

VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS IN A METROPOLIS: THE CASE OF LAGOS, NIGERIA*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Voluntary associations are significant mechanisms by which migrants can be integrated into a new urban milieu, yet not all individuals or sectors of city populations belong to them. While it is widely accepted that associations have a role to play in urban west Africa by offering welfare services (Little, 1965), providing political outlets in the broad sense of that term (Wallerstein, 1966), or defining status (Eisenstadt, 1956), little is known about the configurations of membership (but see Meillassoux, 1968). In order to understand more fully the part that voluntary associations play in the lives of city dwellers it is still necessary to ask fundamental questions. For example:

- 1) What percentages of urban populations actually belong to, and are active in, voluntary associations?
- 2) What kinds of voluntary associations are preferred?
- 3) Who belongs to what kinds of associations?

In other words we still need to know to whom voluntary associations are important and to whom they are relatively unimportant.

This essay addresses itself to these questions by examining voluntary association behavior among residents of one suburban neighborhood of Lagos, Nigeria.¹ In so doing it argues that membership varies substantially according to ethnicity and sex. Yoruba and Ibo-speaking residents are known for their high level of participation in several types of voluntary associations, yet Hausa-speaking residents rarely join any but religious groups. The same contrast can be made between men and women, whose membership preferences are not necessarily similar. Examination of the variables of sex and ethnicity, therefore, begins to provide membership profiles of the various types of associations, but these factors do not stand alone.

Participation, at least in this case, also varies according to socio-economic status, the type of political constraints that may be attached to membership, the distance from home, and the length of time an individual has lived in the city.² When a time factor is applied to the data two evaluations can be made. First, association membership can be seen as a constantly fluctuating phenomenon. Memberships are initiated or abandoned in response to life's needs just as associations themselves fade or grow in reaction to societal pressures. Second, it can be determined at what period in the residential cycle certain types of associational activities are most salient. Once it is possible to ascertain when and to whom associations are important, then we are in a better position to assess both their strength and their role in west African city life.

II. METROPOLITAN LAGOS

Lagos has now surpassed Ibadan to become the largest of Nigeria's cities. The influx of migrants has doubled in the past decade so that today there are almost two million inhabitants.³ Understandably the demographic, economic, and political structures have become complex.

As may be expected, the metropolitan area has a highly transient population, the bulk of which is between the ages of 20 and 29. Elsewhere, in African cities such as Luanshya, Zambia, migrants tend to remain for an average of eight years (Mitchell, 1954) before returning to their towns of origin; in Kampala, the period of residence is even shorter (Parkin, 1969: 26; Elkan, 1960: 104). Both of these areas have been noted for the high turnover in their populations. In Lagos the migrant who has secured a source of income in the early stages of his residence may stay ten to sixteen years before returning home (Olusanya, 1969: 75; Aronson, 1970: 156). The numbers who intend to remain for a full career or permanently are relatively small. No more than eighteen percent of the Yoruba and eight percent of the Ibo residents covered in this study expect to stay permanently. These are inflated figures, moreover, since they represent the situation at a single time period and not the total migrant population, of which permanent residents are the survivors. If it were possible to calculate the total migratory input over time, the survival ratio would be far lower.

The Lagos population is one of the most heterogeneous in Nigeria. Between sixty and seventy percent of the inhabitants are Yoruba, but these Yoruba are divided into at least eight major social and linguistic sub-groupings. (Only a small percentage are descendants of indigenous Lagosian families.) The next largest group (roughly fifteen percent) is the Ibo-speaking population from both Mid-West and East-Central States. The remaining residents are of diverse origins, representing the nation as a whole. With few exceptions members of the various groups spread themselves throughout the city, residing in mixed housing rather than homogeneous enclaves. Of course some neighborhoods have higher concentrations of one ethnic group than do others.

The sex ratio of the population varies according to ethnic group. For instance, the ratio is less balanced among the suburban Ibo, who have as many as 150 males per 100 females. By contrast the suburban Yoruba tend to have a more balanced sex ratio—108 males per 100 females (Nigeria, 1963: II/66). This demographic disproportion indicates that the Ibo population is less residentially stable than the Yoruba, if equivalence of sexes is interpreted as a stabilizing feature. More germane to this context, however, is the fact that an imbalance may have an effect on some forms of voluntary association behavior (see Table 1). Primary groups have preponderantly male membership and thus the activities in these groups may be more male-oriented. On the other hand, the preponderance of males has little effect on religious group or credit association membership, where females predominate, indicating that preference can be as powerful a determinant as demography.

In the economic sector, wage-earners constitute about sixty percent of the male work force of the studied neighborhood, whereas 5.8 percent of the workers are salaried in the country as a whole (Nigeria, 1970: 327). Only a few agricultural workers remain in the city; for the most part men are employed by government, industry, and commercial houses (Nigeria, 1961: i; Sada, 1968: 272), or engaged in independent merchandising, trading, or craftsmanship. Occupational diversity is not

so evident within the female work force, where the majority are self-employed traders.

Voluntary associations arising within Lagos' occupational sphere include 301 registered trade unions. This figure represents more than half the total number of unions in the whole country (Nigeria, 1968: 13). Membership in unions is frequently mandatory, somewhat compromising the voluntary aspects of these organizations. Despite this they attract a comparatively small sector of the population.

The political institutions of the metropolitan area are diverse. The city proper, where nearly half of the population resides, is administered by the Lagos City Council, an institution partially modeled on British municipal governing bodies. Suburban Lagos is divided into three districts, each having a separate administrative authority: Mushin Town Council, Ikeja District Council, and Awori-Ajeromi District Council. These three agencies serve slightly more than one-half of Lagos' present population. In contrast to the city, where direct rule was instituted, a colonial policy of indirect rule in the suburban sectors gave birth to a relatively weak administrative system, a weakness that has persisted to the present time. The tangible result is that public services and agencies are less comprehensive in the suburbs than in the city. In an effort to compensate there has been a high level of informal political activity in those areas where administration has been weakest. In the Mushin Town Council jurisdiction, for example, there has been a proliferation of voluntary landlords' associations and chieftaincy councils—groups that have attempted to meet some of the needs of the ever-expanding migrant population.

At the present time participation in other associations of a political nature has been curtailed in accordance with military decrees. The banning of political or quasi-political associations has had important consequences for some types of voluntary organizations. For the most part the large umbrella-type primary associations, such as the Ibo and Ibibio State Unions, or other organizations, especially the political parties, are no longer permitted to function. In some cases where minority groups have been politically weak, the unions have not been banned. Similarly, the lower-level primary associations that recruit members on the basis of shared clan or hometown identification are allowed to operate freely as separate organizations. Nevertheless these groups are careful to avoid activities that may be construed as political, and no attempts have been made to reunite the small associations under an overarching union.

III. SUBURBAN MUSHIN

Given the size and complexity of the metropolitan area, it is not possible to examine voluntary association membership among all sectors of the populace. Accordingly this research project has been limited to one sector of Mushin, a suburban area known to be inhabited primarily by migrants. Mushin began to be settled following World War II and has therefore experienced only three decades of urban growth. Despite this relatively brief period, the population reached 600,000 by 1972, and at that time was divided into thirty politically defined wards. In one of the older and more densely-settled neighborhoods, data were collected using participant-observation and survey methods.

The neighborhood does not mirror the whole metropolis. For example, it is more ethnically balanced than the rest of the city (amounting to about fifteen percent fewer Yoruba and fifteen percent more Ibo-speaking residents than the

city's total). Moreover, it has fewer elite workers, e.g., professional and skilled technical personnel, and no university-educated individuals appear in the sample. Statistically the place of the educated elite is taken up by a bulge in clerical workers (nine percent more than the average number found in the city). Except for these differences the occupational structures of city and suburban neighborhood are roughly the same. So, too, are the income structures. And this reveals an important economic fact about Lagos: wealth is not restricted to certain elite professions. In both the suburban sample and in the city the percentages of individuals earning high, middle, and low incomes are similar.

In this setting, 360 members of the Yoruba and Ibo-speaking populations were asked to describe their voluntary association activity. Respondents were selected randomly (but on a stratified basis) from a neighborhood census taken several months earlier that included 7,000 residents. An interview schedule was administered to adults above the age of 20 in their respective mother tongues by a member of their own linguistic group.

In addition, a second, but non-random, sample of nearly 125 adults was taken to obtain supporting data. Despite the non-random nature of the second sample, results of the two studies are nearly identical. Unless otherwise stated, however, information and tables are taken only from the random sample.

IV. ASSOCIATION TYPES AND MEMBERS

The number of individuals who participate in some form of voluntary activity is high, as Table 1 indicates. The table is arranged to show not only types of organizations to which individuals belong, but also differences in participation between Ibo and Yoruba residents and between men and women. Respondents were asked to specify whether or not membership was active by their own standards, and only active memberships are included in the tables. Political associations are not included because most of these groups were not functioning at the time of the study.

TABLE 1

Voluntary Association Preferences
by Ethnic Group and Sex
(in percentages)

(N = 360)

<u>Group</u>	<u>Type of Association</u>						Total Involved	Total %	Total N
	Religious	Primary	Work Related ^a	Recreation	Esusu ^b	None			
Yoruba									
Men	79	34	16	19	11	9	91	100	(N = 145)
Women	83	15	2	10	25	13	87	100	(N = 48)
Ibo									
Men	44	40	8	2	0	31	69	100	(N = 120)
Women	72	9	0	0	0	24	76	100	(N = 47)

^aFifteen percent of these memberships are compulsory.

^bRevolving credit associations.

Religious Associations

Of the five types of association listed in Table 1 it is clear that religious group membership is the most prevalent form of voluntary activity. It is supported by three-fourths of the population, with the exception of Ibo men, whose interest level is decidedly lower. While there is little doubt that the percentage of those involved is inflated (since the term 'active' has been given no qualitative measure), participation levels are nonetheless high.

All types of religious institutions and societies are subsumed under this category. This means that attendance at a church, mosque, or prayer group is considered a voluntary activity, as is membership in a religious club or society, e.g., woman's auxiliary, youth league, or Islamic brotherhood.⁴ In other studies, however, institutional involvements are not counted as religious association memberships. When institutional (but not societal or separatist) memberships are excluded from this study, the total number of individuals who are involved in some form of voluntary association activity is reduced by about twenty percent (or more in the case of Ibo women).

In this analysis both institutional and societal involvements are counted as voluntary association memberships since both activities bring individuals into regular contact with one another. Members of small religious groups are often known to associate together (sometimes daily), to support one another in crisis situations, or to involve themselves in one another's ceremonial activities. Interaction is also facilitated by the fact that much religious activity takes place in or near the neighborhood where members reside. This is particularly true of Muslim prayer groups and separatist sects whose members can meet in the parlor of the group's leader, in small buildings, on verandahs, or any other convenient location.

Within the Yoruba and Ibo populations there are clear differences as to which religious institutions are preferred. Yoruba are almost evenly divided between Islamic and Christian faiths, with an additional fourteen percent preferring separatist organizations. By contrast, Ibo belong only to Christian organizations, although a few retain their traditional faith to the exclusion of all others. In practice individuals frequently combine traditional and introduced religions, but this survey was not designed to measure religious eclecticism among the city's residents.

Another aspect of religious life that merits further investigation is the level of homogeneity of members within each group. Preliminary examination indicates that some separatist sects and societies draw members from a single hometown or division. One such society is the Egba Men's Association of a large Roman Catholic church on mainland Lagos. While the church itself caters to a heterogeneous membership, its social clubs are divided along ethnically-exclusive lines. Under certain circumstances, these homogeneous social outlets offer a neutral shelter for those who wish to avoid primary associations that once had a reputation for active political involvement. Still it appears that the practice of substituting an ethnically-exclusive religious society for a primary association membership is minimal at best.

Primary Associations

The second most popular type of voluntary activity is the primary association—a term referring to organizations that recruit members on an ethnically-exclusive basis. Primary associations define shared ethnicity in terms of those features that have applicability to the area of origin and not to criteria arising out of the new residence. Thus membership is based upon shared culture and language

(mother-tongue), kinship (clan or kindred), or geographical division (village, town, city, or district). The French term *association d'originaire* is perhaps more apt than the English *primary association*, although both attempt to describe the same phenomenon.

For the most part the supporters of primary associations are men. Among the Yoruba there are two men for every woman, as opposed to four men for every woman among the Ibo. This imbalance may seem uncharacteristic in the Ibo community since both men and women have been noted for their high level of participation. But there are reasons why this is so. The low level of female activity may be a local response to big city problems rather than a more general pattern. Transportation costs and difficulties undoubtedly limit participation within each family. Ibo (but not Yoruba) women often indicate they are not active in primary groups but keep in touch with them through husbands who are active. In addition, the sex imbalance helps account for the preponderance of men in these groups.

The seemingly low level of involvement of Ibo men is another, but related, issue. Elsewhere in Nigeria their participation levels are high. For example, it has been estimated that nearly every adult Ibo-speaking migrant in Port Harcourt belonged to a primary association in the early 1960s (Wolpe, 1974: 83). A 1972 study in Aba shows that three-fourths of the men and nearly half of the women belong to primary associations (M. Peil, personal communication).

In Lagos, however, primary association membership is less widespread and has been so for more than a decade. A 1959 study (Marris, 1961: 157) revealed that thirty-one percent of the heads of households (mainly men) in two Lagos neighborhoods were active in primary associations. The 1972 Mushin study is quite similar: thirty percent of all adults participate in these groups. It may be that Ibo were slightly under-represented in the 1959 sample and therefore the totals were lower than they should have been. And it may be that in the 1972 study political factors had some dampening effect on membership. The banning of the Ibo State Union discouraged some individuals from participating in the hometown or clan groups that once were part of the union but now operate independently. The recent civil war has also disrupted social involvements of Ibo of East-Central State, many of whom either evacuated Lagos or remained there in a delicate minority position. But even if allowances are made for these factors, the primary association membership level in Lagos would not reach that of Port Harcourt or Aba.

The political explanation cannot be over-emphasized because participation is substantial among the eighty percent of Ibo men who arrived in the neighborhood before the war and remained there throughout its duration. (See Table 2 where memberships are correlated with length of residence.) The group in which participation is low is the twenty percent of Ibo men who arrived during or after the war. Within this small sector it may be that membership rates have not yet sprung back to pre-war levels. Essentially, however, membership is simply low among all newcomers to the city, be they Ibo or Yoruba. I shall return to this point.

Work-Related Associations

The third category of association—work-related groups—includes all unions, market associations, or craft guilds. Since memberships are not broken down into sub-types, their relative popularity is not assessed here. Nonetheless a few observations are important. Among male blue-collar workers, particularly factory employees, transporters, and mechanics, there is widespread support of union

activities. Traders, of whom the vast majority are women, also support market associations in relatively large numbers. But this is not reflected in Table 1 because most of the women living in the survey area trade in front of their residences rather than in markets.

Recreation Associations

Recreation groups are the fourth type of voluntary association. Subsumed under this category are debating societies, alumni associations, sports groups—none of which draws heavily from this population—and friendly societies. The latter are formed by groups of friends who usually share the same sex and general age level. Although friendly societies tend to be limited to Yoruba-speakers, they often are pan-Yoruba in membership, involving friends made in Lagos rather than those of a single town of origin (although there are exceptions).

Esusu Associations

The fifth category, here termed *esusu*, refers to the revolving credit and savings associations that proliferate under a number of titles throughout west Africa. Some of these groups augment their economically-oriented activities with social gatherings, but others do not. Most members prefer to be well acquainted with one another since the viability of the monetary transactions is based upon mutual trust among participants. Yoruba women are the strongest supporters of these groups.

In summary, the level of participation in voluntary associations is high and the preferred activities are religious, followed by primary associations, and then *esusu*. Without question the number of Yoruba residents who support voluntary groups is large. Considering the proliferation of associations in the form of age groups, friendly societies, or religious groups in the long-established Yoruba towns and cities, this is not unexpected. The point to be made for the Yoruba is not that there is a high level of participation in Lagos alone, but that in this aspect of their social organization there is a high level of continuity.

Within the Ibo population formal activities outside the religious or primary association framework are infrequent. Women rarely participate in other kinds of groups, and only a few of the men belong to work-related associations or recreation groups. Nevertheless there is a substantial level of involvement; only one-third of the men and a quarter of the women have not voluntarily joined some type of association in the city.

V. SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS AND DISTANCE FROM HOME

While it has been shown that associational preferences differ within each population, further refinements of membership profiles can be made by examining, first, socio-economic status, and, second, distance from area of origin.

For present purposes, socio-economic status refers to type of employment (wage or self-employment) and amount of income. Relative income, however, is only significant when applied to the most poverty-stricken sector of the population—those individuals who are dependent upon relatives or friends for their well-being or who eke out a subsistence income by taking advantage of day-to-day employment possibilities in the informal segment of the economy. This sector, which includes the aged as well as young and middle-aged residents, eschews all but religious association activities. Otherwise income differences are not significant indicators of voluntary association membership.⁵

Religious group members represent all sectors of the population regardless of socio-economic differences. This is true even of Ibo men whose overall participation in religious groups is the smallest of those residents considered here.

When the membership of primary associations is examined, more detailed patterns begin to emerge. For example, male members of Ibo primary associations cannot be characterized as having specific educational attainments, but the type of employment in which they engage is consistent. Nearly sixty percent of members are wage-earners who are eligible for, and working for employers (mainly government or large commercial firms) offering retirement pensions. Furthermore they have usually been employed by the same organization for an average of ten years. No unemployed men or retired individuals who plan to remain in Lagos permanently belong to primary groups although they do belong to religious organizations. These factors indicate primary association membership is exercised among a relatively stable sector of the Ibo population rather than among those who are less securely employed.

Turning to Yoruba men, one finds a similar pattern. As with the Ibo, primary association members tend to come more from the wage-earning sector of the population than from the self-employed sector. Conversely, the members of Yoruba men's recreation groups come from the self-employed ranks of the population rather than the wage sector. Even a few unemployed individuals belong to recreation groups.

Like their male counterparts, Yoruba women who are wage-earners join primary associations. The opposite is the case with *esusu* groups whose members are usually self-employed. Women rarely combine *esusu*, primary, or recreation association memberships in any way. Yet they do combine religious activities with any one of the three.

Finally, no socio-economic differences are found among Ibo women who belong to voluntary associations.

With respect to distance between Lagos and an individual's area of origin, it can be shown that migrants whose hometowns are close to the city (within Lagos State or near its northern borders) display little interest in voluntary associations. These people often are weekend commuters and continue to focus on home groups rather than finding new ones in Lagos.

For those migrants whose hometowns are located beyond Lagos State or near its northern borders, memberships are exercised in relative proportion to their overall numbers. Up to half of the Ibo and Yoruba men whose hometowns are farthest from the city exercise membership in primary associations. Thus proximity to hometown may inhibit certain types of associational activity whereas middle or far distance may encourage it.

VI. LENGTH OF RESIDENCE

Patterns of voluntary association membership become clearer when a time dimension is applied to the data. In Table 2 members' length of residence is correlated with each type of association and in Table 3 the length of residence is measured against the intensity of voluntary association involvement, as reflected in the number of memberships.

The most dramatic trends are to be found in primary associations. As already indicated, men rarely join these organizations during their first few years in the

TABLE 2

Voluntary Association Preferences
according to Ethnic Group, Sex,
and Length of Residence in Lagos
(in percentages)

(N = 360)

Group	Length of Residence (in years)	Type of Association						Total ^c %
		Reli- gious	Pri- mary	Work Related	Recre- ation	Esusu	None	
<i>Yoruba</i>								
Men	0 - 5	71	50 ^a	14	7	7	14	163
	6 - 10	84	28	22	6	14	12	166
	11 - 20	83	36	28	33	11	7	198
	21+	77	25	4	24	12	8	150
Women	0 - 5	86	14	0	14	28	14	156
	6 - 10	74	11	11	22	33	22	173
	11 - 20	82	9	0	0	27	18	136
	21+	90	19	0	10	19	5	143
<i>Ibo</i>								
Men	0 - 5	40	7 ^b	4	0	0	60	111
	6 - 10	44	36	12	0	0	20	112
	11 - 20	48	52	6	0	0	23	129
	21+	44	60	9	2	0	21	136
Women	0 - 5	63	0	0	0	0	38	101
	6 - 10	60	20	0	0	0	20	100
	11 - 20	81	5	0	0	0	19	105
	21+	69	15	0	0	0	23	107

^aOnly three of these members joined before their third year in the city.

^bOnly two of these members joined before their fifth year in the city.

^cTotals exceed 100% due to multiple memberships.

city. Yoruba begin to join in their third year of residence, Ibo in their sixth. Were it not for the disruption of the civil war, Ibo probably would have joined earlier. Be that as it may, it appears that both groups wait to join until they have had time to find employment and settle into a career.

Despite the fact that the first year or two in the city is known to be a difficult period, when job and house-finding assistance is necessary, it appears that newcomers are not attempting to solve adjustment problems by joining associations. Instead they are meeting their needs with the help of more diffuse networks of kinsmen and friends. The fact that primary associations expect members to pay dues and contribute to periodic welfare funds accounts in part for the lack of support from the newly-arrived who have not yet gained a sense of economic well-being.

Table 2 also shows that Ibo and Yoruba men differ in their commitment to primary association membership as length of residence increases. Ibo participation expands as time passes. This is not true of the Yoruba, whose membership in primary associations diminishes as the years pass but whose participation in other organizations increases. In other words, Ibo concentrate more attention on primary associations while Yoruba become more diversified in their interests. Several factors are responsible for this divergence, and they are considered in the concluding section.

As for other associations, the trends are more generalized. One of the first actions any newcomer takes after arriving in Lagos is to establish himself in a religious group. Despite the length of time he may stay in the city, interest in this type of organization is maintained at about the same level. Undoubtedly the intensity of involvement fluctuates with personal needs, but this cannot be demonstrated here.

Participation in work-related associations also follows a general pattern, in that the majority of participants have been in Lagos about five years before joining. Interest among Yoruba declines in latter years, perhaps because wage-earners become fewer in number as length of residence increases. Although wage-earners may be more prone to return home once their careers in the city are finished, there also is a tendency among Yoruba to undertake wage-employment only until they have acquired enough money to become self-employed (Barnes, 1974).

As the years pass, the population as a whole increases its intensity of participation in voluntary organizations. No case is as dramatic as that of Ibo men, whose participation rate in all types of associations increases by forty percent after they have lived in the city for five years. After this time they do not expand the number of memberships to any appreciable degree.

Yoruba belong to the greatest numbers of associations. The more established they are in the city the more memberships they have. While Table 3 shows there is a slight decline in participation among Yoruba who have lived in the city more than twenty-one years, it must be noted that some of these individuals are elderly and poverty-stricken and therefore have lower participation levels than those who are younger and more economically stable. When the former are omitted from consideration, the percentage of residents belonging to more than one association slightly exceeds the number belonging to only one organization.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

There are two conclusions to be drawn from the data. First, during this period in Lagos' history, religious institutions and societies are playing a strong role in the lives of residents. A broad sector of the population is voluntarily involved in this type of organization, and by its own standards actively so.

Like all associations, religious groups can engage in a wide variety of activities, and need not restrict themselves to the psychological needs of members. They can be effective in integrating individuals into their communities by providing welfare services or job and business contacts. Islamic prayer groups, separatist sects, and small Christian institutions are particularly effective in carrying out these tasks. Less efficient are the large religious institutions such as Anglican, Roman Catholic, or Methodist churches. Unless members of these institutions also belong to auxiliary societies, the extra-religious assistance they can obtain is more limited.

TABLE 3

Intensity of Participation in Voluntary Associations
according to Ethnic Group, Sex,
and Length of Residence in Lagos
(in percentages)

(N = 360)

Group	Length of Residence (in years)	Numbers of Associations			Total %
		0	1	2+	
<i>Yoruba</i>					
Men	0 - 5	14	36	50	100
	6 - 10	12	35	53	100
	11 - 20	7	24	69	100
	21+	<u>8</u>	<u>41</u>	<u>51</u>	<u>100</u>
	Average	9	35	56	100
Women	0 - 5	14	43	43	100
	6 - 10	22	33	45	100
	11 - 20	18	46	36	100
	21+	<u>5</u>	<u>57</u>	<u>38</u>	<u>100</u>
	Average	13	48	39	100
<i>Ibo</i>					
Men	0 - 5	60	33	7	100
	6 - 10	20	68	12	100
	11 - 20	23	48	29	100
	21+	<u>21</u>	<u>53</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>100</u>
	Average	31	50	19	100
Women	0 - 5	37	63	0	100
	6 - 10	20	80	0	100
	11 - 20	19	76	5	100
	21+	<u>23</u>	<u>69</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>100</u>
	Average	24	72	4	100

The emphasis on religious group activity is quite possibly a practical response to the exigencies of life in Lagos. Most activity (sixty-six percent) takes place within walking distance of an individual's place of residence; this is the one association aside from tenants' or landlords' groups that functions within one's own neighborhood. Inasmuch as transportation presents difficulties, it is reasonable to suppose that as much activity as possible is narrowed to groups that meet in a convenient locale. National events also may have directed the interests of some individuals to groups that can be considered politically neutral. Still, the fact that religious organizations have wide appeal and are enjoying a period of intense activity should be seen as a complement to, not a large-scale replacement for, other types of activity.

The second conclusion concerns primary associations. Contrary to evidence from other Nigerian cities, statistics show that membership in Lagos is not widespread. Lest this be thought a temporary phenomenon, it appears that membership

has remained stable for more than a decade. The issue to be addressed, therefore, is not that there is a comparatively low level of membership. The more important point is that primary associations do not appeal to all sectors of the migrant population.

It has been assumed that primary associations assist new migrants by providing them with welfare services while they settle into the new location (Little, 1965: 24, 85ff; Middleton, 1969: 47). This study takes issue with that position. Newcomers in Lagos indicate that they do not join primary associations, because among other things they have been in the city "too short a time to belong" or because they prefer "to go home for activities." Job seekers, for whom these groups have been held to be important, report that they also do not belong, because they are "too poor to do anything." Similarly, individuals who subsist at the barest income levels report they are not active in primary associations because they, too, feel "too poor to join."

Stated positively, it is the individual who has made an initial adjustment to Lagos life and has found some measure of economic stability who is attracted to primary associations. Subsequently among the Yoruba interest in this type of group tapers off, while Ibo increase their participation and interest over time. This divergence must be examined in more detail since it reveals a great deal about the underlying purposes of primary associations.

Clearly, associations are only one avenue by which individuals fit themselves into the social fabric of the city. As migrants become more settled all types of social relationships are increased. Familial life is more intense once wives can be brought to the city and children raised there. Social, business, and political networks become wider, if for no other reason than that acquaintanceships multiply. Eventually neighborhood and community concerns can lead individuals into local policy-making circles and pressure groups such as landlords' or tenants' associations.

Still the spectrum of social opportunity is largely dependent upon a group's place in the structure of its community. For migrant Yoruba, who enjoy a numerical majority in the metropolis and whose cultural compatriots largely control local governmental councils, the process of integrating themselves into the Lagos community is eased by familiarity. Once they have found alternative outlets, the supportive functions of primary associations are less desired and necessary. The comparative willingness of Yoruba to settle permanently in Lagos also bears witness to these facts.

Ibo, who are a minority group in the city, cling more tenaciously to primary associations as their years in the city increase. As a group they have little representation in municipal government and, this being the case, their place in the community is less secure. Intermixed with these factors is a reluctance to remain permanently in the city, if failure of women to migrate in equal proportion to men is any indicator of residential stability.

Together these factors support the proposition that a major function of primary associations is to assist members to remain in touch with home communities (Gugler, 1969: 150) and smooth the way for a possible return. Ibo associations are heavily involved with the affairs of their homes; money is collected and sent home for improvements, scholarships, and amenities. Above all, a niche in hometown politics can be reserved through proper manipulation of, and loyalty to, one's primary association. By contrast, Yoruba primary associations are less economically

oriented to their home communities (Marris, 1961: 41), although political considerations do obtain.

In the final analysis, it appears that residents who are the least settled or in the greatest need of assistance are not attracted to primary associations. The same has been observed in Kampala, where the poorest, most fluctuating, and unstable elements in the urban population "are not good material for association formation" (Southall, 1966: 357). At the present time primary associations provide mutual support to co-members who wish to remain in touch with home communities. But it does this after they have weathered the initial storms of establishing themselves in the city. In that sense they have become associations, not for the weak, but for the comparatively strong.

NOTES

* An earlier draft of this paper was read at the 16th Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, Syracuse, N.Y., 1973.

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2. All of these factors, with the exception of political constraints, have been suggested by Southall (1966: 352).

3. The 1963 Population Census of Nigeria revealed that there were 1,089,868 residents in metropolitan Lagos. Subsequent population surveys (Morgan and Kannisto, 1973), undertaken by the Department of Community Health, University of Lagos College of Medicine, in 1967 and 1968, indicate that the population was growing at a rate that would exceed two million by 1972 when this research was undertaken. The figure of two million takes into account a population decline in the city between 1965 and 1967 because of civil unrest and a subsequent wartime exodus.

4. Dual memberships are not counted in Table I.

5. Correlations between amount of education and voluntary association preferences had little significance in this population.

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