

Prostitution in Colonial Lagos and Accra: Evidence from the National Archives Buea, Cameroon, c.1930s-1950s

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Introduction

Prostitution the world over is one of the oldest professions and has attracted diverse studies in recent times (Barritz, 2000; Barrera, 1996; Spaulding & Beswick, 1995; Aderinto 2010, 2015; Taylor-Brown, 2000; White, 1990). The subject has been considered by sociologists, anthropologists and to a lesser extent, historians. According to White (1990) in her path-breaking and powerful work, prostitution is about ‘women accumulating money and property; it is a strategy for survival a desire, a device against oblivion’. Following the Native Authority Ordinance in 1933, under Section 8 (f) ‘Prostitution means any woman who gives herself for hired sex in exchange for ‘money’ (File No. Sf (1938) 3¹). Both definitions are relevant and thus will be used throughout this paper.

Colonialism inadvertently created an environment supporting prostitution. Yet the colonial administrators officially held that prostitution was loathsome. Writing to the Resident in charge of Calabar, British Cameroons, Ogoja, Onitsha and Owerri on 14 July 1943, the Secretary of the Eastern Provinces, Enugu, D.A.F. Shute, said: ‘...I am to add that the problem of prostitution in Lagos is growing daily and more serious and health and morals of more and more children are being ruined. His honour would therefore be very grateful if the widest publicity be given to the contents of this memorandum...’ (File No. Sf (1943) 2). It is little wonder that colonialists saw such a profession as being immoral since the colonial venture claimed to be to

¹ All files cited here, unless otherwise stated, are from the National Archives Buea, Cameroon.

moralise Africans. Between the 1930s and 1950s, the British colonial administration worked very hard to discourage prostitution, but as we shall see not to much effect.

Unsurprisingly, most previous research carried out on prostitution in Lagos and Accra has made use of sources found in archives in Lagos and Accra as well as Ibadan (Aderinto, 2007, 2015; Allman, 1991). As far as the geographical mobility of prostitutes is concerned in Cameroonian historiography, it has remained a *tabula rasa*. This article uses material from Cameroonian Archives, which perhaps surprisingly, contain some colonial reports on prostitution in those cities. The paper further explores the movement of women, migrating not only to Lagos but thence to Accra. What are the dynamics which led to the women's migration and prostitution in these cities, both under the British colonial administration? How were prostitutes viewed in the colonial and indigenous spaces? Who were the recruiters of these prostitutes? What was the connection between Lagos and Accra?

Part of the National Archives of Cameroon is located in the city of Buea. After the First World War, Cameroon was partitioned between France and Britain under League of Nation as Mandated Territories. The British administered their portion as an appendage to the colony of Nigeria, split into two (Northern and Southern). Southern Cameroon was governed as part of the Eastern Provinces of Nigeria with its head quarters in Enugu under the colonial government in Lagos which was in turn under the Secretary of State for colonies in London (Cb (1917) 7). Later, when the winds of independence were blowing across Africa in the mid 1950s and into early 1960, two British anthropologists, Shirley and Edwin Ardener started collecting material which concerned the British Southern Cameroon in Nigeria. It was as a result of that endeavour that the Buea National Archives came into existence in 1959 (Austen, 1974). Although fractured

like most African archives in terms of the way files are kept, I still found some relevant material there. Essentially, this paper is built on that archival data.

A good number of scholars have written on Lagos and Accra but there are still some disagreements on when Lagos was founded (Aderibigbe, 1987; Losi, 2007; Little, 1958; Hopkins, 1973). As British colonies both cities were located on the Slave Coast (Crowder, 1968: 29). The British effectively occupied Lagos in 1861 after Gold Coast and Sierra Leone (Zezeza, 2003). Demographically these cities have witnessed substantial immigration of people and the (heterogeneous) population has increased over the years.

Table 1. The population of Lagos

Year	population
1866	25, 083
1881	37, 452
1911	73, 766
1901	39, 387
1950	230, 256
1963	650, 000

After 1680 Accra began to experience significant population growth which was quite phenomenal as well. From 1877 when Accra became the capital of Ghana the population grew steadily. By the time of Ghana's independence, the population of Accra was 491, 817 and by 2000 the population had reached 2, 905, 726. The process of urbanisation had taken a radical but dramatic turn. By 1957, the year of Ghana independence, Accra had become the foremost city along West African Coast with all the trappings of modernization and urbanisation (Parker, 2000; Acquah, 1958). According to the archival sources prostitutes became quite mobile in the 1930s and 1950s between these two cities.

There were many connections between Accra and Lagos. There were preexisting communication networks that had been established over centuries of human contact and were

transformed through colonial networks. Between 1900 and 1950 Nigerian migrants travelled along the Atlantic seaboard directly from Port Harcourt (Nigeria) to Accra. On the other hand, the prostitutes could join inland water routes to Porto Novo and Cotonou (previously known as Dahomey). From there they could continue via a water route or take the network of roads traversing French Togo until they reached their final destination in the Gold Coast which included Accra, Kumasi and so on. There was also a direct lorry service covering a distance of about five hundred miles, (c.600km) which ran from Lagos through Dahomey and Togo to Ghana. The costs of land and sea transportation were not beyond the reach of most average West Africans. During the first half of the 1940s, the fare for a direct vessel and lorry service to Accra from Lagos was £3 and £3: 10s, respectively. Very few people (elites and high-ranking colonial officers) traveled by air, which was expensive (at the time it cost approximately £8 10s; Aderinto, 2015: 108).

The two cities also shared socio-economic connections. The transfer of money across their common borders did not pose any problem as the two colonies used the same currency (pound sterling). The English language was their official language. The two countries shared similar administrative systems, educational institutions and economic policies. All these facilitated the geographical mobility of prostitutes between Accra and Lagos. Furthermore, the movement of prostitutes from Lagos to Ghana can likely be explained from the fact that there were no colonial ordinances or laws which prohibited prostitution in Ghana before 1940 (Aderinto, 2015: 107).

Liquid Assets and Liquid Bodies: From Descent to Indecent Women?

The causes of prostitution have been well established in the literature. For example, Naanen (1999) noted the economic factors and maintains that prostitution thrives because there is a market for it. The author draws on cases from Victorian England to demonstrate that although it had all its modesty of civilize values it had ‘had a soft underbelly as far as sexuality was concern....’. Citing Hyam the author further holds that colonial administrators themselves took advantage of the services of prostitutes. Some of the anthropological literature suggests that women achieve happiness only when they escape traditional strictures, perhaps by leaving villages for the city and for the job of prostitution (Boserup, 1970). Cities were important and relevant for the growth of prostitution. Lagos became a magnet which attracted prostitutes from the hinterland. Ekwensi (1961: 109) used fiction to document the attitude of women who reached Lagos from the hinterland. In *Jagua Nana* the protagonist of the novel is a devotee of the city. In Ekwensi’s words ‘Better from her point of view, the squalor of a Lagos slum so long as there are sophisticated people around her, the bright lights of a night-spot, a ‘light-life’ band, and the chance of picking up a young and well-to-do patron.’ Ekwensi is showing the sophisticated life of Lagos and the idea of modernity which attracted women. These women migrated to Lagos most of the time not with the intention to get married. They were out to enjoy the niceties of the city, and exchanged their bodies for money after idling the whole day. Ekwensi positions the ‘City’ girl who ‘would be content to walk about a Mayfair-type of neon-lit shop all day, hang about the city hotels, the ice-cream bars with not a penny in her handbag, rather than marry a farmer with a thousand pounds, a year for his income, and no spice of life than the prospect of security and raising children’ (1954:63). In most parts of Africa and the world over, prostitution has been an aspect of ‘social urbanisation and seemed inevitable in a colonial urban centre which

was characterised by youthfulness and cultural heterogeneity and anonymity’ (Aderinto 2010: 17).

In these urban spaces, prostitutes came to be associated with their areas of origin. The name given to Nigerian prostitutes in the Gold Coast was *Akunakuna*, which was the name of the village in Calabar of Nigeria where many prostitutes originated. Among eastern Nigerian cities, Idoma migrant prostitutes were called *Akwato*, the name of the village they originated from.

The Demography of Prostitutes in Lagos in the 1940s

Such women flooded into Lagos at an alarming rate. Table 2 presents some information about known prostitutes in Lagos in 1943.

Table 2: Known prostitutes in Lagos in 1943

Name	Ethnicity	Quarter	House Owner
Lydia Nwabang	Meta	Small Mamfe	Sam
Christian	Sofang	Small Mamfe	Jacob
Tabot	Tali	Small Mamfe	Ashu
Manyong	Asam	Small Mamfe	Oben
Ida	Bende	Small Mamfe	Her Own
Cicilia	Esagam	Ojong Obi	Eta
Christiana	Esagam	Ojong Obi	Eta
Ayuk	Esagam	Ojong Obi	Eta
Catherina	B. Akagwe	Ojong Obi	Ayuk
Alice	Boki	Ojong Obi	Simon
Frida Jato	Osing	Ojong Obi	Moses
Matherina	Nsamdrati	Ojong Obi	Peter
Mary	Okumi	Ojong Obi	Her Own
Catherine Enow	Nguti	Ojong Obi	Eno
Orock	Besong Abang	Ojong Obi	Achare
Eku	Agbokem	Small Mamfe	Her Own
Eneji	Boki	Ojong Obi	Her Own
Christiana	Yaounde	Ojong Obi	Her Own
Enegine Ojake	Boki	Ojong Obi	Her Own
Ma Okon	Nsanarati	Ojong Obi	Taku
Agnes	Bejang	Ojong Obi	Eyong
Nje	Okumi	Ojong Obi	Kofi
Agnes	Otu	Ikrom	Tom
Nancy	Nde	Max	Max
Alice	Nde	Hausa	Jeremiah
Cicilia	Aja	Hausa	Vincent
Martha	Aja	Hausa	Vincent
Serah	Boki	Hausa	Vincent
Frida	Aja	Hausa	Simon
Bedsi	Nde	Hausa	Jacob

Serah	Boki	Hausa	Tachi
Serah	Bejang	Hausa	Sam
Elizabeth	Bejang	Hausa	Her Own
Alice	Bejang	Hausa	Her Own
Adija	Babuti	Hausa	Her Own
Paulimina	Yaounde	Yaounde	Michael
Amina	Babuti	Hausa	Serikimta
Teckler Nike	Akwen	Kofi	Her Own
Emilia	Nguti	Nkam Ude	Awodu
Satu	Bamum	Hausa	Her Own
Adija A.	Bamum	Hausa	Her Own
Adija C.	Bamum	Hausa	Her Own
Veronica	Babuti	Hausa	Egenatus
Marita	Sananga	Yaounde	Cecilia
Karana	Yalongo	Yaounde	Ma Masina
Alice	Mbendake	Hausa	Agbor
Mary	Jikali	Koffi	Alois
Awa	Jikali	Koffi	Alois
Veronica	Babunti	Koffi	Her Own
Milla Kepe	Nguti	Koffi	Sictor
Baka	Bamum	Hausa	Etinda
Nji Ndanji	Bamum	Hausa	Etinda
Adija	Bamum	Hausa	Etinda
Adija Juma	Hausa	Hausa	Yerima
Ngosi	Hausa	Hausa	Yerima
Mero	Hausa	Hausa	Abubaca
Satu	Hausa	Hausa	Awodu
Mary Mobi	Boki	Nkama Ude	Her Own
Maro Efa	Nsanakang	Nkama Ude	Her Own
Janny Miji	Balepe	Nkama	Agum
Lydia Asap	Nde	Nkama	Paka
Ayamba	Nkum	Alois	Alois
Alice Ayamba	Kajifu	Nkama	Her Own
Paulina Kenye	Babunti	Hausa	Ngwei
Ndambi	Takamanda	Small Mamfe	Her Own
Awandabi	AgboKom	Small Mamfe	Ndambi
Mary Ashu	Kibam	Small Mamfe	Ndambi
Dora Ewan	Okuni	Nkama	Beching
Paulina Kikia	Boki	Ikom	Albert
Cecilia Ewang	Okuni	Ikom	Albert
Cecilia Agam	Okuni	Ikom	Stephen Ayuk
Emilia Ashu	Besong Abang	Ikom	Andrew
Anna Eno	Nguti	Ikom	Dedonza
Martha Egbe	Osing	Ikom	Andrew
Serah Ika	Nchany	Nkama	Andrew
Jenny Gebi	Adon	Nkama	Her Own
Mary Eyo	Adon	Koffi	Her Own
Lily	Ikom	Hausa	Sama Tailor
Frida Mor	Boki	Hausa	Tachi
Elizabeth	Boki	Hausa	Albert
Agbwa	Ibo	Nkama	Nkama
Adama	Bamum	Hausa	Satu
Mary Arack	Keaka	Yaounde	Cosmas

Awa	Bamum	Hausa	Satu
Elizabeth Oga	Ikom	Hausa	Satu
Cecilia Akpa	Obuda	Hausa	Isa
Awa C.	Njukum	Hausa	Her Own
Aga	Njukum	Hausa	Her Own
Alice Ayank	Boki	Hausa	Salami
Fanny Nyam	Boki	Hausa	Her Own
Clara Ntui	Boki	Hausa	Salami
Veronica Ashu	Boki	Hausa	Salami
Janny	Boki	Hausa	Alake
Sara Ogar	Boki	Hausa	Salami
Jany	Ikom	Nkama	Her Own
Elizabeth Alega	Ikom	Nkama	Her Own
Emilia Ntui	Nsanarata	Nkama	Akama
Elizabeth Nka	Okuni	Nkama	Akama

SOURCE: Sf (1943) 2, Child Prostitution in Lagos (National Archives Buea)

From the above table it can be seen that many women who migrated to Lagos came from Eastern and Northern Nigeria. An intriguing question is why Yorubas were never part of the trade while Hausas were quite active in it? This could likely be explained in their culture and traditions. After travelling through the Cameroons in 1920s Migeod noted of Hausa prostitutes that ‘many women prefer the free life of a prostitute in the big towns, where there is a mixed population, to the drudgery of married life. There is such a mob of them at Jimita. Occasionally, the Emir is advised to decree that they should be expelled’ (1923: 210-211).

Migeod’s point was further supported by the Resident of Cameroon Province. Writing in 1940 he said *inter alia* ‘...It was discovered that some child prostitutes were not Nigerians and had been trafficked from Northern Cameroon, through the northern part of the country and through several channels until they finally arrived in Lagos’ (File Sf (1940)1). The table shows that there were prostitutes in Lagos who had come from Yaoundé, the capital of French Cameroon in 1940s. Others came from the northwest part of the Bamenda Province. Recruitment and recruiters played an important role in the mobility of prostitutes to Lagos and later to Accra.

Recruitment of prostitutes to Lagos

Prostitution became common and the female migrants were recruited just like any form of labour to work in industry. Some historians have located the expansion of prostitution during this time period as a result not only of demand but also of supply. However, the middle-class demand and the demand of migrating labourers and peasants in due course fashioned conditions that engendered some similar structural patterns of prostitution over the globe including Europe, Asia, and the Americas. In some cases trafficking then occurred when women were moved to meet the demand of large groups of labourers in colonial and frontier areas (Gilfoyle, 2001). The recruitment of prostitutes reached its heyday in the 1940s. Writing in 1943 the colonial Welfare Officer, D.E. Faulkner did not mince words: According to his report recruitment was in three stages. As far as the first stage was concern, amongst other things he said:

One of the most disquieting aspects of the situation thus created is the trafficking in young girls for the purpose of prostitution... It appears that the *modus operandi* is for a woman who may be known to them or may even be a relative to approach the parents of a girl with an offer to train her in Lagos or to find a husband for her. Very often the woman (or man) will actually pay some dowry on the spot, but that is not always so (File No. Sf(1943) 2).

To lure a potential prostitute to Lagos, she was not approached directly. A relative or any person known to the family of the would-be prostitute would go gradually, approaching the parents of the girl and promising to give things which could improve the standard of living of the girls' family back in the village. Gifts of salt, cosmetics, soap, whisky could be enough for the parents of the girl to release her into an unknown profession in a place where almost all in the rural back waters, languishing in abject poverty, imagined that money 'grew on trees'.

In the second stage, the girl was brought to Lagos and while there she was kept in good conditions without her suspecting what was looming around her immediate environment. In this stage of recruitment Faulkner said:

The girl is then brought to Lagos, kept in an unsuspecting frame of mind by specious promises and is gradually introduced to the life of a prostitute. At first being fresh and virginal, she fetches a good price but gradually she ages, venereal disease leaves its mark, and she becomes the hardened harlot who in a few years will be bringing young girls herself to Lagos... (File No. Sf (1943) 2).

What was even more interesting in the words of Faulkner was the fact that later when these prostitutes had come of age, they then became recruiters of other prostitutes. This demonstrates that prostitution was structured, involving a collaborating network of advisers, pimps, prostitutes' unions and money lenders. Faulkner ended up by saying that: 'But also the Native Authorities might be able to compile blacklists of procurers and publish them. Many names could be supplied by the welfare office and the lists could thus be kept up-to-date' (File No.Sf (1943) 4).

Faulkner was writing from a colonial perspective. He advised that the Native Authorities should note who were in the business including the recruiters. Yet he failed to realise that in Nigeria there were certain sources of prostitutes in which the chiefs and culture colluded with prostitution since they saw it as a lucrative business. For example, amongst the Buhumunus it was a duty to send out at least one female as a prostitute and that was done with pride (Naanen, 1999). If the profession was profitable it therefore goes without much ado that prostitutes were admired.

If prostitution was profitable in Lagos it appears that in Accra it was even more so. The comparative profitability of Accra for prostitution can be inferred from the number of women who left Lagos for Accra. Accra had become important as it was the best city in West Africa or the pearl of West Africa and prostitutes seized the opportunity to enjoy such a space.

Prostitute Movement from Lagos to Accra

The migration of prostitutes from Lagos to Accra, a journey of about 600 km raises some serious academic concerns. Accra had become the pearl of the West African coast in terms of urbanisation. How did these women find themselves in Accra and how were they perceived amongst their hosts and the Nigerian community that was already in Accra. There are no documented causes as to why the women moved to Accra other than that the business was profitable. Clearly the 'traffic engineers' were aware of this, and of how to conduct business in Accra. Writing to His Excellency, the Governor of the Gold Coast in July 1941, the colonial Governor of Nigeria, B.H. Bourdillon said:

the migration of women from Nigeria to the Gold Coast for the purpose of prostitution is a more profitable business and is a well organised trade, supported and maintained by the very communities to which the women themselves belong. In other certain areas of the Odubra Division of Ogoja province for instance, there is hardly a family that has not an interest in it, and Elders openly admit that they receive a fee, amounting to some pounds, from every woman who practices the calling... (Letter No. 36005/July 1941 from Governor B.H. Bourdillon to His Excellency, the Governor of Gold Coast).

At least one can say with certainty that prostitution in Accra was much more profitable than Lagos. The colonial governor makes allusion to the Odubra Division of the Ogoja Provinces which was located in Eastern Nigeria. While studying prostitution amongst the people of the Cross River Basin of Nigeria Naanen noted that there were no financial deals in the dowry of local women which constrained them from movement and it was felt that marriage contracts were prone to being broken off (Naanen, 1999: 65).

Their movement to Accra suggests that they had representatives from their areas of origin that could help accommodate them on arrival. Governor Bourdillon captured this situation in the following words:

The communities principally concerned maintain societies, which are responsible for the management of the trade. These societies have representatives in the Gold Coast

who receive and establish the women on their arrival, and it is even claimed that the fees contracted from the latter have rendered the societies so affluent that they are able to build houses and provide legal assistance for their clients (Letter No. 36005/July 1941 from Governor B.H. Bourdillon to His Excellency, the Governor of Gold Coast).

The Governor throws more light on how the prostitutes were finally settled in Gold Coast. These women were scattered around the cities like Tamale in the North, Kumasi in the Eastern Region but most prostitutes were concentrated in Accra. Numerically, at the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, there was a total head count of 545 prostitutes in the Gold Coast from Nigeria alone out of a Nigerian population of 1, 500 (36%). The prostitutes increased in number and by 1944 it is estimated that there were well above 1,000 (File No. Sf (1940) 2, Nigerian Prostitutes in the Gold Coast). This number shows how the profession fetched wealth.

Prostitution did fetch money and this sometimes was manifested in conspicuous consumption. The letters of the prostitute Selina Rowo, who lived and worked in Sekondi, Gold Coast, clearly illustrate this situation:

In the letter of 14 March 1943, she informed her brother at Ediba that she had remitted 20 pounds to her husband to build a comfortable house for her. She also sent 10 shillings to her brother to assist in the upkeep of their daughter ...In another letter dated 27 July 1943 she reminded her husband, Eze Aji of her previous remittance to him and that he should keep the rest of it until it was enough to build a house. In Eji's letter of 23 July 1943 to his wife, he gave a breakdown of the expenditure of 22 pounds from her Part of the expenses: 2 pounds for the 'native doctor' for the medicine Rowo requested for her mysterious sickness; 10 shillings for juju consultation and an unspecified amount given to Rowo's brother Johnny Ikpa Onyi while Eji himself used 10 shillings for out of pocket expenses; 13 shillings went for legal fees as a result of litigation initiated by Rowo's relatives against Eji (File No. Sf (1940) 2).

The business was good. Female prostitutes became the breadwinners of their families following their professional migration from Nigeria to the Gold Coast. While writing in July 1941, His Excellency, Governor B.H. Bourdillon said: "there can be no doubt that the profits from the trafficking of women are considerable and the case is quoted of one of these harlots who returned recently from the Gold Coast with no less than eighty pounds in her possession' (Sf

(1941) 4, Letter No. 360051). Bourdillon's letter further lends credibility to the profitability of prostitution. The District Officer Mamfe, wrote to the senior resident Buea, Cameroons Province on 29 January 1942 saying that prostitutes who had been to Gold Coast and had then retired displayed wealth. He said: "The women of Okuni (Ikom Division) who have retired from the profession of prostitution in the Gold Coast have built themselves splendid houses ...it seems that they succeed well enough to be able to refund their own dowries to their husbands and to provide male members of their own families with wives' (Sf (1943) 5). All these led to the conclusions that prostitution was profitable and generated wealth although the colonial state never kept any financial records.

The Politicisation of Prostitution: The Undesirable women

The regular arrival of Nigerian prostitutes in Ghana caused grave concern to the Nigerian Youth Association at Sekondi, Ghana, because they were looked upon in Ghana with scorn and as social deviants. The Nigerian Youth Movement protested the presence of Nigerian prostitutes and wrote to its National Branch Association in Lagos on 31 April 1939 through its President, Prince Ekimeh.

The letter lamented the fact that Nigerian women were engaged in a trade that was immoral and soiling the image of Nigerian nation. According to them such a trade should be stopped. Amongst other things they said:

We write that the Nigerian Government should stop the emigration of the Nigerian harlots and hooligans forging their way to the colony and tarnish the good name of Nigeria. The Gold Coast men and women who have not travelled further than their own territory believe that all the Nigerian women are harlots and that is a recognised custom of Nigeria. Gold Coast has become a place of Nigerian refuge. Not only grown up women from Nigeria are to be found here for this nefarious traffic of the flooding but nice girls under age are kidnapped and brought here as training ground.... (Sf (1940) 2).

The Youth Movement asked the Nigerian Government to attend to the migration of Nigerian prostitutes with some urgency. The Nigerian prostitutes were perceived as a social nuisance in the Gold Coast, and so the movement, as a champion of morality, called on the government to stop the emigration of such women. Even the Ghanaian police grew tired with the Nigerian prostitutes (File No. Sf (1940) 2 Letter from the Nigerian Youth Movement, Sekondi to the President Nigerian Youth Movement, Lagos, 31 April 1939). The Youth Movement set in motion measures that, if they had been well-implemented, would have prevented the movement of Nigerian women to the Gold Coast. They questioned the *raison d'être* of their association if they could not redress such an illicit trade — a trade which if left to go on would have an effect on Nigeria's demography:

.Is it our desire to see that Nigeria is increase in population or to be decreased when our girls the future mothers of Nigeria are being brought here under the disguise of slavery and be made barren? We would here suggest that as a temporary measures (a) an Authority be conferred on us through the Gold Coast Government to take census and all particulars of women-folk here (b) Letters be written to all the Shipping Agencies of Nigeria not to issue tickets to any Nigerian man or woman travelling to Gold Coast without sanction of the Nigerian Youth Movement here as to the status of such out-going passengers. We sincerely hope that this will not fall into deaf ears because the real ideal of the Youth Movement is to crystallize the New Nigeria that is to be.

The letter of the Youth Movement re-emphasized the evils of prostitution and urged the colonial administration to 'take the bull by the horns'. It was in that direction that measures were put in place within the circles of colonial administration to check the movement of prostitutes from Lagos to Accra.

Measures to Check the Movement of Prostitutes from Lagos to Accra

By 1940 the number of Nigerian women who were operating as prostitutes was significant. In 1933, there were 400 Nigerian prostitutes in the Gold Coast and in 1939 it tripled to 1,206. In 1944 it had dropped slightly to 1,112 because repatriation had begun. By 1948 it further dropped

to 1,000 (File No. File Sf (1940) 4). Many residents of Accra perceived Nigerian prostitution as problematic and immoral. Writing to His Excellency, the Governor of the Nigeria, Bourdillon intimated that “it now becomes the task of the Government to do all in its power to stop this traffic, whereby not only do whole communities live on the immoral earnings of their women, but the social system is endangered. A decline in the birth rate (with its inevitable revival of the practice of child kidnapping) and in the observance of the marriage tie are already apparent’ (Letter No. 36005/July 1941).

Significantly, those who wished to check the movement of women for the job of prostitution were concerned with the consequences it had on the social fabric of the society. Bourdillon made the point clearer when he maintained that the birth rate would decline if such trade continued. The Governor then continued to propose concrete measures through which the trade could permanently checked. Firstly, he proposed that exit permits should be completely refused to women who could not show good reason:

for wishing to travel to the Gold Coast [he then proposed] rigorous prosecution for procuration (sic) prostitution, keeping of brothels, living on immoral earnings and on any charges that it may be possible to lay against persons connected with the trade. I fear however that the present severe shortage of Administrative and Police Officers will prevent the application of these methods to the degree that is really, necessary but nevertheless, a start is being made on these lines, and since the serious nature of the situation is fully appreciated. I hope that some success will be achieved (File No. File Sf (1940) 4).

The third measure was complete repatriation of prostitutes, and any other person somehow connected to the profession, back to Nigeria. Repatriation, however, was more complicated than it appeared, particularly the issue of who would pay for it. Writing from the Nigerian Secretariat, Lagos, G. Miles Clifford, on 1st December 1941, captured the point more forcefully in the following words:

the Government of the Gold Coast is prepared to deport any Nigerian woman found within 18 months of her entry into the Gold Coast to be a prostitute and has asked if this Government will bear the cost of repatriation. It is now suggested that arrangements might be made for this to pay by the Native Administration funds of the area from which the woman belongs, the Native Administration obtaining a refund from the woman's family by action in the Native Court (File No. Sf (1941)).

Another strategy was to make the prostitutes pay for their own repatriation. The colonial administration felt that since some of the prostitutes had been sending remittances back to their areas of origin, their families, or the women themselves, should pay for their cost of repatriation. On 24 January 1942, the District Officer Mamfe wrote to the Native Authorities of Ekwa, Obang, Banyang and Kembong. As he wrote:

The Gold Coast Government intends to return to Nigeria any Nigerian women they find there that are harlots. Please let me have a list of women from your area who you know or believe have gone to the Gold Coast to become harlots and let me know whether they send money back to their families from time to time and whether you are in favour of asking their families from time to time and whether you are in favour of making their families pay for the cost of sending these women back to their proper homes (File No. Sf (1941) 3).

Nigerian Prostitutes in Accra Finally Go Home

The links between the Gold Coast and Nigeria suggest that the repatriation of Nigerian prostitutes from the latter to the former should have been hitch-free. That was not the case. Between 1941 and 1944 the colonial administrators brainstormed and debated extensively about the best way to send the Nigerian prostitutes out of the Gold Coast.

Writing on 1st December 1941, on behalf of the Chief Secretary, G. Miles Clifford, said *inter alia*: 'The Government of Gold Coast is prepared to deport any Nigerian woman found in the Gold Coast to be a prostitute and has asked if the government will bear the cost of repatriation. It is now suggested that arrangements might be made for this to be paid by the Native Authority funds of the area from which the woman belongs, the Native Administration obtaining a refund from the woman's family by action in the Native Court' (File Sf (1942) 5)

That communication aroused mixed feelings among the Native Authorities as well as some of the colonial authorities in various areas where the prostitutes originated. For instance, in March 1943, the District Officer Mamfe wrote to the Senior Resident wondering the position of the colonial government in repatriating the prostitutes. He compared the situation of the prostitutes in the Cameroons coastal plantations with that of the Gold Coast. He then concluded with more firmness in the following words: 'If the intension of the Government is to repatriate women from the Gold Coast, Native Authorities will want to know why the problem of women who go down to the plantations - a far more important problem is not agreed first' (Sf (1943) 4 Repatriation of Prostitutes and Native Authorities). The letter exposed certain apparent contradictions in the colonial system: the district officer vs. native authorities. For the District Officer to be taking sides with the Native Authorities was unfortunate. However, the content of the letter draws attention to the fact that many more women were practising prostitution in the coastal plantations and had abandoned their husbands. It was more a problem because these women were closer to Mamfe. Also because the Native Authorities had used force to bring back these women and the colonial administration merely used the Native Authority messengers to round them up (See Files Sf 1938/1, Qe (1929) 1, Qd/a (1932) 11, Qd/a (1940) 5, Ca (1942) 1, Sf (1956) 2).

The headache posed by the prostitutes in Gold Coast was such that eventually it was agreed that they should be repatriated. On 13 December 1944, ninety-four Nigerian prostitutes who had been repatriated arrived in Lagos from Accra in a convoy of lorries with all their belongings. They were received by police officers. After much debate and hesitation, the British colonial administration finally decided to bear the cost of transporting the prostitutes to their

various regions. In 1945 more than one hundred and twenty arrived in Lagos and in 1946 a further one hundred arrived.

Although the repatriation finally took place the colonial administration did not rest on their laurels. Stringent measures were put in place to prevent prostitutes from travelling between Lagos and Accra. In 1946, the Nigerian Immigration Legislation empowered the superintendent of Police at the ports of Lagos and Port Harcourt to issue travelling certificates and exit permits after thoroughly interviewing all prospective travellers especially single women. That appeared to be the most effective check on travel by sea but the resident of Cameroons Province, while addressing a letter to his subordinates in Mamfe, Bamenda, Kumba and Victoria maintained that: 'it is naturally impossible to prevent such women from walking over the boundary to neighbouring countries...and go back to Gold Coast' (Sf (1945) 8).

Conclusions

The history of prostitution has pre-occupied scholarship for quite some time. This paper has revisited from the perspective of the movement of women to Lagos and then on to Accra. The Buea National Archives in Southwest Cameroon contains much correspondence that is concerned with prostitution. This under-exploited repository suggests that the in-tray of the Divisional Officers was full with petitions questioning what they were planning to do about the problem of prostitution. This paper has contributed to the current debate by unravelling the complexities which went with prostitution. Many people, especially residents of Accra, perceived the recruitment and migration of these women as evidence of moral decay. While acknowledging this popular discontent, this paper has also stressed the economic benefits of prostitution to women in West Africa, particularly remittances sent back home.

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