Monsieur Charles M. Good

Résumé
C. M. Good — Marchés africains : recension des thèmes de recherche et de la question de l'origine des marchés. État de la question, basé sur l'étude de trente-six publications récentes (sociologie, géographie humaine).

Citer ce document / Cite this document:

Document généré le 02/06/2016
Markets in Africa: a Review of Research Themes and the Question of Market Origins

Organized market-places are among the most prominent locations of economic and social activity in contemporary Africa. Literally thousands of markets are distributed across the varied rural landscapes of the subcontinent, most of them attracting little official notice beyond the horizons of local government revenue collectors.

The economic profile of most African populations is such that few markets, outside of those located in important urban settlements, can be supported on a permanent or daily basis. Consequently, periodicity may be the most conspicuous and fundamental characteristic of the marketing scene. It accounts to an important degree for the relative locations of markets, and sets the rhythm regulating the circulation and convergence of people and goods. The distribution of market periodicities and market networks presents a complex array of functionally distinct, contiguous, and overlapping systems—a kaleidoscopic pattern of place-time interrelationships.

Recently, a few geographers have begun to investigate the theoretical and practical implications of market periodicity in African contexts. Two hypotheses have been advanced and tested on data from West Africa and Uganda. The first states that the locational and temporal spacing of markets is complementary, i.e., 'proximity in space implies separation in time' (Fagerlund and Smith, 1970: 343). The second, or uniform-spacing hypothesis, recognizes that markets are space-competitive, and suggests that their locational pattern should, therefore, approximate a uniform distribution. Nearest-neighbor analysis offers a valid method for estimating these patterns, although preliminary applications show that the validity of results (as reflected in pattern approximations) vary with the scale of investigation (Fagerlund and Smith, 1970; Good, 1972).

The seemingly chaotic spectacle of great throngs; the potpourri of exotic smells and wares, professional traders, children, con men and jesters; the haggling and noise, all contribute to the color and excitement of markets, suggesting why they have perennially aroused the curiosity and imagination of explorers, traders, colonial officers, tourists, and other foreign travelers since Ibn Battuta. Yet apart from a few pioneers such as Frochlich (1940), and the occasional anthropologist or two, until quite recently markets were hardly likely subjects for serious scholarly attention. The reasons for this lack of prestige and interest in markets need not detain us here, except to note that during the colonial period markets and African commerce generally had a low level of official encouragement and visibility. The attention they did attract was often tempered with suspicion, and the marketing process was commonly burdened with restrictions by enthusiastic administrators and others supposedly bent on protecting Africans from the 'evil' effects of competition and other 'immoral' influences (Bauer, 1968: 50-55; Good, 1970: 205-209; Marris and Somerset, 1971: 8).
The publication of *Markets in Africa* (Bohannan and Dalton, 1962) may have indirectly acted as a catalyst, serving to focus the attention of a wider audience on this integral but slightly understood aspect of African development. It coincided, incidentally, with a period marked by an upsurge of respectability in African area studies generally among academic institutions, foundations, and government circles both within and outside Africa. African countries were subsequently inundated by researchers with their protégés in trail, a small number of whom have heightened our awareness of the institutional and systemic significance of markets, past and present.

Geographers are among those who have made empirical and conceptual contributions towards the better understanding of markets during the past decade. However, as might be anticipated, much of the recent literature as a whole overlooks or gives only implicit recognition to such problems as the origin and expansion of markets; the spatial structure, accessibility, and interrelations of markets; the perceived and actual importance of markets to market users; the responsiveness and stability, both locational and temporal, of market functions and networks under changing socioeconomic conditions, including the forces of accelerating urbanization; the actual interrelationships among such variables as marketing organization, the terms of trade for producers who sell and buy and traders who collect and sell, and regional specialization; and the geographic consequences of government policies which stimulate or neglect the functions that markets can perform in the interests of improved economic and social conditions. (One unusual but positive example of how markets can be used to accomplish a variety of developmental objectives comes from Mali, where the US Public Health Service Smallpox Eradication Program discovered that markets provided the most convenient and effective medium for ensuring high vaccination coverage of populations characterized by vastly different mobility patterns.) (Imperato, 1969.)

Identification of the very complex problems mentioned above is not meant to imply that fundamental geographic questions and variables are the only ones of any significance, or that geographers can alone clarify the role of markets and offer the most realistic solutions to the practical problems of market-place exchange. The crucial question, which only geographers can answer, is whether market systems can be analyzed effectively and understood without their perspectives. Fortunately, there is now a small but expanding cluster of African geographers who, because of their physical and cultural proximity to the scene, are in an advantageous position to make a major contribution to the geography of markets and development.

As inclination and breeding automatically focus our attention on areal differences, it is worth recalling that to date the balance of published research still weighs heavily in favor of the West African region. This is certainly due in part to the historical fact that markets have always been more numerous there than in any other part of the continent outside the Mediterranean littoral (Newbury, 1969: 66). In contrast, East African markets were the subject of fewer than ten articles (five appearing in *Markets in Africa*) as late as 1970. In this same year a monograph on rural market development in western Uganda appeared, which is thus far the only attempt at a comprehensive survey for any area of East Africa (Good, 1970). A study of markets in one county of Teso District has since been added (Edyau, 1971).

The following discussion focuses on the theories and empirical evidence concerning the origins of markets in Africa south of the Sahara. It draws principally on work by geographers, anthropologists, and historians.

**Origins of Market Institutions: Concepts and Evidence**

What were the essential preconditions giving rise to the establishment of organized market-place exchange in precolonial Africa? As yet there is no syn-
The debate over market origins revolves around several different concepts, variables, and modes of analysis. These include 'subsistence-oriented' versus 'market-oriented' trade; evolution and role of currency systems; the question of 'polity primacy' in connection with the allocation and control of resources; and the so-called 'geographical' or spatial factors such as regional ecological and cultural complementarity, population thresholds, and distance variables.

Bohannan and Dalton attempted to assign African societies to one of three categories distinguished by the relative importance of physical market-places and the presence or absence of the market (transactional) principle. Accordingly, marketless societies and societies with peripheral markets are both characterized by multicentric economies. Goods and services carry different moral valuations, and their exchange is facilitated by various transactional principles which are tied to the structure of kinship and political obligations. In marketless societies, we are told, the market principle or price mechanism is virtually absent; whereas in societies with peripheral markets it may operate in a limited sphere, but not to the extent that it becomes an integrating mechanism allocating factor resources among alternative outputs. Market-places are sites of petty commerce which are identified mainly with economies in which the market principle is peripheral. As the market principle comes to dominate exchange (market economy), the role of the marketplace as a locus of market activity declines proportionately, and the institutional place of sale takes on varying physical and organizational forms. This model is relevant here because it is surprisingly weak in a critical aspect: it focuses on economic processes which purportedly act to diminish the relevance of market-places in African societies, but does not suggest why they came into existence in the first place.

Geographer B. W. Hodder confronts the issue of market institutions more directly, evaluating the evidence for and against two main theories about their origins (1965; 1969: 24-31). The conventional theory (Hodder notes its acceptance by Bohannan in the case of the Tiv) begins with the individual's propensity to barter. This generates a necessity for local exchange, division of labor, and local market-places, followed eventually by the need for external and perhaps even long-distance trade. The second theory, which draws on Polanyi et al. (1957), Weber (1930: 195), and Pirenne (1925: 142) among others, reverses the order of events in this argument. Trade and markets can never arise out of the demands of individual or local exchange for foodstuffs or craft articles; rather, their emergence reflects the growth of external relations involving different communities.

Iboland, east of the Niger, appears to be one case in which the evidence seems to run at least partially counter to the regional interdependence theory of market origins. Traditional Ibo markets evolved within the framework of a preexisting four-day week, and are 'widely believed to have developed out of the custom of the rest day' during which people refrain from farm labor (Hodder and Ukwu, 1969: 129). Markets were associated with individual village groups, and their location—commonly the village square—and timing depended on factors internal to these groups. Their main function was to facilitate horizontal exchange between the mass of peasant producers and consumers. However, in some areas differentiation of trade led to the emergence of a second order of markets which articulated intergroup exchange through interlocking market chains. Long-distance trade formed a third level in the marketing hierarchy, and depended on specialist trading communities, notably the famous Arochuku traders who created the great Agbagwe fairs subsequent to the arrival of Portuguese merchants on the seaboard during the late fifteenth century. The Aro system gave rise to 'a consciously coordinated trading network based on trading settlements, trade routes, and fairs [. . . ]', and ultimately 'the further differentiation of existing markets, the creation of new ones, and the development of new patterns of regional orientation' (Hodder and Ukwu, 1969: 33).
Hodder marshals impressive evidence from western Nigeria and elsewhere to support his thesis that external, or long-distance, trading contacts played a major role in the genesis of markets in Africa south of the Sahara. Furthermore, two other conditions were apparently crucial to the establishment of formal markets: (1) a relatively high population density (a threshold of 50 persons per square mile is indicated for Yorubaland), and (2) a political organizational capacity to maintain the security of market trade (1965: 102-103). Hodder does not dismiss the possibility that some Yoruba markets could have originated in response to demands for local and neighborhood food and craft exchange, but at the present there is no evidence of this (1969: 30-31).

In northern Nigeria, according to M.G. Smith, gift and barter exchange among occupationally-specialized clans preceded markets among the Hausa. Here the emergence of markets occurred ‘with the large-scale caravan traffic before the development of a uniform currency [. . .]’ (1962: 304). Skinner suggests a link between the historic caravan penetration of Upper Volta and market origins among the Mossi people (1962: 239-250). Meillassoux observed that markets among the Guro of central Ivory Coast ‘tend to be localized at the contact area between complementary zones’, and concluded that ‘markets are primarily induced by external exchange of complementary products with an alien population’ (1962: 297-298). An almost identical conclusion is drawn in the case of traditional markets among the Kuba peoples of present-day Zaire (Vansina, 1962: 194).

In a recent study of late nineteenth century trade in the Atebubu district of Ghana, Kwame Arhin identifies three factors which characterized and formed the basis of market-place exchange: the dominance of situation over site, and regional and ethnic specialization in natural and craft production. Atebubu market originated after 1874 and its emergence is associated with the contraction of Ashanti territorial control in central Ghana. It located so as to tap the profitable caravan trade (particularly in kola) between the forest and interior savanna zones. What is of interest here is that Arhin specifically questions the relevance of the theory of precolonial and transitional markets outlined by Bohannan and Dalton, which suggests among other things that markets are initially a response to demands for endogenous petty transactions. He emphasizes in connection with the Atebubu market that ‘all of the goods [. . .] were produced, and largely intended for consumption areas’ outside the Atebubu district; also that the majority of traders in the market, resident and non-resident, were not ‘target’ marketers but professional traders engaged in obtaining goods in bulk and cattle in heads for re-exchange. The value of the goods did not lie in whether they were for 'subsistence' or 'prestige' purposes but in that they were the basis of large-scale enterprise for the traders. The supplies of goods had nothing to do with incentives for the local people to produce but with external political conditions which determined access to the market for long-distance traders. The Atebubu market was external to the local productive system; it was a ‘transit’ market, a unit in the market network of the Ashanti hinterland’ (Arhin, 1971: 207).

In West Central Africa, the Loango provinces situated north of the Congo estuary were individually and collectively famous in precolonial times for their remarkable variety of special products such as redwood, ivory, palm-oil, fish, and salt, as well as for their palm-cloth weavers and coppersmiths. Specialization among the different peoples in these ecologically varied territories formed the basis of a sophisticated system of interzonal exchange involving organized caravans, central markets, and a widely used general purpose currency (palm-cloth) (Martin, 1970: 141-145). In the Kongo kingdom, to the south of Loango, similarly advanced levels of economic specialization, interregional trade, and well established markets were encountered by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century (Gray and Birmingham, 1970: 9). In neither of these two kingdoms is there any evidence to suggest that markets owed their existence to the demands of neighborhood, small-scale exchange.

Documentation and interpretation of commercial life in Ethiopia appear in
relative abundance beginning in the sixteenth century. Local produce and imported manufactures and luxury articles (e.g., quality fabrics, spices, salt, precious metals, china, and medicines) of diverse foreign origin formed the backbone of internal trade, which was centered in fairs and markets dispersed along or located at the junctions of caravan routes crossing the northern highlands. Market transactions were made by means of barter and a variety of currencies. Among the Amhara the latter consisted of salt bars, pepper, iron, and silver (Levine, 1965: 61). Great fairs were held weekly or daily in the chief towns, many of which included the active participation of a class of merchants identified as Coptic ‘priests, friars, and nuns’. In the 1520’s, the contemporary Alvarez likened the town of Manadeley in Tigre to ‘a great city or seaport’ in which one could purchase ‘all of the merchandise that there is in the world’. It was, he boasted, attended by ‘merchants of all nations’ including ‘Moors’ from Morocco, Tunis, Cairo, Jeddah, and India as well as Turks, Roumys, and Greeks. James Bruce and others mentioned the caravan routes linking the highland markets with Sennar, Nubia, and Egypt. Other external routes, all of which varied in importance in adjustment to political conditions prevailing near the periphery of the plateau, extended to Massawa on the Red Sea coast and Zeila and Berbera on the Somali coast. Tenuous and less plausible connections may at times have stretched as far south as maritime Congo, and Malindi on the Kenya coast (Pankhurst, 1961: 307-321).

More recent sources indicate that the Galla of Ethiopia also have many traditional markets and a history of long distance trading connections with nearby kingdoms and the Somali coast. A similar functional pattern is suggested for the Konso people of southwest Ethiopia (Kluckhohn, 1962: 417) and for the Gondar region of the northern plateau (Messing, 1962: 388-389). In Somalia itself, traditional markets located at the intersections of the principal caravan routes. Lewis (1955: 78) writes that the markets were probably all founded by Arab traders, and that market villages gave rise to Somalia’s modern towns.

Traditional markets were apparently comparatively less common institutions among the more than 150 societies which make up East Africa. They have been identified with the coastal Swahili-speaking peoples; the Digo, Teita, and southern Kikuyu of Kenya; the centralized polities of Bunyoro and Buganda in Uganda; and some areas of western Tanzania.

One of the most interesting questions relevant to the genesis of markets among interior societies such as the Kikuyu and Nyoro is whether they were established prior to, or in response to, inland penetration by foreign traders from the coast. This has been debated at length elsewhere with particular reference to the kingdoms in the northern Great Lakes region (Good, 1970; 1972). A recent contribution by a Nigerian historian offers names and locations of more than 50 markets which were said by informants to have been flourishing in Bunyoro-Kitara and its sphere of influence prior to the arrival of Europeans (Uzoigwe, 1970: 17-18). While this particular evidence has yet to be thoroughly analyzed and evaluated, early European visitors in the area did provide vivid accounts of activity in a few great markets. And they explicitly questioned, but were unable to ascertain, whether the ‘more advanced state’ of commerce among the Nyoro and Ganda was not due to the long-distance trading expeditions, and in some instances permanent settlement, of Zanzibari merchants (Schweinfurth et al., 1888: 111-112).

The regional salt markets such as Katwe, Kasenyi, and Kibero, also in western Uganda, were well-established enterprises long before the northern Great Lakes region was penetrated by non-Africans. Each location was the locus for specialized production and sale, by a resident, professional labor force, of a scarce resource in great demand. Their viability as markets was a function of their accessibility and scale of external connections—features which were sensitive to attempts by indigenous, and later, colonial, political authorities to dominate the strategic salt trade (Good, 1972).

The role of external stimuli in generating markets is particularly well document-
ed for the Mbale area of eastern Uganda (Twaddle, 1966). Organized market exchange first evolved there at the turn of the twentieth century, locating at the foot of Mount Elgon where two main long-distance caravan routes along the Swahili trading ‘frontier’ converged on each other. These circumstances, together with fortuitous political developments of exogenous origin, led to the rapid emergence of Mbale as an urban center (it is presently a major regional growth pole in Uganda) able to attract and support a permanent trading community of foreign Africans (e.g., an estimated 2,000-3,000 Ganda followers of Kakungulu, Swahili, Arabs, and Asians). In 1904, the visiting missionary J. J. Willis observed that ‘several important trade routes converge on Mbale [. . .], an excellent road connects Mbale with Jinja to the southwest. A caravan route [. . .] connects it with Mumias [in Kenya] to the south. Caravans to and from Mbale to the northeast pass through Mbale, laden for the most part with ivory. And to the northwest a caravan route passes through Serere and Bulul to the Nile Province: so that for trade purposes Mbale is a natural centre’ (in Twaddle, 1966: 34).

In the same year, Mbale was designated a Protectorate government station by the British administration. As Twaddle emphasizes, this was a case where the Flag followed Trade. And quite characteristically, the first official need perceived by the British administration in Mbale was not to initiate trade, but to institute an elaborate system to control it (loc. cit.).

In precolonial western Tanzania, regular market places were not, on the whole, typical of the region. According to Roberts, much of the trade was conducted ‘in ad hoc gatherings at a caravan halt, or by visiting a particular place of commercial interest, such as a centre of salt or iron production’ (1970: 63-64). Admittedly, the evidence of markets in this area is only fragmentary, and with a few exceptions their genetic relationship with routes of trade can only be inferred. However, there were markets in the southern Ha chiefdom of Heru; around Lake Tanganyika, including Ujiji; and in some of the Sumbwa chiefdoms (areas of salt and iron production) situated between the Nyamwezi and Lake Victoria. All would have been astride or in proximity to the line of trade routes branching northwest and west from Tabora (Unyanyembe). In the Nyamwezi country proper the only significant markets present during the late nineteenth century appear to have been at Tabora and Mirambo’s capital.

As Roberts emphasizes, precolonial commerce in the interior of Tanzania was an activity involving different peoples, including Nyamwezi, Sumbwa, Gogo, Taturu, Sukuma, Vinza, and Sagara, who exchanged complementary products which circulated within and between regional trade networks. The latter were extended to form the foundation of long-distance trade routes during the nineteenth century. The really significant levels of buying and selling were then concentrated in places such as Tabora. By 1860, this settlement had become the principal entrepot in the interior of Tanzania, as it was located at the junction of trade routes to the coast, Ujiji, the interlacustrine States, and Katanga (Roberts: 51-52).

Historians Gray and Birmingham challenge the second, or external, theory of market origins in their introduction to Precolonial Trade in East and Central Africa (1970). They contend that the significance of precolonial trade did not ‘depend on the area, distance, or communities involved’ even when this included long-distance caravan trade. Neither, they assert, are the items of trade nor political organization reliable indices of trade development. Instead of using ‘geographical’ criteria, it is necessary to employ an ‘economic analysis’, from which subsistence-oriented and market-oriented trade emerge as the two main phases of precolonial exchange. These are distinguished not by spatial variables, but in the differences between activities directly connected with trade (p. 2).

Subsistence-oriented trade, according to these historians, is associated with subsistence agriculture and regulated by kinship networks. Specialization is typically ‘suppressed and shackled’. In contrast, market-oriented trade implies a freedom from the inhibiting effects of subsistence production and customary social
articulation of exchange. It is innovative, productive of a commercial momentum and new economic values, generates new forms of wealth (e.g., slaves, ivory, cattle, or wax), is sensitive to the market mechanism of supply and demand and, although authorized physical sites were not a prerequisite, often gave rise to organized market-places. Furthermore, market-oriented trade ‘almost always [. . .] involved the invention, or introduction, and the increasing acceptance of an indigenous or imported currency, enabling traders to enlarge the scope of goods exchanged ‘within a common frame of values’ (Gray and Birmingham: 3-4).

This analysis by Gray and Birmingham raises several objections. First, they never really come to grips with the genetic relationship, if any, between the market as an abstract transactional principle, and market-places. They state that trade could become market-oriented without the presence of physical markets, but clearly imply that market-places signify the presence of the market principle, the use of currency, and a dynamic entrepreneurial spirit of opportunism. But the rationale for market-places remains blurred.

Secondly, the authors seem to overemphasize the importance of currency as a precondition for market-oriented trade. In precolonial western Uganda, for instance, the great salt market at Katwe was the thriving hub of an ‘international’ network of regional and long-distance trade routes over land and water, serving an area approaching 35,000 square miles. Salt was obtained there and then distributed elsewhere by means of barter, particularly in exchange for food staples and other resources found lacking in the Western Rift. Its on-site ‘price’ varied according to seasonal fluctuations in supply (a function of climatic energy and political factors), with quality, and with distance from the source. Oral evidence and the observations of travelers such as Lugard certainly bear out that this trade was subject to the market principle, intermeshed with subsistence exchange networks, and was conducted without reliance on a currency as the common denominator (Good, 1970: 154-162; 1972: 543-586).

A third objection concerns the authors’ contention that geographical criteria, i.e., distance variables, areal differences, and the characteristics of the participants engaged in trade, are insignificant to an understanding of the development of precolonial exchange institutions. In economic and spatial terms, this represents a rejection of the principle of comparative advantage and the concept of regional complementarity. More importantly, the adequacy of geographical modes of analysis is questioned without citing any of the work actually done by geographers. Gray and Birmingham discredit the idea that external stimuli were essential to the growth of market-oriented trade and, by implication, market-places. They argue that ‘the changes brought by long-distance, direct caravan trade, linked with overseas markets’, were not ‘an indispensable prerequisite’ for the transition to market-oriented exchange, nor important enough to constitute a distinct category (p. 10). Here they distort the main point insofar as the origin of market-places is concerned. For it is not the link-up of caravans with overseas emporia that seems crucial to the development of market institutions in a society, but rather the experience of ‘sustained commercial contact with foreign-based trade circuits and agents’ (Good, 1971: 6). The term ‘foreign-based’ may be equated with ‘external’, ‘alien’, or ‘stranger’; Africans or non-Africans; and intra- or intercontinental origins. It implies the mutual recognition and exploitation of regional, complementary resources for the benefit of two or more societies; the emergence of professional specialization; and the growth, upkeep, and expansion of regular interethnic, interregional, or long-distance lines of communication.

Gray and Birmingham are also ‘struck by the negligible role played by political leadership’ in the development of long-distance, market-oriented trade in eastern and central Africa, given the assumption often made that a large-scale political infrastructure would be required to ‘organize ancillary services’ such as markets (p. 13). They identify the Kamba, Nyanwezi, Yao, Bisa, Cokwe, and Thonga as ‘major examples’ of trading peoples lacking such political organization.
The suggestion that trade development among the Yao peoples of Tanzania and Mozambique was somehow beyond the pale of political accountability and control does not conform with recent findings by Alpers (1969). His analysis shows that long-distance trade not only promoted the rise of 'great trading towns' among the Yao, but also stimulated radical change in the scale of indigenous political units (pp. 405-420). By the late nineteenth century some of the Yao trading settlements contained several thousand residential units. The enlargement of villages and the expansion of towns are associated in time with the emergence of 'a whole new generation of Yao trading chiefs' in control of extensive territorial units (1969: 407).

Similarly, while the forest-dwelling Cokwe of Angola were not organized within a centralized political structure, this did not mean that the search for and use of political authority through long-distance trade was negligible. Indeed, Miller writes that during the nineteenth century 'Cokwe chiefs who stayed in their villages profited from the caravan trade as much as the caravan leaders and heads of raiding parties' (1969: 192). These chiefs controlled the trade in standard articles (e.g., wax, ivory, rubber, cloth, gunpowder) for themselves, and went to elaborate means to lure and detain caravans near their settlements. A trader would find it could take days to sell one tusk of ivory (p. 193). Caravan leaders could transact business only with the chiefs themselves. However, they and their men could purchase foodstuffs from ordinary villagers, and were in some areas provided the pleasure of women. Taxation of caravans, and the customary use of lengthy, extortionate judicial procedures for arbitrating offenses they were alleged to have committed put visiting traders at the mercy of Cokwe chiefs 'who knew how to charge what the traffic would bear' (p. 194).

Inasmuch as they were not empires, the Yao and Cokwe do illustrate that successful trade did not necessarily owe its existence to facilities supplied by State systems. But could these and other trade networks have evolved and flourished without the substantial indulgence and sanction of those wielding political power?

The same question may be raised in connection with host of measures used to gain entry to and provide for the security of trade. In these circumstances the absence of formal political controls may be more apparent than real. For example, magic and religion could be employed by traders as a means of protection. Arab traders in East Africa depended on fire-power for safety in the midst of overwhelming numerical odds. Together with an alien African trader they were often able to create a climate of receptivity on the part of the African communities they contacted by offering their specialist skills and by stimulating local demand for their exotic goods. Kamba traders relied on women as innocuous agents who could mediate trade between their people and foreign territories (Gray and Birmingham: 12-14). The Kikuyu and Masai had a long-established understanding that women of either group could enter each other's country freely and unmolested for purposes of trade, a custom honored even in times of war (Muriuki, 1968: 104). In Bunyoro-Kitara, exchange depended importantly on the omukaga system—in practice an irrevocable blood-brother relationship designed to provide safe conduct for foreign traders (particularly Ganda) and promote profitable transactions in a market-place (Uzoigwe, 1970: 35-36). A similar covenant (the Igbandu relationship) was entered into between persons of different groups in Iboland, and served as the foremost means of ensuring freedom of movement through the country and safety among strangers (Hodder and Ukwu, 1969: 131-132).

Finally, Gray and Birmingham state that on the whole, 'close links between States and organized trade', similar to the pattern in kingdoms such as Mali and Ashanti in West Africa, were not established in eastern and central Africa (p. 13). Curiously, the authors fail to mention the position of trade in the rival kingdoms of Bunyoro and Buganda, two of the most advanced societies in the region. In the same volume, however, Tosh's analysis of precolonial exchange in the northern interlacustrine zone points to a 'high degree of political control over trade' (p. 110). A significant expansion in the scale and nature of interlacustrine commerce occurred
from the 1840's onwards, spurred by the establishment of direct routes over land and Lake Victoria (Hartwig, 1970) to the East African coast via Zanzibari merchants. But these coastmen did not take direction of the trade, for 'Africans dominated every stage of the commercial process' apart from the actual carriage of goods along the import-export corridors (Tosh: 111). In fact, the Zanzibari's confronted highly organized State-systems which generally proved capable of controlling the social and economic consequences of long-distance trade. In this context, the Arabs behaved, on the whole, as 'passive recipients of royal patronage' (Tosh: 113; Good, 1970: 151).

In his study of Bunyoro-Kitara, Uzoigwe concludes that precolonial market-places were established or supported, and commerce encouraged, by the abahaka (kings) primarily for political reasons (1970: 37-38). This reflects a trait complex inherent in that African value system which Nigerian anthropologist Uchendu labels 'polity primacy'. In other words, 'the primacy of the polity rather than the primacy of the economy is a traditional African concern [. . .]. African societies tended to over-exploit their primitive economies to support their political goals and social values' (Uchendu, 1969).

Evidence evaluated by Uzoigwe in support of this thesis for Bunyoro includes, first, the fact that all markets customarily 'belonged' to the omukama. In kabarega's reign four flourishing markets were located adjacent to the palace, one of which was supervised by a special detachment of the abarusura (national army). Second, the abokama also had a deliberate policy of assigning political agents/tax collectors (the king's 'eyes and ears') as market masters throughout the empire—a lucrative, prestigious position commanding great respect. Third, trade in strategic goods (e.g., ivory) was a royal prerogative in Bunyoro, as indeed it was also in Buganda, Nkore, and Loango (Martin, 1970: 145). And fourth, the king's economic role, which made him the largest receiver and bestower of material gifts, was an inseparable part and measure of his own political influence and, thereby, the social and areal coherence of the State.

Conclusion

The foregoing survey provides evidence of an indisputably close functional association between the growth and distribution of markets and interregional commercial circuits. The hypothesis, restated, is that the origin of precontact markets among previously localized, 'spatially restricted' communities in Africa was a direct consequence of the growth and expansion of regularly frequented trade routes linking complementary zones.

There remains the problem of determining whether markets might not have arisen independently of interregional trade routes, i.e., at other propitious locations, a possibility which is most difficult to assess in the literature of early travelers. Also, it is possible that viable trade routes, or segments thereof, channeled substantial traffic across extensive stretches of populated territory, and intersected with other trade routes and circulatory systems, yet never fostered intermediate points of exchange or break-in bulk centers between their principal and terminal nodes (cf. Hodder, 1965).

Newbury, in his excellent analysis of precolonial West African trade, concedes that population patterns, migration, ecological zones, degrees of professional specialization, and caravans were probably all important factors influencing the location and distribution of markets. But he maintains that a satisfactory typology must await further knowledge of the regional conditions affecting many centuries of growth (1969: 66-67). Nevertheless, support for the 'external' theory of origin is implicit in his identification of the two main functions of precolonial periodic markets. These were 'to move consumer goods through exchange cycles between areas that were not self-sufficient in their economy; and more particularly, to serve as bulking and wholesale centres for professional long-distance traders dealing in
rarer and more valuable commodities’. In the West African interior, ‘everywhere’ the indigenous ‘preoccupation with edible surplus formed the backbone for the passage of more exotic items of trade’ (pp. 67-68).

The argument developed in this review is consistent with Meillassoux’s hypothesis of market origins presented in a recently published symposium entitled The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa (1971). He concludes that:

1) the circulation of goods within a self-sustaining community is carried out through transfer; such societies cannot be centres of propagation of trade;

2) between neighboring communities transactions depend both on the nature of the goods exchanged and on the social relationships existing between the parties; hence they tend to take on the form of gift and counter-gift rather than of commercial exchange.

In these circumstances commerce can only result from contacts between:

1) societies who can mutually offer scarce goods to each other, and

2) between agents who are in a social position which frees them from involvement in prestation and gift exchange.

... The absence of markets in regions where economic relations are dominated by person-to-person relations and where foreign traders are not active, as well as the frequently observed existence of markets on the borders of these regions with complementary economic zones, tend to support this hypothesis’ (pp. 82-83).

Finally, among many contemporary African peoples markets are institutions that first emerged during the colonial era. Study of the processes that combined to induce these innovations in traditionally marketless societies offers a potentially fruitful approach to understanding the origins of indigenous markets in precolonial times. As exemplified in the case of Ankole, western Uganda, the preconditions for market development in a marketless subsistence economy under colonial administration include establishment of a variable minimum degree of local security (if not already present) through law and order; introduction of taxation, collection of which results in the first effective contact between indigenous communities and the intrusive agents of socioeconomic change; availability of exotic trade goods for local consumption; and the creation and spatial penetration of incipient urban demand through differentiation of indigenous and alien economic and political roles. In Ankole, mechanisms of market growth included (1) expansion of interregional pedestrian traffic, beginning in World War One, along traditional trade routes; (2) modernization of transport, an innovation which effected a rapid eclipse of the traditional African salt trade and led to the opening of markets for salt (and other goods) on the Ankole plateau; (3) emergence of a large wage labor force following the discovery and decision to exploit valuable metallic ores; (4) individual and government initiatives to expand trade in livestock; and (5) the gradual growth of urban consumer demand for rural agricultural produce both within and outside Ankole (Good, 1970: 231-233).

BIBLIOGRAPHY


BAUER, P. T., ‘Some Aspects and Problems of Trade in Africa’, in R. Moyer
MARKETS IN AFRICA


Casati, Major G., Ten Years in Equatoria, London, 1898.


C. M. Good — Marchés africains : recension des thèmes de recherche et de la question de l'origine des marchés. État de la question, basé sur l'étude de trente-six publications récentes (sociologie, géographie humaine).

---

**Communiqué**

La Quatrième Conférence Annuelle de l'Association Canadienne des Études Africaines se tiendra à l'université Dalhousie, à Halifax (Nouvelle Écosse), du 27 février au 2 mars 1974.

Thème de la Conférence : « L'Afrique au Canada : recherches en cours ».

Pour tous renseignements, s'adresser à :

Dr. P. D. Pillay, Président
Comité d'organisation de la Conférence
Dalhousie University
Halifax, N. S.
Canada