

LANDLORDS AND BROKERS:  
A WEST AFRICAN TRADING SYSTEM

(With a note on Kumasi Butchers)

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In his important article "The Social Organization of Credit in a West African Cattle Market" (Africa, January 1965), Dr. Abner Cohen examined the mechanism of Ibadan cattle market mainly in terms of the roles of the chief permanent functionaries of the market, the "landlords". In this summary article I am concerned firstly to generalise about the West African "landlord system of long-distance trade"; secondly to provide a little comparative material relating to an important cattle market, Kumasi, where the traditional credit-granting system has broken down; and thirdly to raise some points about the changing organisation of Hausa butchers, again with special reference to Kumasi. As my enquiries in Kumasi cattle market were part of a general study of the landlord system, I shall not excuse myself for the brief duration of my stay in Kumasi in connexion with this fieldwork,<sup>1</sup> but I must emphasise that my knowledge of the workings of Kumasi cattle market is very superficial compared with Dr. Cohen's of the market in Ibadan.<sup>2</sup>

Research on settled, urban, immigrant communities, such as the Hausa in Ibadan, has been grossly neglected up to date: there has been little realisation of the extent to which, in their ethnic diversity, West African cities resemble compressed countryside.<sup>3</sup> (Social anthropologists have preferred rural areas; economists do hardly any non-statistical fieldwork; political scientists have failed to appreciate the significance of permanently encapsulated urban societies; and urban sociologists are trained inappropriately). Considering this general gap in our knowledge and the fact that M.G. Smith whose work was confined to Zaria Province, is effectively the only source<sup>4</sup> on the socio-economic organization of the Hausa in

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1. I visited the Kumasi cattle market eleven times in April and May 1964. I am most grateful to Mohammed Shehu for his assistance there on each occasion.
  2. But before going to Kumasi for this work I had had the advantage of learning about the organisation of Ibadan Cattle market from Dr. Cohen at first hand, so that I had some idea of what to look for. I was also somewhat familiar with the cattle markets at Accra and Zaria.
  3. Jean Rouch in his well-known article "Migration au Ghana, 1953-55", Journal de la Societe des Africanistes, Vol. XXVI, 1956, referred to the super-tribalisation of the migrants in the cities of Ghana, but no one else has seriously followed up his pioneering work.
  4. See, in particular, The Economy of Hausa Communities of Zaria, Colonial Research Studies No.16, HMSO, 1955. In this remarkable work, which cannot be read too often, Dr. Smith does not happen to mention the institution of landlord, as distinct from that of broker (dillali), though there are many cattle landlords in Zaria.

Hausaland, the publication of Dr. Cohen's general findings on the social organization of the five thousand immigrant Hausa of Ibadan is indeed eagerly awaited. It was because the cattle landlords have dominated the Hausa quarter of Ibadan ever since its foundation in 1916, that he was obliged to study the cattle market so intensively, as part of a much wider whole.

The various roles of the Ibadan cattle landlords (in Hausa known as mai gida) are dealt with very adequately by Dr. Cohen. In a general way, taking Dr. Cohen's article as read, I would briefly define a landlord as a settled stranger,<sup>5</sup> who makes it his business to accommodate long-distance stranger-traders and to assist them in selling, and usually in storing, their goods. If a landlord operates in a market - which he does not necessarily do, for (as will be seen) many landlords' houses resemble small wholesale markets - then he is also a dillali (or broker), a Hausa word of Arabic origin, signifying a formally recognised intermediary between buyer and seller.

The West African landlord system is especially associated, historically, with the long-distance trades in livestock (sheep and goats, as well as cattle) and in kola. But the dozens of landlords found nowadays in cities like Kumasi or Accra, or in towns like Keta, entertain traders in many other types of storable produce, such as grains and groundnuts. Some of these landlords specialise in receiving stranger-traders who handle certain types of produce only, for instance Mopti fish from the river Niger; others receive strangers of certain ethnic origin only; others, again, will accommodate any travelling trader. Although the system is traditionally associated with long-distance northern Muslim traders engaged in the north-south trade, there have been, for the past few decades at least, some Ewe, Yoruba and other southern landlords in places like Accra, or Keta.

There is no general literature on the West African landlord system and I certainly failed to realise the significance of the institution when first noticing its existence in Kumasi and Accra in 1962.<sup>6</sup> Shortly afterwards one had been excited by the appearance of "Landlord and Stranger: Change in Tenancy Relations in Sierra Leone"<sup>7</sup> by V.R. Dorjahn and C. Fyfe, which is partly concerned with the history of the landlord system in our sense, the earliest reference to it being dated 1846.

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5. In a few regions, such as Hausaland, landlords may be natives, whose business it is to receive long-distance traders who are also natives.

6. See the entry "Landlords" in a glossary of African markets contained in my article "Markets in Africa", The Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. 1, No.4.

7. The Journal of African History, Vol. III, No.3.



One's interest in this ancient system of indigenous international trade having been aroused, one gradually came across stray references to it in many sources, of which the earliest, so far, is Clapperton in Kano.<sup>8</sup> Certainly the literature<sup>9</sup> on long-distance cattle marketing in West Africa adequately supports the conclusion that the landlord system is standard throughout most of the savannah zone<sup>10</sup> and it is presumably common, if not universal, in the forest zone.<sup>11</sup>

The landlords outside Hausaland are nearly all settled strangers. If a landlord has not inherited his position from his father, then he is likely to have been a long-distance trader himself, one who made such a success of his business that he was enabled to buy, build, or rent, a house large enough for the accommodation of other strangers. Landlords like to give the appearance of having retired from active trading - of being older statesmen above the fray: thus do they enhance the dignity of their neutrality as brokers. Rules of etiquette loom largely in the lives of landlords, who must never, for instance, be observed at home in social intercourse with a cattle buyer or butcher. But as well as being neutral they are apt to be heavily involved, in various ways which I shall now discuss.

Dr. Cohen strongly emphasises the importance of the fact that each long-distance trader has his regular landlord to whom he often remains attached for years and this stability is a general feature of the landlord system, whatever commodity may be involved and represents a highly-developed form of the reciprocal regular-customer relationship which is of such general importance in West African market trading, both wholesaling and

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8. Clapperton mentioned that in connexion with long-distance trade "the name of the dylala, or broker, was "written inside every parcel". If, then, the goods were found to be of inferior quality, "the dylala must find out the seller, who, by the laws of Kano, is forthwith obliged to refund the purchase money". (Quoted from West African Explorers, ed. C.Howard, The World's Classics, p.250.). Other writers to mention brokers or landlords (besides M.G.Smith and the sources listed in the next footnote) include: L.Binger, Du Niger au Golfe de Guinee, Paris, 1892; S.F.Nadel, (who in A Black Byzantium, p.330, notes the existence of guilds of dilali (sic); C.H.Robinson, Hausaland, London, 1896, p.123; and P.Staudinger in Im Herzen der Haussalander, Berlin, 1889, p.613. See also footnote 17.
  9. This includes: H.Barth, Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa, 1857 (See Vol.IJ, p.309, on livestock marketing at Kukuwa); D.Danset, La Commercialisation du Betail et de la Viande du Niger (cyclostyled, 1964); Marguerite Dupire, "Trade and Markets in the Economy of the Nomadic Fulani of Niger", being chapter 12 in Markets in Africa, ed. P.Bohannan and G.Dalton, as well as other writings by the same author; G.I.Jones, "The Beef-Cattle Trade in Nigeria", Africa, January 1946; and J.Robin, "Le Marbat Marche au Betail de Louga", Africa, April, 1945 (Louga is in Senegal).
  10. Though I was informed that there are some cattle markets in Upper Volta without landlords.
  11. The literature is remarkably scanty. A cyclostyled (though unpublished) report, (MIG/61/4), issued by CCTA in connexion with a conference on migration held in Niamey in 1961, makes it clear that the cattle marketing system at Bouake in the Ivory Coast is based on brokers, known as coxeurs.

retailing.<sup>12</sup> But although in Kumasi cattle market, the name of each trader's landlord is so well-known as to be automatically recorded against his (the trader's) name in the official record of cattle arrivals at the market, yet both there and in Ibadan, landlords compete vigorously for old as well as new business, even to the extent of sending agents to Mali to advertise their good name.

Successful cattle landlords, with many strangers attached to them, are very prosperous people. When asked how it is that they can afford to entertain their strangers so lavishly, providing them with three free meals a day and other entertainment, sometimes for several weeks, they always say that the la'ada (or commission on sales) is their only remuneration. Dr. Cohen notes that in Ibadan the landlord retains only about 7s from the total commission of 13s (per head of cattle) which is collected from the buyer on the conclusion of the sale<sup>13</sup> and it is the landlord who gives his stranger a present on his departure - not vice versa. I am sure that in monetary terms the la'ada is trivial - it is a mere witness fee. How, then, is the prosperity of the landlords to be explained?

I suggest that, most importantly, the landlord should be seen as the organiser of the distribution of the largesse bestowed by his stranger. The stranger is apt to spend part of his takings on the purchase of goods, and traders and others who benefit from introductions effected by the landlord may give him a commission. Lorry park collectors should be specially mentioned in this connexion, for they readily admit to sharing their takings from departing strangers with the landlord.<sup>14</sup> Throughout West Africa (former French as well as former British) there is an indigenous system of lorry park organisation (of which in colonial times governments took no cognisance) under which all fares are received on behalf of lorry owners by collectors, who load the lorries and generally regulate traffic and who are paid a commission on the total sum collected,

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12. Women traders speak of their suppliers, as well as their customers proper, as "regular customers".

13. I doubt whether in Kumasi the landlord usually formally shares his commission, which is only 5s., with others. When visiting Abakaliki cattle market in Eastern Nigeria, in April 1965, I was informed that la'ada was 12s., made up as follows: 5s for the mai gida; 3s for the cattle seller; 1s 6d returned to the cattle buyer "for chop"; 1s for the cattle seller's boy"; 1s for the Hausa chief in Abakaliki (who is not in the cattle trade); 6d for the mosque. In addition, the 10s per head levied at Veterinary Control Posts on all beasts entering the Eastern Region (this being usually, in fact, collected at markets) is claimed by the seller from the buyer, so that effectively, as informant's insisted, la'ada was £1. 2s.

14. It was when a Kumasi lorry park collector volunteered that he shared his commission with the landlord who directed the departing stranger to the lorry park, that I first became aware of the landlord institution.

which in Ghana and Nigeria is 2s. in the £. Outside Hausaland, these collectors are apt to be strangers. They resemble the landlords, also, in not being appointed by the market, or lorry park, authority - nowadays the local council. I suggest, following Cohen's analysis of landlords as patrons, that in many districts these collectors should be regarded as, in origin, lorry park dillali - clients who are expected to hand over part of their takings to their patron-landlord.<sup>15</sup>

Although the landlord's special relationship with his stranger is supposed to preclude him from having any similar relationships with buyers, I am sure that in fact (and this is my second point) landlords often receive direct financial benefits from buyers. This may take the form of a hidden commission on purchases, or of paying their stranger less than the buyer's price.<sup>16</sup> Landlords often assist buyers in practical ways, for instance by arranging transport on credit and naturally they are "thanked" for this financially, perhaps by both parties.

Thirdly I was told that landlords, though themselves normally sedentary, are sometimes long-distance traders, employing others to travel (or even travelling themselves at times) and that their relationships with their strangers provide them with many opportunities of promoting their own trading interests, even though, as one may suppose, actual trading partnerships with them are rare.<sup>17</sup> I met a number of landlords in Kumasi who were also stationary dealers in the cattle market - dealers are defined on page 8 below. (When they buy from their own strangers, a third party acts as intermediary.)

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15. I am not suggesting that, nowadays, each collector is the client of a particular landlord - though this may have been so in the past. At large lorry parks, collectors are nowadays organised in geographical groups under a head-collector, so that in Accra there is a Niamey section (concerned with lorries plying to Niamey), a Kumasi section and so forth. A rather unsuccessful attempt has been made to incorporate collectors in the new Ghanaian trade union structure. In some districts, for instance the Ejura yam growing area of Ghana, lorry park collectors have developed additional functions, such as that of directing buying stranger-traders to sources of supply. The Iboland collecting system appears to be a modification of the Hausa system, the collectors being natives, the revenue being shared with drivers and transport owners.
16. In Niger, according to Danset (op.cit), p.68, there is a rule that the dillali should receive the money from the purchaser in the presence of the seller, but whether this effectively protects the seller is not known.
17. In a source quoted on p.415 of Les Kolatiers et les Noix de Kola by A.Chevalier and E.Perrott, Paris, 1911 (a primarily botanical work which is nonetheless a most useful source on the kola trade), it is suggested that brokers sometimes sent out touts in front of trading caravans to spread false information among cattle rearers with the purpose of persuading them to accept lower prices.



Fourthly, although the strangers do not pay for their board and lodging directly, they sometimes, to their own admission, "dash the servants" in the landlord's house on their departure: these clients, the servants, are no doubt often expected to pass part of their takings to the landlord, to assist him in meeting his expenses.

Fifthly, many landlords nowadays are a species of travel agent, advising their stranger on the ever-deepening mysteries of exchange control, import licensing and so forth: surely they are paid for this work? And there is also their function of "banker" - custodian of their trader's money while he lodges with them.

Sixthly, as the Arabian maxim has it, "the guest is a present from God".<sup>18</sup> The more strangers who flock to a landlord,<sup>19</sup> the more prestige he enjoys in his own community.

The operation of the landlord system may be observed most clearly in cattle (and sheep) markets and also in connexion with kola marketing.<sup>20</sup> Southern cattle markets like Ibadan and Kumasi, which are situated outside the cattle-raising zones, are the most impressive indigenous economic organisms in West Africa. It is not just that their annual turnover is so large,<sup>21</sup> but that they have the capacity to rise to the occasion when much larger numbers of cattle than usual arrive on any day.<sup>22</sup> The cattle must be sold immediately, not only because many of them would otherwise soon die of trypanosomiasis, but also because the grazing areas attached to the markets are so small. The landlords are the pillars supporting the market structure. But, before concluding this first section of this article, I must refer to another type of

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18. See quotation on page 7.

19. Danset (*op.cit.*) records, p.14, that one day at Ayorou in Niger one landlord was accommodating 30 cattle-rearers who were selling their animals.

20. Kola landlords are very numerous in some places: thus Cohen (p.17) records the existence of 285 in Ibadan. But partly because kola is often sold outside markets, so that the market mechanism is more difficult to study, reliable (detailed) literature on kola marketing is very scanty. Cattle and kola trading are sometimes closely linked. Thus formerly, though not much today, the traders who brought cattle from Lagos to Accra (by sea) returned with kola. I found that the organisation of the kola "market" in Bolgatanga in Northern Ghana was entirely similar to that of a cattle market, though one landlord had erected the shed and was in sole charge.

21. As many as 61,000 cattle were sold in Kumasi in 1963 - an estimated turnover of over £2m. The turnover of Ibadan cattle market may be slightly higher - Cohen, p.8, footnote 2. It may be estimated that herds numbering about a million head are needed to sustain each of these markets.

22. Nearly all the cattle arriving at Kumasi come by lorry, most of the imported animals direct from Bawku. (The animals which are driven south from Bawku are mainly sold at Prang.) The number of lorry-loads arriving daily at Kumasi is extremely variable: the total recorded number on the 14 days, 18th April to 1st May, 1964, was 119, as many as 28 of which arrived on 28th April.



landlord altogether - he who, as it were, operates his own wholesale market from his house.

West African markets are essentially ephemeral institutions, opening (and closing) periodically<sup>23</sup> and not providing storage facilities.<sup>24</sup> Considering how slowly long-distance traders are apt to sell their goods,<sup>25</sup> storage is their main problem and the facilities provided by many landlords are effectively extra-market,<sup>26</sup> especially when the produce is bulky. Wholesale customers buy directly from the landlord's house and then resell in the market. Such specialised wholesale house-markets will remain an essential adjunct to the market system, until local authorities realise their responsibility for building storage depots.<sup>27</sup>

In much of the forest zone of West Africa the landlord system has the appearance of a Hausa institution, the term mai gida being common currency: in connexion with their widely-flung trading activities many Hausa landlords established themselves far from home and other traders then imitated them. It is for the historians to trace the spread of the institution from further north. I conclude with a quotation:

"The city is merely a temporary depot, situated between the borders of the desert and the copiously watered valleys of the south, and is so completely a town of warehouses and docks that none of its merchants possesses either camel or boat. What part, then, do its people play if they are neither exporters nor importers? They are brokers, contractors and landlords. "The guest is a present from God" says an Arabian maxim much in vogue in Timbuctoo, where there are no caravansaries. The inhabitant offers gratuitous board and lodging to the stranger merchant for the first three days and interprets the noble precept in a disinterested and elevated manner..... The part of diatigui or landlord does not end there; he is expected to instruct the stranger on the current prices, the abundance or scarcity of the product he has come to buy or sell, the standing of any client who may offer himself and also to assist his guest in making his purchases, the price of lodging thus including the benefits of brokerage." Timbuctoo the Mysterious by Felix Dubois, translated by Diana White, London, 1897, pp.259-60.

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- 23. It is only in the very largest centres (of which, for instance, there are only about 6 in Ghana), that daily markets are held.
  - 24. Except occasionally for yams and then usually in separate small yam markets which are annexes to general markets. (Most yam storage is undertaken by farmers).
  - 25. The extremely slow pace of selling is one of the major inefficiencies of the West African long-distance trading system. In the case of credit sales, for instance, it is usual for the seller to wait for payment.
  - 26. Others besides landlords are obliged to store goods outside markets. There is no proper wholesale maize market in Accra, and many women maize wholesalers use their houses for storage.
  - 27. Such storage facilities as do exist inside daily markets are usually built by private traders - though local authorities are increasingly building lock-up "shops" round the edges of markets.



Kumasi Cattle Market

Alhaji Idi, a Dagomba landlord who is the (unofficial) head of the Kumasi cattle market, informed me that there were about 40 cattle landlords (he referred to them as mai gida) who work in that market and he listed their names. I checked this list with all the landlords I met in the market and I think it is fairly complete. (As most of the "bringers"<sup>28</sup> who sell cattle at Kumasi are from Mali, Upper Volta or Niger,<sup>29</sup> so most of the landlords are of corresponding nationality). It seemed that about 16 of them were from Mali (of whom 11 were Gao), 10 were from Upper Volta and 3 were from Niger: of the remainder 7 were from northern Ghana and 4 were Hausa. At least 12 of them bore the title Alhaji, having made the pilgrimage to Mecca. Landlords are fairly readily distinguishable in the market by their black umbrellas.<sup>30</sup>

In terms of the numbers of strangers they receive, some landlords are much <sup>more</sup> important than others. Thus during the period 25th April to 1st May 1964 one landlord was officially recorded as "receiving" 21 of the 74 separate consignments<sup>31</sup> and the 7 "largest" landlords received three-quarters of the total.<sup>32</sup> On two days, April 28th and 29th, when as many as 47 lorries arrived, one landlord received 14 consignments altogether - and may well have had to seek the help of other landlords in accommodating his strangers. Not only is there this concentration of business in the hands of a few, but the indications are that the list of 40 includes many who are in semi-retirement, even though they may regularly attend the market.

The man who assisted me in the market was a Hausa, born in Kumasi, who denoted himself as a cattle "dealer" - he had previously been a dealer in the Kumasi sheep market which is an entirely distinct, though similarly organised, institution. A dealer may be defined as a stationary trader who buys cattle, usually directly from bringers, for the purpose of reselling them in the market, on cash or credit terms, within at most

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28. Following usage in the market itself, I define a "bringer" as anyone who brings cattle to market to sell.

29. Only very recently has an attempt been made, for the first time, to distinguish the real country of origin of imported cattle in the Ghanaian trade statistics, so that the respective importance of these main sources has not been known. (In 1963, 86% of the cattle arriving at Kumasi cattle market were recorded as being imported, the remainder being from northern Ghana).

30. A few other prominent persons also carry umbrellas.

31. All were lorry-loads, save one which arrived on foot.

32. These figures may not be completely accurate as the name of a dillali assistant is sometimes given in place of the landlord.

three days. Traditionally, it is one of the functions of a landlord to guarantee that the buyer, who usually buys on credit,<sup>33</sup> will pay up within a certain period - up to 4 weeks in Ibadan. In Kumasi this traditional system has collapsed and dealers partially fill the gap. It was interesting to note that the dealer who assisted me, who was an operator in a rather small way of business, was sometimes addressed by his butcher-customers as "mai-gida".<sup>34</sup>

Unfortunately, I ascertained little of the history of the collapse of the traditional credit-guaranteeing system, which seems to have finally occurred less than ten years ago when the new cattle market and slaughter house were opened in the outskirts of Kumasi. However, it would seem that as Kumasi cattle market grew in importance as the source from which most of the population in southern Ghana, outside Accra, drew its meat supplies, the traditional system was bound to suffer great strain. Nowadays only about a quarter of all the cattle which pass through the market are slaughtered in Kumasi and most of the buyers (they are mainly butchers, but also traders who resell to butchers) are from elsewhere. Dr. Cohen describes how the Ibadan landlords are obliged to employ boys to observe, as it were, every financial movement of their butcher-customers. Given the number of strange buying-faces, this would not, nowadays, be practicable in Kumasi.

Then, there is the general question of the relationship between landlords and butchers in the market. While the fact that most butchers are strangers<sup>35</sup> would preclude them from taking concerted hostile action against the landlords (such as that which occurred in the Abeokuta cattle market in 1963<sup>36</sup>), yet the two groups do not trust each other. Also the ethnic heterogeneity of the Kumasi landlords, considered as a group, would make it very difficult for them to co-operate with each other in risk-taking as do the Ibadan landlords.

So far as I could ascertain, most dealers in Kumasi market are individually related to their customers - two dealers may work with each other, but there is not even that slight general element of corporateness that exists with landlords. Dealers deal mainly, but not exclusively, with regular buying customers. They grant credit, for up to several weeks, to such of their customers whom they know and trust

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33. Credit-sales are common under the landlord system, whatever the merchandise involved.

34. He was also regarded, jokingly, as my mai-gida. The friendly taunt "Where is your mai-gida?" welcomed me on several occasions as, rather forlornly, I entered this large, boisterous market.

35. See below, page 12.

36. Cohen, footnote 2, p.16.

who require it. If the customer fails to pay up then, though most reluctantly, they may resort to the courts.<sup>37</sup> They are very volatile financiers, sometimes buying and then reselling in the twinkling of an eye. They are so numerous and competitive that I can only presume, as other general evidence also suggests, that their trading margins are usually rather reasonable.

But I judge the activities of dealers to be generally of peripheral importance. They are, to change the metaphor, a safety valve which prevents the market from exploding when too many cattle arrive. I think that a considerable proportion of the cattle are bought directly from the bringers by large butchers and traders who usually, though not invariably, pay cash - unfortunately this statement, which is based on observation and conversation, cannot possibly be substantiated, there being no means by which a research worker can record the details of many transactions which occur simultaneously. If this is correct, the collapse of the traditional risk-taking system is closely associated with the increased prosperity enjoyed by a minority of butchers during the last decade.

The landlords are concerned only with transactions involving their bringers and do not intervene when dealers are reselling. That the la'ada (or commission) is a mere witness fee is borne out by the fact that dealers, like landlords, receive this fee from the buyer when reselling, thus reclaiming what they had originally paid to the landlord.

West African markets are, traditionally, places which anyone (stranger or native)<sup>38</sup> may enter for direct selling purposes and this tradition survives. Perhaps, this being so, I should not have been so surprised as I was by the sight of a group of six Gao bringers who, I was told, habitually sold directly to butchers, without the intervention of any landlord. There are many Gao in Kumasi, and these frugal traders prefer, like so many of their countrymen, to crowd into a permanently hired room for cattle men, rather than wasting their money (and their time) on landlords.

While bringers, like these six Gao, sometimes combine together for the practical purpose of meeting the expenses of the journey,<sup>39</sup> I think

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37. Unlike the Ibadan landlords, Cohen, p.18

38. Thus a special section for "villagers" who are not regular traders but who wish to retail their produce directly, was opened recently at Kumasi Central Market.

39. Sharing drovers and other expenses.



that most of them are individuals<sup>40</sup> who do not act concertedly. Butchers, also, act for themselves or, if they are penurious, in partnership with at most one or two others. The cattle market, then, is basically an arena where one individual is enabled to sell at great despatch to another individual - and where prices fluctuate.<sup>41</sup>

I conclude this section with a few notes on the bargaining process, the etiquette of which is partly designed to conceal any collusion between landlord and buyer. This process is the opposite of auctioning,<sup>42</sup> involving as it does one potential buyer only - though others may be standing nearby. The landlord starts by naming the price for the cattle, which may be sold singly or in groups, and bargaining then starts. The bringer is there for consultation, but he does not actively participate. The potential buyer tries to beat the price down. If he is a Kumasi butcher he will often be buying one animal for slaughter the same or the next day. As there is no weighing of animals, which vary greatly in size and condition, so "Your eyes are your skill". The bargaining process may be very prolonged: I observed one dealer taking thirty minutes beating the price down from £70 to £38. Sometimes business is conducted with very great despatch. Often no bargain is concluded. Both in Kumasi (and Zaria) bargaining groups are apt to include a number of semi-participants who offer advice to the landlord; the drovers, who are important personalities in the market, stand alertly curious as to the outcome of their long-distance trading expedition and are sometimes seen to receive the cash on behalf of their bringer.

#### Hausa butchers<sup>43</sup> in Kumasi

Hausa butchers, whether at home or abroad, have a low prestige in

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40. These individuals are not necessarily the principals - they may be acting on behalf of others.
  41. Given the great variation in the weight (and quality) of the stock, there is no possibility of studying price variation statistically until weighing is introduced.
  42. Auctioning is the usual practice at most public cattle markets in Britain, for instance. See The Drove Roads of Scotland by A.R.B. Haldane, 1952, for a very relevant description of the north-south cattle trade in Britain before about 1860, or so, when railways, steamships and auctioneers combined with changing methods of agriculture, to rob the huge Scottish livestock markets (which supplied England) of their former glory.
  43. Nowadays not all the Kumasi butchers are Hausa, but most of the prominent ones are and their organisation remains basically Hausa in pattern.

their own community,<sup>44</sup> both for historical reasons and because of the repellent nature of the butchering trade. At the same time, in many cities and districts of West Africa, they are among the wealthiest citizens:<sup>45</sup> in Kumasi and Accra, for instance, several of them are prominent race-horse owners. Nowadays the affairs of immigrant Hausa communities are apt to be highly-charged politically, and in a city like Kumasi the traditional organisation of the Hausa butchers (who, of course, form only a small proportion of the whole Hausa community there) may be observed in the process of rapid change. In pursuing my own brief enquiries among the butchers of Kumasi, I suffered from two severe handicaps:<sup>46</sup> firstly that nothing comparable to Dr. Cohen's work on the Hausa community of Ibadan has ever been done in Kumasi and secondly that the literature on Hausa butchers generally is remarkably scanty.<sup>47</sup> So as to emphasise the tentative nature of my findings on the changing organisation of the Kumasi butchers, (as well as my inability to set them in proper context) I present them here in summary form.

1. The butchers of Kumasi, who were formerly nearly all Hausa, are gradually becoming a more mixed group ethnically.

Ethnic information relating to 66 of the 72 (or so)<sup>48</sup> Kumasi butchers suggests that, nowadays, only about two-thirds (44) of them would count themselves<sup>49</sup> as of Hausa origin. (Many of these Hausa are Ghanaian citizens, having - themselves or their fathers - been born in Ghana).

44. In The Economy of Hausa Communities of Zaria, M.G. Smith states that butchers are the lowest occupational class, many of them being descended from slaves - see p.16. My chief informant among the Hausa butchers of Kumasi put it like this: "In the Hausa community generally butchers are not highly regarded. This is so when fathers are considering whom their daughters may marry. There is a hatred of the whole idea of butchery."
45. See M.G. Smith, ibid. D. Tait regarded the butchers as among the richest people in Dagomba - "they are far wealthier than the chiefs." (See "On the Growth of some Konkomba Markets" Proceedings of the Second Annual Conference (Sociology Section) of the West African Institute of Social and Economic Research, Ibadan, issued 1953).
46. But I had one great advantage, too, which was that among my butcher-informants there were some who were far more helpful than I had any reason to expect.
47. Apart from M.G. Smith and Danset (op.cit.) few writers have done more than refer in passing to Hausa butchers and surely the repellent nature of the trade partly explains this neglect. In many West African regions, including the forest zones of Ghana and the Ivory Coast and much of the savannah outside Hausaland, the butchers are still predominantly Hausa, whereas in others, such as Iboland, local men are rapidly taking over from the Hausa who taught them the business.
48. Opinions differed on the exact number (which was about half as much again as a few years ago), but as many are not in business the precise figure is a matter of indifference.
49. These were the people who regarded themselves as "primarily Hausa" - though they might be Ghanaian by nationality. Most of the Dagomba were probably also of Hausa origin, but did not emphasise this.

Of the remaining 22 butchers, 15 are Ghanaians, being of Dagomba (7), Ashanti and Banda (5), or Gonja (3) origin. The remaining 7 are: Gao (2), Zabrana (2), Mossi (1), Yoruba (1) and Grunshi (1).

2. The office of chief butcher (sarkin pawa) has recently ceased to be hereditary in Kumasi.

The butchers (pawa in Hausa) are organised in traditional Hausa fashion in an association headed by a chief butcher (sarkin pawa). Traditionally, the office of chief butcher was hereditary, a father being succeeded by a son. Not only did this tradition recently break down in Kumasi,<sup>50</sup> but nowadays the butchers' nominee has to be acceptable politically.<sup>51</sup>

3. The chief butcher retains much of his traditional power and most of his traditional obligations.

He has control over new entrants to the trade and is also, effectively, responsible for allocating stall-space in the overcrowded central meat market. He receives the skins of all animals slaughtered on Friday, which are then his to sell.<sup>52</sup> At the time of Ramadan he must provide each butcher with a gown, costing £4 or £5, and when a child is born to a butcher's wife, he should provide a sheep for the "out-dooring." If a butcher dies and has no relatives in the country the chief butcher must assume responsibility for the funeral.

4. Some of the most prosperous butchers are newcomers to Kumasi and the general willingness of the established butchers to admit newcomers (provided they are qualified butchers) is remarkable.

Of the 44 Hausa butchers for whom information was available, about 20 had arrived in Kumasi since about 1951<sup>53</sup> - most of them directly from Nigeria. Although it is clearly possible for rich Hausa newcomers to buy themselves rather rapidly into the association - which presumably causes much heartburning considering the number of old-established, second or third generation, Hausa butchers whom my informant designated as "broke" - most of the Hausa newcomers are not rich men when they first arrive.

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50. There is a rich field for investigation here by political scientists.

51. At the time I was in Kumasi there was, effectively, no chief butcher and the then acting chief butcher was a stop-gap appointment. This paragraph, therefore, relates to the former situation in Kumasi - as well as to the current one in Accra and elsewhere.

52. Friday has been altered to Saturday in Accra, as more cattle are slaughtered that day.

53. My informant was able to recollect which of the butchers had been in Kumasi at the date of his own arrival there.



5. Practically all the Hausa butchers, whether newcomers or not, are sons of butchers. But the growing number of non-Hausa butchers includes some (such as former flayers) whose fathers were not butchers.

The Hausa tradition that a son should not be a full butcher in his father's town during his lifetime, continues to be observed in Kumasi. (It is, presumably, this tradition which explains much of the migration of Hausa butchers).

6. Many of the Kumasi butchers are very poor.

The average daily number of cattle slaughtered in Kumasi in 1963 was 49. As there are several very important butchers who slaughter far more than one animal daily (most of them supply institutions) and many who slaughter nearly every day, the statistics clearly bear out the statement that there are many who slaughter only occasionally, or not at all. (There are also some who, lacking the finance to buy an animal for themselves, regularly buy in partnership with another butcher, selling half the meat).

7. The entrenched position of butchers is reflected in market-stall ownership.

There are about 22 full butchers who officially rent tables (stalls) in the enormously over-crowded, small, ramshackle meat shed in Kumasi Central Market. These butchers are regarded by their fellows as "owning" these tables, for the market authority (Kumasi City Council) finds itself unable to enforce its own bye-law prohibiting the sub-letting, or transfer of ownership, of stalls by those in whose names they are registered. I was informed that 9 of these 22 butchers, most of whom were designated as "broke", were selling no meat from their tables, having rented or (effectively) sold them to others.

8. The butchers continue to defy the elected market authority.

If a butcher is unable to obtain the use of a stall proper in the Central Market (which is much the most popular selling centre) then he may either sell in another Kumasi market, or obtain permission from the chief butcher to "fix" a stall for himself, in practice usually a wooden table, in the Central Market. As many as 9 of the 20 Hausa butchers who have arrived since about 1951 operate from such "fixed tables", against the wishes of the City Council, who show their tolerance of this defiance by collecting rent from the trespassers.

9. Flayers, who assist the butchers, continue to be rewarded, traditionally, in kind.

Few Kumasi butchers flay their own cattle: instead they employ flayers for this work at the slaughter house. (The actual slaughter is performed, in accordance with Muslim law, by an official slaughterer, a Malam, appointed by the butchers). These flayers are paid with parts of the offal, which they sell for cash. They, in turn, employ their own assistants. Whereas formerly the flayers were Hausa, nowadays they are mostly Gao - men who have sometimes succeeded in ingratiating themselves with their butchers by their willingness to lend them money.

10. A new class of "free cutter" has come into existence, effectively swelling the number of butchers working in the market.

Apart from the butchers proper (often referred to as "full-pawa") there are meat cutters and meat sellers. (This distinction is reflected in the issue by the Kumasi City Council of licences of three different colours). Meat sellers are the lowest class and sell outside the butchers' shed. A meat cutter is one regularly employed by a butcher, to assist him in cutting and selling his meat at his stall. Often the butcher effectively sells meat to the cutter, allowing him to resell at whatever price he can get. An interesting class of "free cutter", most of them Yoruba, has recently come into existence: they buy meat from any butcher and retail it from a stall which they may occupy regularly. Their entry to the trade must be approved of by the only Yoruba butcher (an old man) who then recommends them to the chief butcher. Although he described them as "almost pawa", my informant added that they would not want to become full-pawa - "because they are afraid of debt".

11. In Kumasi<sup>54</sup> it remains a rule that butchers are never landlords or brokers - the traditional specialisation persists.

But butchers may also be cattle dealers or traders. (I witnessed one of the wealthiest Kumasi butchers, a young Hausa who recently arrived from Nigeria, buying 40 large beasts at £52 each in Prang cattle market one day, most of them being subsequently resold in Kumasi).

From all that I learnt, I draw the conclusion that despite their organisation in a traditional craft association the Kumasi butchers are highly competitive so far as general retail business is concerned<sup>55</sup> - indeed, from the point of view of the butcher who is old, ill, or down on his luck, they seem almost cruelly so.

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54. But not in Accra, where one of the many unconventional roles of the chief butcher (who arrived a few years ago from Nigeria) is that of landlord.

55. But not in relation to the supply of institutions, where much political patronage is involved.