Control Scheme would be put into practice in spite of any opposition.”^[86] This opposition had already been widespread when the controls were limited to food prices, but the introduction of government food purchasing and distribution expanded market women’s discontent. Lagos market women argued against the Pullen stalls and regulations on a number of fronts. The first, and most significant, was their inability to maintain

their business and the lack of consideration of adequate profit margins. Pelewura described their concerns in an editorial, stating that “the market women would not like to be deprived of their means of livelihood, which was the sale of foodstuffs.”^[87] She indicated that she communicated these concerns personally and directly to Captain Pullen, at a meeting he arranged with her shortly before the advent of the controlled markets, that she communicated these concerns personally and directly to the Commissioner of the Colony, and that she submitted to the government a petition signed by 1,500 market women “embodying their objections to the Pullen scheme.”^[88] The petitions through which the LMWA registered their opposition to the Pullen markets consistently referenced the issue of livelihood. A later petition, signed by several dozen market women but delivered by a crowd of approximately 1,000, stated that the Pullen scheme and the government monopoly in African foodstuffs “has deprived them of their trading rights.”^[89]

However, the arguments of the market women against the Pullen scheme and its regulations were not solely made in economic terms. They also argued against the Pullen scheme on the basis of its divergence from the established and well-accepted practices of the food market. These arguments about the market women’s privileges were expressed both in general opposition to the Pullen scheme and in specific opposition to particular arenas of regulation. In a broader sense, the LMWA argued that “the privileges of market women, enjoyed for the last 80 years, as referred to in a similar petition of November 17, 1943, were interfered with.”^[90] In a meeting in which Pullen told Pelewura that he intended to sell rice, *gari*, palm oil and pepper,

Pelewura responded that market trading was not the government's "line of business but was the concern of the Lagos market women who had maintained their families for many years by the sale of these foodstuffs."^[91] At mass meetings to protest the scheme, assembled market women sang satirical songs mocking the interference of European administrators in the sale of foodstuffs consumed by Africans:

Strange things are happening in Lagos.
Europeans now sell pepper,
Europeans now sell palm oil,
Europeans now sell yam,
Though they cannot find their way to Idogo [an outlying food supply source]
And yet [Oba] Falolu [the king of Lagos] is still in his palace and alive.^[92]

Pelewura made a similar comment during a meeting with Pullen, reminding him that she remembered WWI, when "no white man sold *gari* in Lagos."^[93] The market women's opposition to the Pullen scheme made clear reference to the perceived incongruity of European men involving themselves in the sale of African foodstuffs.

These general objections to the Pullen scheme were also accompanied by specific objections to the introduction of new goods to the list of Pullen-controlled foodstuffs. When Pullen announced that poultry should be sold by weight rather than by size, a delegation of poultry sellers from markets across Lagos visited his office and objected to the controlled price, specifically its failure to account for the increasing costs of railway transportation for poultry. They informed him that scales were not used at the sources of supply, so his attempt to implement them at the point of sale was based on his assumptions about how food pricing and

distribution should work, rather than being based on the knowledge of how these systems actually operated in practice.^[94]

When fish was added to the list of regulated foodstuffs, also to be sold by weight rather than by size, the objections came not only from the market women, but from the fishermen as well. A joint meeting of fish sellers, net owners, and fishermen approached Pullen in protest. Pelewura, herself a fish seller, “stated that the sale of fish by scales was contrary to African customs,... that collective bargaining was the usual method of sales agreement... and that fish was not an African produced foodstuff within the orbit of the Pullen Food Control Scheme.”^[95]

The secretary of the Nigerian Fisherman’s Association, A. Ipaye Balogun, also noted that the nets, tackles, and supplies necessary for fish production were not subject to price regulation and that large European firms that dominated the market for such goods, such as the United Africa Company (British) and the Union Trade Company (Swiss), were able to raise their prices without regulation all while the African producers were subject to strict price regulations.^[96] Fish was an especially contentious addition to the Pullen control scheme because it so directly impacted both the fishermen as producers and the fish sellers as traders. Both these groups argued against Pullen’s regulation on the basis of its departure from “African market custom,” and these arguments based in the language of what is customary received substantial support in the press.^[97]

We can see in these examples how the objections to the Pullen scheme rested on the disconnect between existing customary practices and colonial involvement. These arguments

moved from the very specific (selling fish or poultry by weight) to the more broad (colonial interference in a realm in which it had previously not had any legitimate authority). Pelewura's statement that dealing in foodstuffs was the business of market women who had maintained their families through this trade for generations paints a picture that contrasts sharply against the structure established by Pullen's markets. In a speech heralding the opening of new Pullen stalls at Sabo and Oyingbo markets, Captain Pullen "introduced as overseers of the market, Messrs W.H. Fowler, S.T. Wey, Labode Williams, T.A. Williams, C.R. Porter, S.A. Johnson, O.A.L. Araba, Ayo Vaughan, Dudley Cooker, and J.A. Onojobi... The men were all private businessmen."^[98] It does not specify if any of these men were businessmen involved in the trade of foodstuffs, but that question is frankly not the salient one.

Instead, it is important to understand that Pullen's actions at Sabo, Oyingbo, and in the other Pullen markets, established men, some or most of whom were European, as overseers of markets that had up until that point been self-governed and self-regulated by women. Pullen did hire market women to run the controlled stalls. However there are several instances of Pullen complaining about "unbusinesslike" practices from these women, such as enlisting the help of relatives or younger girls to mind the stall, and these women could be fired for such "irregularities."^[99] This practice can be interpreted as an attempt to reorganize the labor relationships of the market sphere. Whereas Lagos market women had well-established systems and norms for regulating the marketplace amongst themselves, Pullen's practices attempted to establish a hierarchical labor relationship between male overseers and female workers who could be fired for "irregular" practices. This attempted reorientation toward the norms of the waged

economy made market women vulnerable to outside coercive authority in a way they had not been previously.

Pullen's market system also delegitimized market women by framing them as participants in a "black market" or an "informal economy." This delegitimizing discourse was so prevalent that it can be found even in the secondary literature. For example, Oyemakinde states that two thirds of Lagosians got their foodstuffs during the war from "flourishing black markets."^[100]

Describing market women as operating a "black market" is a way of adopting and embracing the colonial perspective. If two thirds of Lagos consumers purchased their food from established market vendors, with whom they very likely had ongoing relationships stretching back years or decades, such an arrangement should hardly be described as informal or marginal.

The protests and petitions against the Pullen markets directly addressed the interference of European men into a sphere that had heretofore been dominated by African women. These arguments made specific reference to the market women's privileges in their sphere, which were based on longstanding and established custom, relationships with their consumers and suppliers, and long-term knowledge of the variability of the marketplace that colonial administrators simply lacked.

Overall, the most common complaint from Pullen and other colonial administrators, both during and after the Pullen control plan, was the lack of cooperation from market women and consumers. Pullen attempted several strategies to encourage or coerce cooperation, some of which were punitive and some of which were based on attempted alliances with market women. For example, Pullen attempted one of the most classic tactics of indirect rule with Madam Pelewura when he offered her a monthly salary of £7.10s and an appointment as head of market

women in exchange for her guaranteeing the LMWA's cooperation with controlled prices. Pelewura is reported to have turned him down, saying she would not have accepted his offer for £100 monthly.^[101]

Pullen also approached the Lagos Women's Political Party, established in mid-1944, in a bid to secure the cooperation of elite Lagosian women. In one such meeting, for example, Pullen "assured the representatives of his cooperation if the party resolved among its objectives to enlighten the market women in the proper vein."^[102] This paternalistic approach to securing the market women's cooperation is a good reminder that women could be just as divided by class and social position as they could be united by gender. Women's interests were not monolithic and it is anachronistic and perhaps Eurocentric to assume a blanket solidarity among women based on a view of themselves as a gender-specific category.

Finally, the question of cooperation and "public conscience" merits a larger exploration because of the frequency with which these terms were deployed throughout the price control era. When reading the colonial authorities lament that cooperation was "conspicuous only by its absence,"^[103] the question naturally arises of whose cooperation was expected and who comprises the public for which a "public conscience" was apparently lacking. Although market women may not have been willing to cooperate with price regulators and inspectors, this does not imply that they lacked a public conscience. Far from it. Rather, their notion of the public, or the community to which they owed allegiance, did not align with the colonial expectations.

Colonial administrators, at times in cooperation with African elites, attempted to coerce that cooperation through punitive measures and moralizing discourse.

The question of cooperation is centrally important in reports commissioned by colonial authorities after the Pullen scheme was abandoned. The Tudor Davies Commission, established in 1946 to investigate the cost of living and wage adjustments in Nigeria and the impact of the 1945 General Strike, described the failure of the Pullen scheme thus:

Price control in Nigeria has not been effective however, firstly because Nigeria is not a normal country, owing to the African's propensity for petty trading and bargaining... It is realized that successful operation of price control anywhere, and especially in Nigeria, is chiefly a question of the extent of public co-operation and public conscience. Co-operation by the African public would appear to be almost non-existent... [104]

This description highlights both the contention over the nature of “public cooperation” as well as another major theme and goal of the Pullen scheme: the standardization of the African economy to more closely align with colonial notions of economic “normalcy.”

The description of Nigeria as not a “normal” economy was deployed elsewhere in the Tudor Davies Commission report and Pullen used similar discourse when he described African markets and market women as “uneconomical,” “unbusinesslike,” and “irregular.” Much of his project throughout the price control measures was one of attempting to order, standardize, and rationalize a market sphere that had heretofore operated outside of these regulated norms. Pullen attempted here to prioritize order over practice, to impose supposedly “rational” models on unbusinesslike petty bargainers, and to prioritize compliance above all other aims. In these attempts, he was fulfilling one of colonialism's quintessential projects: the promotion of “efficiency” and the reification of a hierarchical dichotomy between modernity and tradition.

There was also a gendered aspect to this attempt to standardize and regulate the market sphere. The production and trade of foodstuffs had been dominated by women since the precolonial era and it was a significant source of economic activity for these women's families and communities. However, this established practice was specifically criticized by the Tudor Davies Commission's report on the failure of the price controls, saying "the sooner the male ceases to rely upon the economic contribution of the female to the family exchequer, the sooner will the wage structure be founded on a more correct basis."^[105] Lisa Lindsay has used the Tudor Davies report as part of her clear and compelling analysis of the arguments of Nigerian trade unions for better wages on the basis of their supposed status as male breadwinners.^[106] In this respect, Nigerian workers were echoing and reflecting colonial arguments about women's economic activity in the marketplace as nonstandard and aberrant. The Pullen controls attempted to found a more "correct" economic structure wherein women, if they could not be removed from the public economic sphere entirely, would be standardized and made more rational and efficient.

III. The *Gari* Crisis and the End of the Pullen Scheme

The Pullen scheme failed to garner the cooperation that colonial officials expected would be forthcoming. Every expansion of the Pullen regulations was met with a corresponding expansion of the market women's opposition. Eventually, this tension became unsustainable, as public opposition reached a crisis point. The control of *gari* sales was the issue that brought the Pullen scheme to this crisis and was the issue expanded the opposition to the scheme beyond the market women and their customers. In the spring of 1945, a *gari* shortage began to be felt in Lagos and in response Pullen tightened controls on wholesale purchase and distribution of this staple foodstuff made from pounded cassava root. At this point, the control of *gari* went further than any previous control over native foodstuffs, and became a genuine monopoly. *Gari* was only available in limited rations and through Pullen stalls.

LMWA members had been raising the issue of *gari* controls for at least six months, arguing that the government's monopoly on *gari* sales meant not only that their trade had been significantly impacted, but that food access was negatively impacted. They pointed out an incident in which nearly 2,000 bags of *gari* that had been seized by the Deputy Food Controller for not having been purchased through official channels were left to rot and had to be dumped into the lagoon.^[107] In this period of scarcity, accounts of wasted food struck a chord not only with market women who could have sold those supplies, but also with consumers who struggled to access a critical food source. Market women also argued that Pullen's haste to tighten control over *gari* sales was premature and ill-informed. For instance, market women were able to describe with a great deal of specificity the seasonal fluctuations in *gari* price and supply from

the period before the war, and used that knowledge to argue against the need for government regulation of *gari* sales.^[108] The LMWA's petition contrasted their knowledge of food prices and supply chains, gained over decades of experience, against the Pullen markets, which were based on ill-informed assumptions that led to food going to waste.

As the shortage went on, public opposition to the government's *gari* monopoly intensified. A "mass procession of market women and housewives" accompanied four Lagos chiefs to a meeting with Pullen, in which they demanded he remove the government control of *gari* for a one month trial, and that even if the control of *gari* were later reinstated, "Pullen *Gari* contractors should not be made to become barriers to market women, contrary to the credo of free trade."^[109]

By this point the crisis was not simply one of food shortage, but of public safety, as the Pullen stalls became increasingly dangerous and uncertain. Barbed wire fences were erected to manage the lines that would start at 4 a.m. or even earlier the night before. Struggling to maintain their position in line for hours on end, women fainted or became entangled in the barbed wire.^[110] Although Pullen discouraged customers from waiting in line all night, the Pullen stalls would often run out of rations two hours after opening. As scarcity increased, so too did the crushing crowds and the frequency of injuries.^[111] An editorial described the hellish conditions in Pullen markets using a Yoruba adage: "If a horse is sold in heaven for a cowrie, who will go

there to buy it?”^[112] Even when consumers were able to obtain their rations, their suffering in the process was widely publicized.

In an attempt to reestablish control over the daily crowds, officials at the Pullen stalls were given canes to keep customers in line.^[113] Strict disorderly conduct regulations were put into effect, which defined disorderly conduct at food stalls quite broadly; behavior ranging from entering a line anywhere except at the end or jostling for a better position in line, to loitering about a food distribution stall could fall under disorderly conduct. These regulations also created gender segregated lines, and entering the line of the opposite sex would also be punishable. The punishments for these infractions were incredibly harsh: on a first offense, a fine of £100, six months imprisonment, and a whipping; on a subsequent offense, twelve months imprisonment and a whipping.^[114]

The question of behavior in the food lines was fiercely contested in the press. African sympathies lay largely with the beleaguered public slogging through a period of food scarcity and, at times, fearing for their safety. Colonial bulletins, however, did not share that same view. A short government notice on “Queues”, published as part of an ongoing series called “Food Facts” implemented to respond to the *gari* crisis, sparked a vigorous public debate about the colonial government’s perception of Lagosian women. The bulletin stated:

Forming queues is not natural to Nigerians. But Lagosians have had 18 months experience of queueing and should by now have learnt to display better manners when doing so. In England people have had to queue up for foodstuffs during wartime... no one fights and pushes to get into a queue and no one would think of trying to force their way into the middle of queue. Public opinion is too strong against such practices. Where is such public opinion in Lagos? If people

attending the Control Centres behaved in a proper manner, there would be no complaints of women being crushed and hurt... [115]

The expectation of politeness, deference, and good manners in the face of persistent food shortage was a particularly heartless admonition, and one that was quickly denounced in the Nigerian press.

In an editorial entitled “Queuing: A Tactless Bulletin,” the West African Pilot denounced the “unwarranted rebuke thus made by the government, which certainly cannot pretend to know better than ourselves” what attitude public opinion in Lagos took toward the Pullen control stalls and the *gari* shortage. Because the government’s bulletin compared the wartime behavior of the British to the behavior of Nigerians, the editorial was able to respond by turning that comparison on its head: “it is no credit to the government if Nigerians at home suffer as much as the Britons.” Finally, the editorial pointed out that Africans’ behavior is subjected to double standards. Behavior that could be praised as “proper manners” in one instance could be disparaged in another; “The law abiding quality of the African has even been stigmatised as docility.” [116]

Finally, as the *gari* crisis continued, a second editorial reopened the issue of the comparison between European and African women’s wartime behavior. Entitled “So London Women Can’t Take It!” the editorial reported on a recent incident in which London women (“True emblems of discipline, these women... these calm and patient Jobs even under fire, these quintessences of law and order, as we are told”) angrily protested the queueing regulations: “They shouted, they booed, they stampeded.” This news was quickly deployed to counter the

colonial argument that British women were stoic and resolute in the face of queues, while Nigerians' behavior was unacceptable and their sympathies lay with those causing disturbances. This editorial described the angry protest by British women and claimed, "News like that of the demonstration of those London women is very welcome. For it serves to foil the effects of miseducation which induces Africans to regard people in European countries as anything but one and the same human beings... be they of the ruling race or subject peoples." [117] The original bulletin on queueing was written from a place of racist condescension, but the Nigerian press deconstructed its arguments and instead made an argument that the shared experience of wartime scarcity demonstrated the hollowness of colonial claims to enlightened moral superiority or race based difference.

By the end of the summer of 1945, newspapers were reporting on the *gari* crisis almost daily and the editorial pages of the West African Pilot were filled with letters of support for the decontrol of *gari* and the the abolition of the Pullen markets. Article after article described a shift in public perception over the two years that the Pullen scheme had been in effect; at the outset consumers had been optimistic about the effect it would have on prices, but as time went on it became clear that the Pullen markets were unable to adequately account for the needs of Lagos traders and consumers. Several of these editorials made specific mention of the protests and petitions lodged against the scheme over the years, suggesting that continued pressure from market women had a significant impact on the public opinion of the Pullen markets. [118]

Whereas at its outset the market women were the only ones actively opposed to the Pullen scheme, by this point they had amassed significant support from the press, the Lagos chiefs,

religious authorities, and “a host of other respectable personalities in the community.”^[119] The control of *gari* was revoked in September, and by early 1946 the combination of public pressure from market women and their increasing support from the Lagos chiefs saw the end of the Pullen scheme altogether.

Existing literature on the Pullen scheme has largely treated it as a failed colonial project, and a relatively isolated one at that. However, the Pullen scheme and its opposition highlights several recurring themes in Nigerian colonial history and should be approached from a perspective that highlights several overlapping analytical frameworks: the limits of colonial control as they attempted to standardize and “rationalize” the African economic sphere, and the gendered patterns of access to that sphere.

The Lagos market women’s disregard for the food price controls implemented during WWII was often framed in the colonial record as a lack of “public conscience” or cooperation. Their markets and the trade that took place there were pushed to the fringes of legality and legitimacy. But among the market women, their suppliers, and their customers, a significant degree of organization, cooperation, and self-management persisted throughout this period. As Luise White noted, as she concluded her study of organization, cooperation, and self-management among Nairobi prostitutes during the same period, “this was not a contradiction, or a disregard for civic orderliness; it was their loyalty to one community and disdain for another.”^[120] The LMWA was not, as the colonial sources described them, operating without a public conscience, but rather was operating within their own sense of who the public was.

The Pullen scheme was implemented with the assumption that cooperation would be forthcoming. The plan was based, however, on an ignorance of how marketplaces and the larger production network that supplied them actually functioned in practice. This ignorance was not lost on market women and their allies, who consistently argued that, in the development and expansion of the Pullen scheme, “The wrong persons had been consulted.”^[121] Designed without input from the producers and traders with extensive knowledge of the Lagosian food system, the Pullen scheme was destined for failure on the basis of its own hubris.

Pullen and other colonial administrators’ repeated description of the Nigerian economy and marketplace as “irregular,” “uneconomical,” “unbusinesslike,” and “not normal,” is an example of the quintessential colonial discourse of “rationalizing” the African context. Pullen’s plans for the marketplace were based on a campaign of standardization and regulation, not only of prices but also of labor relationships. As the Pullen stalls were established, the nature of the market woman’s work was reimagined as an employment relationship that could be terminated at the decision of her male supervisor. Combined with Pullen’s ongoing focus on standardizing prices, weights, and measures rather than relying on negotiation between traders and consumers, the Pullen scheme attempted to significantly diminish the economic autonomy of market women.

This was not the first time in Nigerian history such an attempt to establish “rational” marketplaces had been met with women’s resistance. The Aba Women’s War of 1929 targeted the enclosed, fenced-in “modern markets” that were established and promoted by colonial and colonial-allied men. In their testimony to the commission formed to investigate the women’s protests, witnesses and participants spoke to the importance of the marketplace as a source of strength for women and their resentment of men’s interference with it. We see here an earlier

example of how “the men who made up the colonial administration... supported one another by refusing to recognize women’s market rights and claims.”^[122]

But market women, whether the women who took part in the Aba Women’s War in 1929 or the Lagos women who protested the Pullen scheme from 1941-1946, were not complacent in response to this attempted disruption of their established sources of economic and communal strength. The Pullen scheme attempted to standardize and regulate the marketplace according to supposedly rational colonial expectations of economic normalcy. This posed a direct challenge to market women’s autonomy and agency, and the continuity with which they had enjoyed those privileges. The strength of the market women’s response offers a powerful example of women’s resistance to their marginalization and delegitimization at the hands of colonial authorities who refused to recognize the depth of their expertise and organization.

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