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spending power: love, money, and the reconfiguration of gender relations in Ado-Odo, southwestern Nigeria

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Women's (mis)behavior in intimate relationships is a constant topic of commentary among women and men in Ado-Odo, southwestern Nigeria. Today's women are said to be wayward and troublesome, defying their husbands in pursuit of other men's love and money. Yet, many women maintain marriages in which there is no love and no money. And for those who do leave, remarriage offers little attraction: neither for love nor for money. In this article, I explore the interplay between love and money in intimate relationships in Ado-Odo and implications for the ways in which gender and agency are construed and enacted in everyday life. [Nigeria, Yoruba, women, gender relations, love, money]

lẹ́ ọwọ̀ ni obinrin ni ju lẹ́ ọkọ̀ re—women love money more than their husbands

—Dayo, panel beater, thirties

Women's choices and women's behavior are a constant source of disapproving gossip in the spaces in which women and men gather in Ado-Odo, a small Yoruba town in the agricultural hinterland of metropolitan Lagos. Nowhere is disquiet more evident than in the running commentaries on women's sexual and marital relationships that pepper everyday conversations. These kinds of complaints are nothing new. Research on women and marriage in other areas of urban Africa has, since the 1970s, drawn attention to the moral disapproval independent women court as well as to the role of money in sexual relationships (Abu 1983; Karanja 1987; Little 1973; Obbo 1980; Oppong 1983). In southwestern Nigeria, the behavior of urban women has been a source of commentary and concern since the early colonial period (Fadipe 1970). By the early 1970s, the ways of young women had become a familiar target for criticism in the Nigerian popular press; a range of supposedly wayward female characters continues to occupy the pages of contemporary newspapers, popular comics, and magazines, accompanied by moralizing commentaries.

The caricatured figures of the popular press—such as the *acadas* (female university students who seek wealthy lovers), “sugar mummies” (wealthy women with a penchant for “toy boys”), and “senior girls” (women who remain unmarried, pursuing careers and having boyfriends)—may be more prominent in discourses on the vicissitudes of city life. But commentaries on the behavior of women in smalltown Ado-Odo resound with similar concerns. Today's women are represented as wayward, troublesome, and avaricious: women who are out for what they can get. Their pursuit of men's money is contrasted with idealized values of obedience and endurance—and of love. Some commentators go so far as to suggest that love has itself become a mere commodity.

Discourses on love and money in intimate relationships counterpose the spending of money as an expression of love, with a pursuit of money—a love of money—that displaces husbands and turns good wives into bad women. Disapproval centers on women who leave marriages to live alone, stigmatized with the label *ilemoşu* (women who leave their husbands' compounds to return to their natal homes or live in houses they have built themselves) and characterized as voracious temptresses, in hot pursuit of men and their money. An analysis of these discourses as evidence of the increasing commodification of relationships, however, would miss out on a more interesting story. Although many women echo men's complaints about the wayward behavior of *other* women, their own stories paint rather different pictures. Some tell of struggles to maintain their families in the absence of "proper care" and of "helpers" (i.e., lovers) who enable them to keep going in marriages in which there is neither love nor money. Women say they do this for the sake of their children. Others recount leaving intolerable domestic situations to live alone. Their stories were of women who were able to make it for themselves. For many of these women, remarriage was a laughable prospect: for love or for money.

In this article, I explore the shaping of gendered subjectivities through processes of contestation over love and money in intimate relationships. I begin with the narratives of disquiet that form such a pervasive part of the landscape of everyday life in Ado-Odo. I go on to explore some of the subject positions that discourses on intimate relationships make available and the ways in which appropriate male and female behavior are framed. Through ethnographic description, I consider some of the complexities of conflicts and expectations that surround heterosexual partnerships, love and money, marriage and morality.¹

discourses on intimate relationships in Ado-Odo

Amidst the discussions on women's misbehavior that are so prominently a part of social life in Ado-Odo, there is rarely a dissenting voice. Discourses on immorality frame the problem as one of the present and one in which women's agency stands out as the prime cause for concern. Although hints of dissonance emerge in life histories, revealing a past that often fails to conform with idealized olden days in which women knew their place (see Cornwall 2001), the rhetoric of rupture so dominates discourses on the present that continuities are buried under the collective sigh of despair.

Older women and men would invoke this past, speaking of a time that often lay beyond the borders of living memory in which obedient, virginal brides-to-be were not even allowed to talk to their prospective husbands and where husbands were authoritative, responsible providers. In an unlikely chorus, they would be joined by younger men and women to castigate the behavior of today's women. These days, people told me, young women are not only "disvirgined" but pregnant before marriage. "The girls of today" may seek their lovers in "corner-corner love," "destroy conceptions," and befriend sugar daddies and *fayawo* boys (smugglers with plenty of cash). In times of economic austerity, things seem to have become a lot worse. Although younger women would be charged with "uselessness [*sic*] themselves all around" by having sex with men, men who cannot live up to the demands placed on them by the women in their lives find themselves cast as "useless."

Moral accounting roundly places the blame for the present state of affairs on women and attributes it to a perverse love of money that is counterposed to a love that stems from dutiful obedience and is evidenced in endurance. I listened to the complaints of married women, mindful of their own respectability; of younger, unmarried women, eager to distinguish themselves from those with whom this kind of behavior was associated;

and of men of all ages, reflecting mournfully on their own situations or generalizing with exasperation about the situations of others. All painted images of a contemporary scourge, that is, women who might be expected to “pack in and pack out” (move in and out of relationships with men) as it suited them, chasing after men for their money and then dumping them—or being dumped—when the money ran out. Mr. Yele Akinwonmi, a retired customary court judge, told me: “These days a lot of women don’t want to work. They believe that if a man has a lot of money to play with, they’ll follow him rather than staying with the husband who is struggling in the house.”

In these conversations, I heard of cases of unmarried women entertaining numerous boyfriends for the cash they provided and then, when pregnancy struck, not being able to work out who the real father was. People regaled me with tales of women who remain in marriages to be with their children and “chase after money here and there,” through affairs that became open secrets. Agnes, aged 19 and herself a lover of a married man, pronounced on the state of affairs: “These days girls are all corrupt and don’t care about anything but money. The majority are just eat and run. They don’t bother about love. What they need is money. They will be pretending to love the man and they need only his money.”

The kind of behavior that Agnes captures in her description of the women of today as “eat and run”—satisfying themselves on men’s money and then moving on to the next man—is, as she went on to point out, not only the case for younger women. Although the youth frequently get the blame, Agnes argued, older women are also “up to no good,” dressing up and going to night parties: “All those type of things that they are not expected to do.” Agnes’s juxtaposition of love and money captures a popular sentiment, and with it an apparent breach in expectations. This breach forms a recurrent theme in contemporary complaints about women’s behavior: it is one intimately linked to access to a particular source of money, *men’s* money, and to a pursuit of pleasure to the neglect of other responsibilities.

Women were as voluble as men on the subject of women’s waywardness, and men as well as women bemoaned what they called “useless men” who failed to fulfill their obligations. There was little gender differentiation in the kinds of commentaries I heard on the present state of affairs or in the contexts in which they were voiced. The insistent complaints about morally corrupt (*išekuse*) behavior were not merely those of the older generation about the youth of today. The young frequently joined the old, talking of *they* rather than *we* in their narratives of moral corruption. All reserved the greatest force of their criticism for those women who chose to live outside a formalized cohabiting relationship, the women they called *ilemoşu*.

of enduring resignation and rampant desire

No one spoke in defense of any of the women whose lives came up for discussion in gossip. Men blamed women; women blamed women. Although women complained about men’s behavior, they rarely made men the focus of blame: their approach was more one of resignation. And it was not only these women’s perceived love of money that was at issue. Condemnation was leveled at those women who were “after sex” and “liked sex too much.” Married women maintained the face of respectability, bolstered by vigorous condemnation of the behavior of young people, but they too might seek lovers not only as “helpers,” who gave them money to assist with their children, but also for “enjoyment” and “to have fun” or, people grumbled, because they were “the kind of women who were never satisfied.” When I asked what women thought of those men who have girlfriends around town, one woman, in her

thirties, said: "That's what men are like. We can't do anything. We just have to endure."

"That's what men are like" implied resignation about the fact that men are expected to have extramarital sexual relations. Ideas about the irrepressible sexual needs of men emerged in conversations with men in many contexts, from men who would tell me earnestly that if not for having several wives they would be forced to "ease themselves" elsewhere, to the hydraulic model of male sexuality offered to me by one herbalist who compared the male body to a tank continually being filled by dripping water, in need of an outlet. Images in the popular press, from the salacious offerings of *Lagos Weekend* to the soft porn of *Lolly*, serve to reinforce a hypermasculinity in constant, rampant search for sexual satisfaction. Periods when wives are unavailable (during certain stages of pregnancy, when breastfeeding, when menstruating) are often given as justification by men for their infidelities as well as the rationale for polygyny. According to this logic, men *have to* have girlfriends, especially when they only have one wife. Faced with a man's need, their wives are expected to endure. "That's what men are like" refers less to an unmet need for sex in marriage than to the very insatiability of male sexual desire.

Clearly, this evocation of men's sexual needs implies a pool of women who are available to service men's desires: women to whom they may well give money because, as one man put it, "You can't ride a woman without giving her something." These women might be *aşewo*, a term used to refer not only to sex workers but to any woman who is known to take lovers. They may be *ilemoşu*, school students, apprentices, and other unmarried women, but they might also be other men's wives. Stories about men approaching other men's wives were often told to me, by men and by women. "Friends," one man muttered, "can't be trusted. They may come to your wife when you are out and try to have something with her." A husband who suspects his wife is up to no good may take the precaution of using magical medicine that can bring about a horrible death or cause the offending parties to be stuck together as if with a powerful genital superglue (see Cornwall 1996). Sometimes the medicine backfires and catches the husband instead. Wives who wish to prevent their husbands from sleeping around also have recourse to medicines that cause impotence when a man is with another woman. Rare, however, are the herbalists who would dispense such a medicine.

Normative discourses on female sexuality emphasize containment, that is, marrying and remaining "to face their children and their work" (i.e., making these their primary concerns) rather than "running here and there" after men and money. Those women who had affairs were accused both of "liking sex too much" and "chasing here and there after money": Women's sexuality was represented as unseemly excess *and* denied in the transformation of desire into the pursuit of cash. Women talk of having an entitlement to sex, which can be invoked in disputes. Yet, dominant discourses on female sexuality phrase this entitlement in terms of the right to be given a child. Once women have children, they are expected, and enjoined by others, to put up with unsatisfying relationships so that they can be there to look after their children. For, after all, as one man in his forties told me, "that is what marriage is for, not for love or sex-something or enjoyment, but to have issues [children]."

This placing of "love or sex . . . or enjoyment" as secondary to reproduction resonates with representations of the unseemly behavior of wayward women—who are cast as unwifely, and antireproductive. Over time, variant discourses on female sexuality have offered more space for the legitimacy of female sexual pleasure (see Cornwall 1996).² Younger women have come to expect more from their marriages; and for

those in polygynous marriages, the issues of sexual jealousy and sexual satisfaction have gained a new prominence in conjugal contests. Older women's commentaries on the current state of affairs emphasized, however, that sex was a duty and not a pleasure, an element in the package of a relationship that women ought to endure.

situating subjectivities

Love (*ifẹ*) and money (*owo*) are configured in complex and ambiguous ways in discourses on intimate relationships in Ado. *Ifẹ* expresses as much a social relation as an affective state: it is always predicated on another as its object: When women and men talked about love, they expressed it in terms of *doing something* for someone else; when they talked of "doing something," they were talking about spending money. To "spend and spend" on someone was, in many contexts, a sign of the love of the spender; a love that is never for itself, but instead in itself constitutive both of the personhood of the spender and the social relations that spending enables. Expressed both as spending power and in terms of the part it plays in processes of "self-realization" (Barber 1995:212), money is not merely a means but acquires an agentive character in itself transformatory. Money becomes, then, a driving—and always unpredictable, mercurial—force that can transform not only social relations (Marx 1954; Simmel 1978) but people themselves (Barber 1995). Love is equally transformative, and the outcomes of such transformations are ambiguous and uncertain.

The invocation of an idealized past in discourses of disquiet lends rhetorical power to complaints about female behavior. Yet, studies of Yoruba women's lives and livelihoods demonstrate that women's mobility and the agency afforded by relative economic independence have long posed a challenge for securing female compliance (see, e.g., Sudarkasa 1973). Life histories and archival material reveal significant continuities, from the wayward women whose 19th-century fiancées took them to court for repayment of betrothal arrangements on which they had reneged, pocketing gifts in the process, to the traders of the 1940s and 1950s who sought freedom in new opportunities for mobility (see Cornwall 2001). Despite these continuities, however, there are aspects of the contemporary situation that present unprecedented dilemmas. One focus for disquiet, as I go on to discuss, is the broader implications of women's spending power, and of men's economic impotence in the face of normative expectations, for the shaping of gendered subjectivities. In times of exceptional economic hardship, the popular adage "to be a man is more than a day's work" takes on a new significance: as austerity took its toll, many men came to lack the means to provide even the basics, placing women in positions where they have literally had to fend for themselves. The growing economic impotence suffered by many men served to exacerbate the fragility of men's identities as husbands, identities that are recuperated only by recourse to norms that have scarce purchase in the exigencies of contemporary times.

At first glance, it would seem that the very ambivalences that surround the relationship between love and money in intimate relationships in Ado-Odo are in themselves indicative of unease about other transformations: in particular, of affective relations into transactions that leave behind ideals on which these relationships might otherwise have been based. This would suggest that love has become a mere commodity, one that can be bought and sold, won and lost for a price. This suggestion would, however, obscure the ways in which the value that money comes to represent in this context is embedded in the contests that characterize everyday relations between heterosexual partners. Other issues are at stake.

The ways in which love and money are gendered in discourses on intimate relationships offers insights into the ways in which competing discourses make available

a range of often contradictory, gendered subject positions for men and women (Hollway 1984; Laclau 1990). Speaking from the subject position of respectable wife, women may raise their voices in the clamor of complaint about the behavior of those who go astray and wilfully defy the demands that the good wife position makes of women. At issue for women who position themselves as respectable wives is not necessarily that men have girlfriends, or even that men might *feel love* for other women, but that men *spend money* on other women. For women as wives, those women with unbridled sexuality who are "running here and there," mean trouble: for they may well be the women their husbands might be sending messages to or having liaisons with in the stillness of the night. As mothers, they may themselves need to become other men's lovers to find ways of providing for their children or spurn offers of inadequate amounts of money rather than quietly and obediently accepting whatever their husbands offer. And as mothers-of-men, women may occupy subject positions in relation to which their sons become the husband-provider who ensures their needs. Indeed, women may say of their sons, "he has become my husband." This puts their sons' wives in direct competition over resources. Further ambiguities lie in the slippage between the subject positions of wife and husband and other, competing, subject positions.

Representations of female misbehavior derive some of their discursive power from the ambivalence that surrounds women's power in other subject positions and domains. Women's active engagement in trading, as well as their prowess in other economic pursuits, offers them not only independent incomes but also subject positions that arise less from conjugal or even kin connections than statuses acquired in other domains of association. Yet, discourses on female misbehavior fill the category "woman" with the subject position "wife." Questions of immorality dwell on appropriate wifely behavior and its antithesis, the unreliability of wives and the apparent refusal of women such as ilemoşu to remain what people referred to as being "under a man," that is, under a man's control and direction. Normative discourses about husbands and wives make reference to models of gender in which there are elisions but also dissonance between discourses about females as wives and as women, and about males as husbands and as men.

Relations between husbands and wives are clearly only a subset of gender relations, despite the tendency in Western feminist analyses to lend them analytical primacy (see Moore 1993; Oyewumi 1997). The assumptions underlying the privileging of the conjugal relationship over other relationships and relational subject positions have been criticized by a number of writers on gender in Africa. Their analyses highlight the cultural salience of other dimensions of difference—notably age and wealth—and provide a caution to feminist readings that superimpose the cultural particularities of the power effects of difference in Western contexts on African women's lives (see Amadiume 1987; Ogundipe-Leslie 1994; Oyewumi 1997; Sudarkasa 1986). These are critically important arguments, drawing attention to the limitations of approaches that use gender as a shorthand for an oppositional imbalance of power in which women are inevitably the losers, and that fail to make sense either of women's agency or identifications. It is not only Western feminists, however, who elide "wife" with "woman" and superimpose onto a more complex array of relational subject positions a hierarchical relation of power in which women are and should be subject to the control of men. In the mesh of multiple modernities in contemporary southwestern Nigeria, representations of women locate women in the very "coital and conjugal sites" (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994:251) that so obscure other dimensions of their identities.

In the following sections, I take up some of these issues. I begin by taking a closer look at marriage in Ado-Odo. Looking at the kinds of contests that arise in relationships around marital obligations and around money, I return, via a consideration of the ways husbands and wives figure in discourses about men and women, to examine the ambiguities of love and money in contemporary intimate relationships.

making husbands and wives: marriage in Ado-Odo

Ati gbeyawo ko ja, owo ọbẹ lo ọoro—to marry a woman is not hard. It is the money for feeding allowance that is the difficult part.

—Yoruba proverb

Rather than considering marriage (*igbeyawo*—“taking/carrying a wife”) as a stable category, the spectrum of sexual relationships between women and men needs to be situated as, in Burnham’s words, “a bundle of interactional possibilities” (1987:50) that can be drawn on and modified by men and women in quite different ways. Marriage practices in southwestern Nigeria have changed considerably over the course of this century (see Mann 1985). Although some people choose “court” or “ring” marriage, most marry according to native law and custom (see Ekundare 1973). And, in contemporary Ado-Odo, an entire spectrum of interactional possibilities are regarded as marriages under native law and custom.

“Native law and custom” is an almost residual category, buffeted by changing practices and by contests beyond the sphere of fixed claims and obligations. Recourse to Yoruba custom is left to the opinions of the elders whose jurisdiction holds sway in the customary courts. And custom is constantly re-created, constantly in flux, impinged upon by myriad influences from Islamic codes to the admonishments of the new pentecostal Christianities to the images of romantic love purveyed in popular magazines, transfigured in recursively constituted appeals to Yoruba culture. Some core principles can, however, be identified. In “native” marriage, men and women’s property remains separate. Men and women retain rights over their own independent property and earnings, which their children and natal relatives inherit when they die. Legitimacy is no precondition for receiving a share of inheritance. Any children a man has fathered can make claims on his property, which is notionally to be divided equally among units of *ọmpiyà*, which comprise individual mothers and their children. Divorce is a straightforward transaction, contingent on repaying a specified amount to whomever paid the dowry, if it can be shown that dowry was paid in the first place. If a man grows tired of a wife, or if she behaves in a wayward manner, he can simply repudiate or ignore her and take another: Divorce is only sought by men in extreme cases. Divorces are generally pursued by a woman for a specific purpose: to enable her to remarry without interference from her current husband or his family. Few women seek divorce if they intend to remain nonmarried.

Divorce signals an end to relationships that, no matter how tenuous, continue to be regarded as marriages: “As long as a woman is not divorced and no matter where she lives, whatever the case may be, she’s still a wife,” Chief Ajuwon, a retired administrator in his seventies, informed me. But “once she has paid her money at the court and got her receipt, the husband can’t say anything again,” noted Omo Jesu, a prophet in his forties. As divorce implies remarriage, the woman becomes another man’s wife, and as a result, forgoes the opportunity to have her children living with her. For not only may the ex-husband and his family refuse to allow her to retain her children once the children are old enough not to need close attention and can make

themselves useful, her new husband may have no intention, as people put it, of “catering for another man’s child,” a child whom the biological father can reclaim at any time. Yet, although divorced women may be regarded as heartless for leaving their children, divorce itself is not stigmatized—after all, it represents the movement of a woman out of the orbit of one man and into that of another.

Despite the relative informality of marriage in contemporary Ado-Odo, the widespread nonpayment of dowry, and the frequency of informal separation, numbers of women continue to make use of the customary courts to absolve themselves formally of obligations toward their husbands and their husbands’ families before remarrying. Contests over obligations in this arena revolve around normative ideals of what husbands and wives are required to do or be and presided over by judges who exercise patriarchal prerogative to dictate the outcome of proceedings. Their concerns are not only those of men who are themselves husbands, but also as men—as fathers, as brothers, and as elders. In the cases that are brought before these courts, failure to meet particular expectations is offered, and accepted, as justification for divorce.³ Virtually all the divorce cases in Ado-Odo’s customary court in the postindependence period were brought uncontested by women (see Cornwall 1996). Two of the principal grounds given by women were that the husband has stopped giving any financial support (which appears in the court records as lack of proper care or starvation) further compounded by his paying her no attention (appearing in the records as neglect).

contested obligations

Expectations of what a husband or wife should do or be have their own historicity, bound up in complex ways with changing notions of responsibility and of gendered agency. Competing religious discourses draw opportunistically on reconstituted custom, creating a potentially complex terrain for the negotiation of conjugal obligations (see Cornwall 1996). When it comes to the pragmatics of everyday life and survival, however, religious differences make less of a difference. Women have long been expected to make a contribution to provisioning (Bowen 1968; Sudarkasa 1973). Whichever religion they belong to, all women have jobs, mostly as traders and in food processing, and many are entirely self-supporting. Some support not only themselves and their children, but also contribute toward their husbands’ upkeep. Even those women whose husbands support them completely still do some kind of work.

One of the most frequent complaints about young women, voiced by men and women alike, is that they get pregnant before they have established a career, a means of supporting themselves. Iya Mutiatu quoted a saying used to admonish the youth: “Bi o ba nişę lapa, o ko ni wa ọkọ, ọkọ ni yio wa o” [if you have your own work, the husband will come to you by himself—rather than you chasing him]. Financial security depends not on having a husband, but on being able to make it for oneself. A man can take another wife at any time, and a woman can find herself saddled with a competitor for his resources or in a situation where she receives little help from him. The uncertainties of marriage require that women safeguard their positions through their own earnings (see Dennis 1991; Sudarkasa 1973).

Irrespective of whether or not their wives earn enough to support the family, men are obliged to give them money for *owo onje* (feeding allowance). Doing this makes a man a husband. And where a man fails to do what a husband ought to do, his right to start complaining may be challenged by wives who assert their side of the “conjugal bargain” (Whitehead 1981). Seun, a teacher in his forties, told me that all he saw was the money he gave her and the food on the table; how was he to know if she skimmed

some money off? He knew that she had her own money and also felt that if he did not do what was expected then there would be trouble. But Iya Afusatu, a petty trader in her forties, told me that no matter what the men *think* they are doing for their families, most women end up with the lion's share of financial responsibility for their children: "These men put down money and think they are catering for you, but it is never enough. When you tell them they will say, 'You are earning money so you can contribute.'" Many of the women I knew received from their husbands less than half the money required to feed the children. Some supported their heartholds with no assistance whatsoever from the fathers of their children. Better-off women found themselves in a position where to maintain their own status they were effectively required to support their children while also making sure their husbands had appropriately expensive clothing and the veneer of wealth.

Although men are indignant when charged with being useless, better- and worse-off men alike rely on and welcome women's earnings. As economic austerity continued over the course of the 1990s, many men were affected by a loss of income and had to rely on what their wives brought home. Talking of the way their wives scorned their efforts, male friends expressed not only exasperation, but hurt. Giving money for feeding allowance was becoming increasingly difficult, they would tell me. Older men muttered that in their day, women endured and would do their best to make ends meet. These days, however, they would "pack out" on any excuse. One young mechanic told me that some women even leave most of their things at their father's houses and then, when the going gets rough, they are off. What, they asked, is a man to do?

Leach (1991) comments on the covert strategies of Mende women who seek lovers to make up for the neglect of husbands, who in turn may tacitly accept their wives' infidelity as a way of getting by. In Ado-Odo, such covert strategies may provide women with the resources for maintaining cohabiting relationships with their husbands: lovers' gifts can shore up marriages. Men who are unable, or unwilling, to sustain the obligations of being a husband and those who have come to rely on their wives' income to shore up their own social position are in a poor position to enforce control over their wives. For, as Dorcas, a retired teacher in her fifties, wryly noted: "He doesn't cater for you, so he can't ask where you get your money from." Some women gain some of the money needed to maintain their families from illicit affairs. Even though these women may engage in such affairs for the welfare of their children and, indeed, to keep their marriages together, discourses on waywardness and endurance eclipse their intentions.

spending power

Spending power earned by women's own labor can be threatening to men, but this threat is conveniently masked by the image of the wayward woman. Disagreements often arise around the ways in which women spend their money, where men come to resent subsidizing the family when their wives earn more than they do. Chief Kuyebi, a retired judge in his sixties, outlined men's grievances:

A lot of men now think that women are cheating them because they are richer than the husband. Some women build themselves a house when the husband himself doesn't have one. Some women have fine clothes and attend many social occasions when the husband can't do this and is spending his money on feeding the wife and children. Some use the money from work together with the amount the husband gives her. She can send money home to her mother. So men will feel cheated and will caution the wife and refuse to give her money. This usually causes a fight.

Men's complaints focused on exactly those things that provide the means for a woman to strengthen a position of virtual autonomy from her husband: building a house of her own, social spending to maintain informal networks, and support of natal relatives. They are, importantly, also the means by which a woman can gain respect and prestige (*ola*) from others: money, as *spending* power, is itself gendered. Tajudeen, a recently married 28 year old, commented on these concerns. He told me, in great detail, of the installments his wife paid on cloth. This was money, he said, that she was wasting by going here and there to funerals, parties that stretch into the night with drinking and dancing. He was resentful: Why should he pay for the children when she wasted her money on clothes? He went on: "Some men are not happy if their wife has a lot of money. Such women can be proud and do not respect the husband. Some women are too fond of going to funerals and can spend ₦2,000–₦3,000 on a dress. If the husband complains, she can say, 'I have money more than you. Go away.' "

Spending money on dresses for funerals is a moot point when it comes to men's complaints about women's extravagance. Women's social status is judged by other women on the quality of the cloth they wear and how fine they look. Going to funerals is part of the maintenance of social networks. For women, then, outlays of money on expensive cloth for funeral ceremonies fit into *their* strategies for maintaining networks or gaining prestige among *women*. Yet, it is at parties such as these that women are said to go astray and run after men, or fall under the influence of other women who turn their heads and make them defy their husbands. The issue, for Tajudeen, was clearly one of power: *her* spending power and *his* loss of effective authority.

Obedient servility is clearly difficult to enforce by the sanction of withdrawing feeding allowance from women like these who are well able to say, like Tajudeen's wife, "Go away." For, as Alhaja Oloruntosin, a contractor in her sixties, noted: "These days, with so many women earning even more than their husbands, moving here and there doing different kinds of work, if the man complains she can turn around and ask him who is feeding his children." And Baba Lamidi, an herbalist in his sixties, spelled out the consequences: "In this town I've seen a man who doesn't even ask the wife what she's taken [eaten] but asks her for food. Does that man have any authority over his wife and children? If he gives them nothing? No!" Women who use this leverage or disobey their husbands in other ways may be labeled *ẹja gbigbe* (lit., "dried fish," the analogy being that they are so set in their ways that they cannot be changed). Men said that the only strategy to use with such women was to send them away, so that they would realize that they must submit to the man's authority.

As women have gained greater economic autonomy, some men have adjusted their side of the bargain. Rafiu, a farmer in his fifties, said of his wealthy wife that he could see no good reason whatsoever to give his wife any money: "She is in money. How do you think I will give her more money? She is richer than I am." And it is not only women who go after money. These days rich women may find themselves pursued by men in search of a way to enhance their own wealth and status. For, as many people acknowledged, a wife can be the one who makes a man "big," helping him with money to service the obligations that secure esteem, to entertain his friends and relatives, and even, if they don't watch out, to use the woman's money to bring in other wives or to lavish gifts on mistresses.

In many cases, however, women's affective economic independence does not deter men from exercising authority or women from submitting to it. For men hold the ultimate sanction: they are regarded as the "owners" of the children. "They can tell you to pack out. That is their weapon," said Iya Bola. Iya Tunde struck at the heart of this: "There's no security in marriage here. They can send you away at any time. A

woman needs her work, so she can stand on her own." Standing on their own within marriages has almost come to be expected of women these days. But any women who choose to stand alone outside a marital relationship are portrayed as those who "chase after men for money."

positions and transitions

The fast-fading endurance that so many spoke of formed part of a discourse on female agency that did not completely deny female sexuality but placed it firmly within the context of reproduction. The moral imperative to endure carries with it a sense of the bounding of female desire and female agency; it also conveys a relationship between husband (*okò*) and wife (*aya*) that is in itself a metaphor for agency, a relation of power within which wife is subordinate to, "under," the husband. These positions are not always coincident with women or with men, but are contingently linked. Discourses on masculinity and femininity associate particular masculinities with husbands and femininities with wives, but also dislocate some of the subject positions available to women or men from females and males, making these positions available for others to take up (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994; Hollway 1984).

Matory (1994) suggests that the husband–wife (*okò-iyawò*) relation has metaphorical implications beyond the relationships between actual husbands and wives, designating wider relations of power. A woman is *iyawò* when she first marries, subordinate to all adult women who are in the house before her and to her husband's male relatives. Her husband may take another wife, who in turn becomes his *iyawò* while his first and senior wife becomes *iyale*, a position of power in the domain of women. Once a woman stops having children she may still be a man's wife, but it may be said of her "she has become a man," referring as much to the respect she accrues as to her prerogative not to be "sexed" by her husband again. And if she remains with her husband, the relationship becomes one of mutual respect, revolving more around women's positions as mothers-of-men's-children. Whereas *iyawò* may represent a position of subordination, becoming *iya* (mother) places women in a nexus of relationships forged through reproduction but not bounded by it. Over time, women's identities come to be shaped not only by the status accruing to motherhood in itself, but by their association with their children, especially if they are successful sons. In the market, a woman is not known as a man's wife, but by an appellation that makes reference to her trade, as *Iya Alata* (lit., "mother pepper seller"), *Iya Onigari* (mother *gari* seller), and so on. In her own natal lineage, a woman may have younger brothers by whom she, as senior sister, is a person with influence. And as seniority, rather than gender, matters in family affairs, a female elder wields influence and is expected to play as much of a part in family obligations as a man of similar seniority might (cf. Matory 1994).

Not only as wives but also as mothers-of-men's-children, as generators of wealth, and as social agents in other spheres women occupy a series of ambivalent and overlapping positions that shift over their lifecourses. "Woman" (*obinrin*) carries that sense of ambivalence, a "multiplicity of differences and alternatives" (Barber 1991:212), and with it the veiled threat of women's agency—illustrated by some of the sayings about women, such as *obinrin ko se e gbẹkẹle* (women are not to be trusted), and even more powerfully, *obinrin iku aiye* (women are the death of the world: the ones behind any trouble, the ones with power to destroy). Writers on Yoruba religious performance and art (Abiodun 1988; Apter 1993; Drewal and Drewal 1983) have drawn attention to the striking duality of representations of women: as soft and nurturing mothers and as malevolent, devouring witches. Divination verses

(Abimbola 1976; Bascom 1969) and masquerade songs (Drewal and Drewal 1983) are replete with images of a power that in itself is gendered female, bound up not only with the generation and destruction of life itself, but with the ambivalence of women as generators of wealth: not just of money and other material assets that they gain in their own right, but also wealth-in-people (Barber 1995; Belasco 1980; Guyer 1993).

Elisions of notions of woman and of wife create dissonance with the subject positions available to women as they move across and within different spheres. Notions of wifeliness clearly have salience beyond situations in which actual wives obey and endure, or display insubordination. They also form a focus for contestation where the corresponding "husband" fails to match up to normative ideals, shifting the locus of control within relationships. In some domains, women come to occupy positions of control within spheres marked out as those of men—as heads of households and as owners of houses and of land. I often heard it said of women like these, "she has become a man" (*o ti di ọkunrin*): a reference less to the transition into a sociological male gender in the later years of their lives, than the fact, as one man put it, that "they can do and undo." Women occupy other subject positions that are equally available to men, such as entrepreneurs, contractors, farmers, owners of petrol stations, hotels, or transport businesses. All *women* are expected in reality to provide for themselves and their children. As *wives*, however, they are expected to remain "under a man."

The relationship between husband (*ọkọ*) and men (*ọkunrin*) was also often elided, drawing on ideas about maleness to confirm the supremacy of husbands over their wives or to applaud husbandly behavior. These ideas emphasize strength and power and can be attributed to things as well as people: Omo Jesus, a healer and prophet, for example, distinguished two kinds of fibroids, one of which he cast as male, *akọju*, which gave women stronger and more insistent pain than the relatively benign female variant, *abọju*. The term *man* (*ọkunrin*) was used in contexts where commentaries were made on people's strength, courage, and responsibility and could also, although rarely, be used of women (*o jọ ọkunrin*, lit., "behaving like a man"). Idealized versions of the authoritative man-as-husband confirm the association of men with power. Mr. Aiyeteru, a well-to-do trader in his late fifties, put this explicitly:

A man is—according to how we put it—the husband and the landlord. Men marry women and they control them. They are their masters. We control our children and anything they want to do. Women suffer a lot with children, yet men are the ones to control the children. If my wife wants to go, I won't allow her to take them because I have more power over the children than her. . . . If the wife wants to do something and doesn't tell me, I won't be happy as she doesn't regard me as a husband.

However, by behaving in ways that were recognized as essentially the kinds of things *actual men* might also be expected to do—such as exercising their irrepressible need for sex, spending on girlfriends, leaving their wives to fend for their children—men could happily flout normative expectations of what they should do *as husbands* without impinging on a sense of them being men. What men did as *men*—or, more importantly, did not do as *husbands*—could be used by women to vocalize some of their frustrations: as Iya Ibeji, cited earlier, commented "in Nigeria there are no husbands any longer. No man is catering properly for his wife and children." Husbandliness connotes taking control over someone else. Yet, it also has other resonances. Many husbands are not companions, but regard themselves as directors. But women may say, referring to the part their children play, or may be expected to play, in the future in providing for their mothers' needs: "my children are my husband."⁴

Husband-as-provider is a subject position asserted by men, even if it is not actively complied with, that carries with it the connotation of being in charge, in control.

“Being under a man” was an expression many women used when describing why they did not want to remarry, whether they were widowed, divorced, or separated. The issue for these women was not gender, but power: not men, in general, but certain masculinities (see Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994). Women who provide for themselves are regarded without reproval as long as they remain wives. But when they dislocate themselves from the subject position of wife at a stage in their life courses where they are expected to remain “under a man” and do what men do—establish independent households, obey no one’s instructions—they encroach on the space marked as “husband.” To recuperate the idea of “husbands,” a man needs to be figured into the picture. Independent women, then, become the voracious *ilemoşu*.

wayward women? *ilemoşu*

Representations of *ilemoşu* portray the archetypal troublesome wife who went astray, with traits both of the incorrigible *ėja gbigbe* and of the *aşewo* with her gargantuan appetite for men and money. Peter, a mechanic in his thirties, summed up the views of his peers when he told me:

They are those women who leave their children to come home. Some say: “No! I don’t want to stay in the husband’s house!” Some will leave their children behind, others will take them with them. Some men will disagree with coming to visit the wife in her father’s house. Some women can leave their children to suffer, so that men friends can come to them in their father’s house: they take their father’s house to be a hotel (i.e., behave like prostitutes).

When I first heard talk about these *ilemoşu*, I was intrigued. Months later, I was still searching for them. I spent my days with women but had not met any who seemed to fit the bill. So I set about trying to find them. “Oh yes, *ilemoşu*,” said one male friend, “there are so many in this area that they are uncountable.” He went on to tell me lurid tales of women who not only seduced men for their money but also pimped off daughters whom they had encouraged to leave their husbands. “*Ilemoşu*?” said a female friend, “too many women in Ado-Odo do this these days. They can be found everywhere.” I began to wonder what I had been missing.

It was only when I persuaded one of my male friends to give me the names of women he counted as *ilemoşu* that I understood: these were women I knew, women who had told me of the misery of their marriages and why they had left. They were, for the most part, women who lived alone because they had no interest in remarrying. One woman in her sixties, cited to me by my male friend as *ilemoşu*, had told me that she banned all men apart from relatives from setting foot in her house years before as she had grown sick and tired of being hassled by them. Taliatu, a trader in her late thirties, told me: “I have been to the war front and returned peacefully. Enough is enough.” Another was a woman in her eighties, driven out by malevolent cowives, who had lived alone for more than half of her life. Each time I thought I had tracked one of these women down, her story revealed quite a different picture. It became apparent that these *ilemoşu* were not the strident temptresses or “harlots” I had been led to believe.

The stories of the women labeled as *ilemoşu* revealed a twist in the tale. For many had endured, and were willing to continue to endure, marriages in which their husbands neglected obligations to provide for their children. And most had left not because their husbands had proved to be “useless,” but for other reasons. Some had left not because of their husbands but because of soured relationships within their husband’s compounds, escaping hostility and trouble. For Taliatu, for example, her return from what she described as the “war front” was to escape the dilemmas of

living with increasingly nasty cowives in a situation where, as she put it, "today fight, tomorrow trouble." For her, as for many other women who told me their stories, husbands actually had little to do with their day-to-day struggles to get on and get by within or outside the compound. There were women who had continued to be friendly with their husbands, outside these spaces. For many, however, their departure represented the end of marriages that had long since dissolved as intimate relationships and were virtually irrelevant to their lives and well-being.

Other issues of safety lay behind the decisions of some women to leave. Afusatu, a trader in her mid-thirties, told me:

Men say that women who go back to their father's house are corrupt and only interested in running after men, but women do it for their own safety as they fear having more children. Their husbands won't stop sexing them and will not care if they have any more children. Men are not responsible.

Rather than running after men for sex, then, some of the women who leave run away from men precisely because of sex. Some flee husbands who will neither agree to the use of contraception nor let them rest (i.e., remain abstinent). The issue for them is less a breakdown in bargaining over financial obligations, than the additional strain another child would create in a situation where it is almost taken for granted that the man will fail to provide. Although divorce signals an effective end to custody of children, returning with them to one's natal home—on some pretext or another—and retaining a notional relationship with the husband can occasionally provide a way of keeping them, although men can call for them to be returned at any time. These women too may be cast as *ilemoşu*, although they say that all they want is peace of mind (*ibalê-çkan*). As Sen (1987) suggests, the point of breakdown at which women decide they simply cannot endure any longer may depend on their fallback positions, on the support they can call on elsewhere, and on the escape routes open to them. In Ado-Odo, women create for themselves sources of security outside their conjugal relationships as safety nets for such eventualities; over time the possibilities open to them to live as independent women have diminished the imperative to endure. A focus on the conjugal relationship alone and on gender relations as husband–wife relations is only part of the picture, however. Other gender relations (relations in which gender makes a difference) impinge on intimate relations and, in some cases, are more significant in determining women's strategies and tactics than relations with their husbands. Focusing on conjugal relations as the principal sites of conflict underplays the significance of the "wider web of non-conjugal support that each partner's ties of kinship, friendship and clientage weave" (O'Laughlin 1995:76). It also obscures conflicts that arise within this "wider web" that take shape around the conjugal relationship, but in which men's agency is effectively displaced.

Many women grumble but most stay to "face the children." The same opportunities that offer women fallback positions may equally be a way of maintaining, rather than breaking away from, marriages. Neglect may be the outcome taken to courts to seek dissolution of marriages but rarely provides the only reason for marital breakdown. Numbers of women who remain in cohabiting relationships struggle and survive—and, in some cases, succeed—without much support from their husbands. Although women may seek richer partners to enjoy a better life, the majority of women I came across who chose to leave were not women who went astray. Many could no longer tolerate, let alone "endure," the situations in which they were living. Risking having to abandon their children is a drastic solution and one not all can face, no matter their misery.

Becoming an *ilemoşu* may have become an option that women are more able to take up, but making the break is contingent on other concerns. Courting disapproval as one derailed from the normative career of a respectable wife and mother can sever other ties, relationships that may be just as or more important for women's well being as that with their husbands. Finally, some women stay because they simply cannot imagine an alternative. As one woman put it: "Some don't bother themselves and face their work and their children [i.e., just get on with their lives], others stay with the husband and look for their satisfaction elsewhere [i.e., take lovers]." Although some of the women who leave do indeed become mistresses of wealthy men or entertain lovers in the houses they build for themselves, many of those I spoke with had literally had enough of men and wanted no more of the hassle associated with them: neither for love nor money.

for love or money?

Discourses on female behavior emphasize control and containment. But the hegemony of these versions of appropriate female behavior continues to be fractured by the realities of women's capabilities to acquire their own money. Women's spending power gives them the means to contest men's authority within marriages and displace men as husband providers. Making it for themselves, women become their own "owners and controllers." The deployment of the category *ilemoşu* to mark out any woman who removes herself from a conjugal relationship—no matter the reason or even her age—reinscribes women into a narrative that occludes the other subject positions they occupy, rendering these "bad women" residual to the normative "good wife." And for "good wives" and "bad women" alike, a partial model of gender relations comes to mark out the space occupied by women in general.

Love and money are thickly bound up with contemporary discourses on intimate relationships and what they have to say about how women and men are expected to behave, and misbehave. If a man really loves a woman, he will spend on her rather than use his money elsewhere; it is when he does not love his wife that he gives her no money. Yet, many talk of money as productive, rather than expressive, of love: money can buy love, at least until the cash runs out. For some, love that is contingent on money becomes love of money itself, competing with or even replacing men as objects of desire. For others, love is something entirely separate from money. If a woman really loves a man, she will stay by his side even when he cannot give her any money. It is when she does not love him that money makes a difference. As several women pointed out, women can make their own money: it is where there is no love that relationships break down.

Love as money, love of money, love or money: all reflect the perceived fragility of contemporary heterosexual relationships as well as the tensions within them. Access to, and contests over, the allocation of resources run as a vital current through accounts of changes in the balance of power in intimate relationships over time and over people's lifecourses. Spending power is an index of people's status and agency, with implications for autonomy within and beyond intimate relationships. Yet, negotiations within these relationships revolve not only around the possession and pursuit of money, but on the divergent ways in which money is given meaning by the actors involved (Barber 1995; Bloch and Parry 1989) and the opportunities it offers for conversion into other things (Crump 1981). The apparent commoditization of relationships, then, needs to be contextualized within a broader frame in which money gains salience as a means to other ends, and as a force that is in itself both expressive and transformative.

notes

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1. This article draws on 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork in this town of around forty thousand people from 1992–94 and on subsequent visits in 1997 and 2000. Alongside participant-observation, fieldwork included analysis of customary court archives; in-depth interviews with key informants (such as herbalists, court officials, and religious leaders) and women and men of different ages in different parts of the town; and interviews on marriage, money, and associated themes with a sample of women and men in one quarter of the town.

2. This is evidenced not only in the ways in which younger men in Ado-Odo spoke about the sexual advances made on them by women, and their concerns with satisfying their sexual partners' demands, and in the numerous letters making reference to female sexual desire and pleasure from male and female teenagers (courtesy of Planned Parenthood of Nigeria who kindly gave me access to their files), but also in popular representations of female desire in magazines and comics, in which women's sexual pleasure and men's efforts to satisfy women's sexual desires are apparent.

3. Grounds cited in divorce cases need to be treated with appropriate caution as utterances in the discursive space in which complaints are aired and recorded. They do, however, offer interesting insights into the ways in which marriage is constructed.

4. It is also, as Barber (personal communication, 2000) points out, a statement of fact: Children belong to the man's lineage and, therefore, are part of the corporate group that stands collectively in the relationship of husband to her.

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