

Concept Note for Roundtable and Exhibition

LAGOS: OWNERSHIP AND IDENTITIES (INTELLECTUAL DEBATES AND ONE MONTH PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION)

Date: November 3 – 29, 2020 **Venue:** Institute for African and Diaspora Studies, University of Lagos

Abstract

There are complexities around how historical patterns of identity have reconfigured the citizenship and mobility processes of both indigenes and residents in Lagos, Nigeria's largest city. It explains the multi-form nature of Lagos historically, and presents opportunities to understand how contemporary diversities of the city evolved. The exhibition and series of roundtable meetings seeks to explore the views of different stakeholders to produce a holistic documentation and substantiation about Lagos across oral, written and graphic forms of expression.

Lagos is considered the melting pot of diverse ethnic groups in both Nigeria and in the West African axis. This Lagos has grown from a small fishing village since its founding in the 16th century to a vast metropolis of over 23 million people in present day Nigeria. After about five centuries since the founding of the city, the ownership and identity of Lagos has remained controversial, among history scholars and traditional historians of Lagos, and even in urban life around the city. The migration history of Lagos needs to be reexamined and reanalyzed with the notion of bringing all stakeholders together to achieve a common ground concerning her ownership and identification.

The controversies surrounding the ownership of Lagos is popular between two different sets of Lagosians: the descendants of Benin kingdom and the Awori people. Historical records have touched, on the one hand, sovereignty and the population process of the Benin; with German surgeon, Andreas Josua Ulsheimer, in 1603 attributing the rulership of Lagos to the Benin (Agiri & Barnes 1987). Other records document the migration of the Awori from Ile-Ife (Losi 1914). It is also on account that other groups also migrated to Lagos in this period (Ijebu, Nupe, freed slaves from Freetown and returnees from Brazil) and lay claim to indigene status in the city (Dioka 2001).

Lagos has urbanised stealthily into a vast metropolis wielding extensive economic, political and cultural influence on Nigeria and the West African sub-region. One major impetus to the evolution of the modern Lagos is the migration of diverse group of people, not only from the hinterland in Nigeria but also from other parts of Africa. This expansion also comes with tensions around indigene-settler dynamics, especially in accessing land, political influence and 'the right to the city'¹. There are also tensions around land governance and the urban poor, many of whom are branded 'foreigners', are especially vulnerable to spatial displacements.

The historic and contemporary tensions around identities in Lagos continue to grow, with extensive coverage in the media and other outlets, but limited academic inquiry on a longitudinal and interdisciplinary basis. This proposal therefore seeks to reconfigure the multiple facets of identity tensions in Lagos through discussions by individuals from different scholarship and practice backgrounds. Through an integrated approach, we seek to achieve an understanding of the nature and pattern of these narratives, and provide a platform for

¹ The right to the city is defined as the right of all inhabitants present and future to occupy, use, produce just, inclusive and sustainable cities, defined as a common good essential to the quality of life (United Nations (2017) HABITAT III Policy paper 1: The Right to the City and Cities for All)

discourse. The discussions will attempt to define ‘Who is a Lagosian? Where did they come from? What are their roles, rights and responsibilities? How can these rights be protected?’

Programme

A series of intellectual debates including three panels as well as a photo and archival document exhibition. The exhibition will attempt to draw both academic and a more general audience to participate in the discourse.

A. Keynote Speech: **Who owns the African city?**

Speaker: Prof. Enocent Msindo (Professor of History, Rhodes University – South Africa)

B. Exhibition

One-month long exhibition from invited photographers and archivists across generations on Lagos in the colonial and postcolonial periods displaying photographs and archived documents to engender discourse around the various facets of ownership and identity contestations in Lagos.

C. Roundtable Discussions

Week 1 - Opening Session: Historical Discourse on Origins, Identities and Colonial disruptions: A panel discussion on historical tensions around the debate on the original owners of Lagos, as well as how policies and programmes of the Colonial era influenced the city’s narrative and contemporary identity politics.

Week 3: Artists Talk: a discussion in which the exhibitors will reflect on the theme of Ownership and Identities as it relates to Lagos and their art, as well as opportunities for bridging the gaps between artist, literary and research communities.

Week 4: Closing Session: Contemporary Discourse on the Right to the City: A panel discussion on tensions around land governance, indigene-settler contestations, ethnic enclaves, and structural vulnerability of residents of informal settlements. This will be followed by a closing lecture on opportunities for further engagement and research on ownership and identity complexities in African cities

Participants

Participants include academics in history, urban planning and development policy, policy experts, government officials, as well as elder statesman – Hon Adekunle Alli who has extensive memory and lived experience from colonial times.

Confirmed exhibitors include the Lagos State Records and Archives Bureau, Deji Akinpelu – Documentary Photographer and film maker using both media for social advocacy around the ‘Right to the City’, Amaize Ojeikere, Supo Shasore as well as emerging photographers Nengi Nelson and Ebunoluwa Akinbo.

Expected Outcome

The outcome of the roundtables and exhibition is the possibility of reconfiguring the narratives surrounding the establishment of Lagos, and its growth into Africa’s largest megacity. The feedback from the panel discussion and exhibition will form the basis for developing policy briefs and a scholarly article to be submitted to a reputable journal of African studies. It is hoped that the discourse will trigger a renewed interest in discourses around Lagos, her origins and her future

Conveners

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