

Which Lagos, Whose (Hi)story?¹

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*[I]f Lagos had not existed, it would have had to be
“invented” as a tribute to the capacity of the Black
people to rule themselves or to ruin themselves
accordingly. – Tatalo Alamu, 2017*

Lagos: The Metaphors of the Onion and the Elephant

Today, Lagos is a megacity with a population in excess of twelve million persons and the industrial and commercial hub of West Africa, with an economy reputed to be the fifth largest in Africa. In this prefatory discussion, we shall highlight the challenges of studying or interpreting the city, given the sheer size and complexity of its population and political economy, by anchoring this piece on the metaphors² of the onion and the elephant.

The metaphor of the elephant is based upon the fable of four blind men, who touched and described different parts of the animal that each of them took to be the totality of the elephant. Relating this to Lagos, the sheer magnitude of the population, the size of the economy and the complexity of the city-state's politics and human population can only be described from a particular vantage point at a time without capturing the totality of what Lagos is. Awareness of the gargantuan size of Lagos and its ramifications should have a sobering effect on those who might wish to generalize about Lagos or resort to reductionism out of convenience.

The metaphor of the onion vividly portrays the layers of human population and the intricacies of the history, human relationships and dimensions of the economic activities in the megacity. That imagery conveys a striking message: There is or there could be more beneath the surface or current layer or level of observation and analysis.

The evolution of Lagos may thus be appreciated via the metaphors of the onion (layers and concentric circles), elephant (magnitude and complexity) and, as indicated below, the fruit blender and bread toaster (assimilation and transformation). In the following passages we shall attempt to engage the double-barrelled question, “Which Lagos, Whose (Hi)story?”, by commenting on the many-sided and multi-dimensional phenomenon that Lagos represents in human, spatial and temporal terms.

Which Lagos?

This question deals essentially with the *spatial* dimension in *time* perspective, which also provides the setting in which we can study Lagos. Lagos is thus defined by the territory it encompasses and what it excludes. The small size of Lagos (3,577 square kilometres), the smallest of Nigeria’s thirty-six states, much of which is occupied by the lagoon and creeks, masks the magnitude and rapidity of the evolution of Lagos. Over time, human migrations, warfare, politics, social relations and economic activities have shaped its rise to its current megacity status. Lagos has thus expanded phenomenally across the intercommunal boundaries that delimited discrete communities on the Lagos mainland and, from the late twentieth century, across the Lagos/Ogun interstate boundary.

As is well known, the original settlement on Lagos Island was named “Eko” (camp) by its Benin invaders, “Kuramo” in the trans-Atlantic slave trade accounts and “Lagos” by its Portuguese visitors, given its striking resemblance to a modest lagoon port in Portugal. It is ironic, as noted by a commentator, that the Nigerian Lagos “is now more famous and globally celebrated than its original [Lusitanian] forebear” (Tatalo Alamu, 2017). Accordingly, the critical question that confronts us is: Which Lagos are we considering at any point in history? The Lagos of 1750 was limited to the then lagoon port and the adjoining fishing settlement that had been an outlet for slaves from the hinterland. Together with Badagry, “Lagos” of the late eighteenth century was dominated by the two slave ports, which had a very modest population of fewer than 20,000 inhabitants. The Lagos-Badagry lagoon ports complex survived into the nineteenth century, shaped by the slave trade and the anti-slavery efforts of the

British, which culminated in the seizure of Lagos and its declaration as a British colony in 1861.

From that point onwards, this geopolitical space was dominated by the British while also receiving a steady influx of returnees from the African Slave Diaspora in Brazil, Sierra Leone and Liberia. In other words, the human population of the Lagos Colony was cosmopolitan and multiracial from the early nineteenth century and this character only deepened with time. Lagos played a key role in the interstate wars of the Yoruba hinterland during the nineteenth century and remained a key beneficiary of political and economic developments in the hinterland in the context of the imposition of British colonial rule. The point is that British rule expanded the territory of Lagos to the eastern corridor towards Epe but this gain was reversed in the west by the “loss” of Badagry, which ended up in the Western Provinces (later, Western Region) of Nigeria up to 1967. By 1911, the boundary of Lagos was set at Igbobi, where the National Orthopaedic Hospital stands in the heart of Lagos Mainland today. The Colony was thus limited to the Island and Mainland areas of Yaba, Ebute Metta, Surulere and Apapa.

For a brief period (1950-54), Lagos was merged with the Western Region, a development that was reversed owing to a combination of the clamour by Lagos notables for autonomy and opposition from other Regions, which considered the addition of Lagos to the West as making it a stronger competing force in the federation. Local clamour for the de-merger was crystallized in the slogan: “Gedegbe l’Eko wa, danfo gedegbe.” That said, the boundaries set in 1911 remained in place till Lagos State was created in 1967, encompassing Ikeja, Badagry and Epe Divisions from the Western Region. An indication of the charged nature of the Lagos/Western Region boundary is provided in a 1955 petition to Nigeria’s Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa; the petition, which was co-signed by one Kasali Ogun and David Opeibi Fagbemi, requested the extension of the Lagos boundary to include their village of Ayobo in Ikeja District. The demand was a ploy to evade the “high taxation, Victimization, Opprecion (sic) and all sorts of punishment” allegedly inflicted on Ikeja Division by the Western Region’s Action Group

government.³ This was a clear indication of the desire of Awori communities on Lagos Mainland to be in the Colony.

The foregoing outline of the spatial expansion of Lagos has been provided to underscore the challenge of delimitation when reference is made to Lagos. One way of tackling it is by adopting the contemporary five-division structure of Lagos State: Ikeja, Badagry, Ikorodu, Lagos, and Epe (known by the acronym IBILE, which in Yoruba language denotes indigeneity). This classification of Lagos by political division anticipates the question of which Lagos we are talking about, as illustrated by the metaphors of the onion and the elephant. Thus, the many levels of analysis of Lagos are represented by the neighbourhood, ward or borough of the metropolis; the island or mainland axes of the city; the immediate suburbs of the metropolis on the mainland (Ikeja, Mushin, Oshodi, Agege, Isolo down to Ajeromi/Ifelodun and Ojo); the immediate eastern suburbs in the Ajah-Lekki axis; the Badagry axis from Ajeromi and Ojo westwards; the eastern suburb of Ikorodu (of Awori, Remo and Ijebu origins) and the far eastern marches of Epe (with Ijebu connections). To compound matters, each of these layers has its own intricacies. One overriding dimension to analysing Lagos is the imposition of spatial analysis to it. In this regard, Lagos City/Kingdom is the pivot of every discussion, with the port as its core. We can see the city/port as a node or centre from which to consider outlying (and, dependent) places, such as Epe, Ikorodu, Badagry, and Agege. This is not to promote the hegemony of the city but to acknowledge its centrality to any discussion on Lagos State or Region.

Accordingly, it may be asserted that Lagos as we know it had a more organic (and somewhat integrated or cohesive) existence before the creation of Lagos State than the complexities noted above convey. First, Badagry, Ikorodu and Epe have had strong and sustained military, dynastic, political, commercial and social relations with the Kingdom of Lagos. Those communities were havens for political adventurers and fugitives from Lagos, who rebuilt their political fortunes in those places for a comeback in Lagos. The careers of Adele and Kosoko exemplify this trend. Second, the current reality of a Greater Lagos (Olukoju, 2008) which extends across the interstate

boundary to the southern parts of Ogun State is reminiscent of the way that the District of Columbia has spilled over into the northern parts of the State of Virginia in the United States. The fact that Awori, Ijebu, Egba and Egun elements are found across the interstate boundary gives a sense of reality to Greater Lagos, which, in any case, had been presaged by the water transport afforded by the creeks and the Ogun river. Beyond the physical boundaries that delimit Greater Lagos is the imagined boundary drawn in people's minds by the disconnect between the reality of their residence outside the city boundaries and their economic or sentimental attachment to the city. This is illustrated by the residents of the Lagos conurbation across the interstate boundary at Agbado, Iju, Akute, Sango Ota, Ibafo and Mowe (up to the Redemption Camp), who sometimes pride themselves as Lagosians. For good measure, they feel a greater attachment to Lagos than their fellow residents in Ogun State.⁴

In effect, the question "Which Lagos?" conflates the dynamics of space and time. This is vividly conveyed by the evocative title of 'Dimeji Ajikobi's book, *Marina Wo Ni 'yen Ma?*, which derived from a perplexed outburst of a niece of the legendary Lady Oyinkan Abayomi.⁵ On the occasion of the public presentation of a book in honour of the celebrated matriach of Lagos society and daughter of the famous Sir Kitoyi Ajasa, the old lady was rhapsodizing about the glory of The Marina, a famous landmark in Colonial Lagos. Her niece, who could not identify with any of the things the old lady was reminiscing about The Marina of a bygone era, blurted out that evocative quip to convey her bewilderment. Her outburst was to the effect that she did not know which Marina the old lady was talking about, given the drastic changes in the landscape that had obliterated most of the features being described. Hence, one of the themes worthy of attention is the scale and significance of the *spatial* changes that have taken place in Lagos over time.

A point of entry in this discussion is to pay attention to particular locations in Lagos and reflect on their place names. Alausa, Abule Oja, Ijeshatedo, Ilaje, Ejigbo, Ebute Metta, Anikantamo, Sandgrouse, Oko-Awo, Olowogbowo, Popo Aguda, Apongbon, Boundary and Ikoyi are names and places redolent with deep historical significance

in the spatial evolution and historical development of Lagos. In particular, some of these names indicate the origins and location of communities of Yoruba settlers in the city. We may also note that place names have changed in response to sociopolitical dynamics that might not necessarily be local or relevant to local politics. The politics of naming and re-naming of Broad Street/Gowon Street; Eleke/Louis Farrakhan/Walter Carrington, and other less volatile cases across the State tells us bits and pieces of the intersection of local and national history and politics.

Places are also significant for the monuments that they host or represent. Ehin Igbeti/The Marina, Okobaba, Epetedo and Oshodi (Oke) are places and names of great significance to those steeped in Lagos history. In contemporary Lagos, physical landmarks too are significant for shaping identities, often as bridges and barriers across bifurcated communities. For example, major highways, such as Ikorodu Road, Apapa-Oshodi Expressway and Abeokuta Expressway bifurcate communities which thus end up in different administrative units. Local identities have thus emerged in response to artificial boundaries created by electoral constituencies, local government units, highways, airports, institutions and major industrial establishments in Lagos.

The question of “Which Lagos?” also raises the issue of whether the Lagos in question is the actual physical entity (the metropolis and Greater Lagos), the imagined entity, or diasporic Lagos. On the one hand, the imagined city has been the magnet that has drawn generations of migrants to the city. The imagination of rich pickings literally on the streets of Lagos has generated rags-to-riches stories though some of the protagonists experienced the transitory phase of the proverbial life under the bridges. The city that is to come exists in the minds and is fuelled by the hopes and aspirations of the lumpen proletariat, for whom Lagos is El Dorado. On the other hand, Diasporic Lagos is the vast Nigerian hinterland of communities, clans and families from which these migrants come and to which they undertake intermittent return trips to flaunt their newfound wealth or enhanced status. It is believed that anyone that failed to achieve success in Lagos would hardly do so elsewhere – hence, the intensity of competition in the city.

Ultimately, in spatial and temporal terms, Lagos may be said to function both as a gateway and the veritable centre of several concentric circles all radiating from Lagos Island. Our initial focus will then be studying the political and cultural centre of the State and City, but also dealing with Lagos on its own terms. The second circle extends to cover Lagos State as it is. Next is Greater Lagos, which extends to Ogun State, with Abeokuta as its northern boundary. In this connection, Abeokuta has served as a veritable satellite of Lagos since the era of colonial rule and Christian missionary enterprise. This has been expressed in the careers of the likes of Madame Efunroye Tinubu and Hon. S.H. Pearse, which straddled the politics and commerce of the twin cities. A fourth circle places Lagos in its Yoruba cultural hinterland, which extends to Kwara and Kogi states. The Lagos Diaspora exists in the Nigerian hinterland and extends beyond the shores of Nigeria. A nuanced examination of the concept of the Lagos Diaspora/Diaspora Lagosians will be attempted later in this piece. That said, these concentric circles are linked by networks of human migrations, as well as road, waterway and railway transport, telecommunications, commerce and social activities. The point is that we need to pay attention to layers or microcosms of each of these circles.

Whose (Hi)story/ies?

The question of whose history we are considering when studying Lagos addresses the *human* or *demographic* dimension of the city-state over *time*. In this regard, the complexity of Lagos is represented by layers of migrations and settlements, as well as the widening boundaries and the tendency of the city-state to include and absorb all manner of migrants. Reference has been made to the spatial expansiveness of Lagos and its implications for the peopling of the city-state from antiquity. Locally, we had the longitudinal movement of peoples from the northern Yoruba hinterland and northern Nigeria, as well as the latitudinal migrations from eastern Yorubaland and southern Nigeria (homeland of the non-Yoruba Edo, Izon, Urhobo, Igbo, Itsekiri and other communities). Beyond this is the Atlantic Diasporic reach of Lagos – Sierra Leone and Liberia on the West African coast, together with Anglophone, Hispanic and Lusophone

America, especially, Brazil, Cuba and the Caribbean islands – where family ties link Lagos to the American Atlantic Basin.⁶

The question of whose history we are writing is about how the different groups defined themselves or are defined in relation to other groups and communities within the city-state. In spatial, temporal and human terms, Lagos is a labyrinthine laboratory that keeps producing exciting aspects and dimensions of human endeavour, daily struggles, spectacular successes and rags-to-riches stories. Ajegunle and some other depressed communities, for example, are known incubating centres for big-time Nigerian sportsmen and women as well as entertainers, especially musicians and comedians/comediennes. The overwhelming influx of migrants from the hinterland has created colonies across the city and encircled indigenous communities, which are fighting to preserve a precarious existence in the grip of a bloated megacity. For example, not many will realize that places such as Ojuwoye, Onigbongbo, Igbobi-Sabe, Ikeja and Agege are indigenous communities which have been swamped by the phenomenal expansion of Lagos, culminating in its megacity status. These have been reduced to enclaves, which also coexist with colonies of various immigrant groups – the Ilaje, Egba, Ijebu, Ijesha, Ekiti and other Yoruba-speaking peoples, and the non-Yoruba peoples, that is, the Arewa, Igbo, Izon and Urhobo, who are clustered in increasingly politically and culturally assertive, and often disaffected, communes across the cityscape. The 2015 elections reveal the hardening of fissures in the political demographics of Lagos. The contentious elections opened old wounds and raised the inconvenient questions of citizenship and ownership of Lagos, couched in the claim that Lagos is “no man’s land.”

A No-Man’s Land?

The magnitude of the non-Lagosian presence has often led some undiscerning commentators to dub the megacity a “no man’s land,” an assertion founded on ignorance and/or mischief. The statement that Lagos is a “no-man’s land” has provoked an angry retort from a Lagos elder statesman and former Federal Minister, Alhaji Lateef Okunnu, who gave a newspaper interview on the issue (Alaka, 2017: 46-47). Okunnu made the following submission, which I shall elaborate or critique as appropriate.

First, the Awori, whose homeland stretched from Badagry to Ota in the extreme west and north directions, respectively, were the original settlers in Lagos, having migrated from the Yoruba hinterland. Most of the landowning Idejo (White Cap) chiefs are of Awori origin. Some Idejo chiefs were originally non-Awori migrants who were nevertheless given titles because of their relationship with the Oba.

Second, during the successive reigns of *Oba* Orhogbua (c.1550-1578) and *Oba* Ehengbuda (c.1578-1606), the Bini from modern Edo State conquered the settlement and left their imprint on the littoral community, especially its monarchy, chieftaincy institution and demographic make-up. Such place names as Idunmagbo, Idunsagbe, Idun-tafa and Idumota, derive from the root word “idun,” which was of Bini origin. Likewise, chieftaincy names such as Ashogbon and Bajulaiye have counterparts in the Bini names Esogban and Bazuaye. In addition, Lagos kings from the first Bini king, Ado, to Oba Adele I (c.1811-21, c.1835-37), who died in 1837 (Law, 1978), were buried in Benin. It is worth noting that the Lagos monarch bears the (fairly recent)⁷ title “Oba” like that of Benin while other Yoruba kings (*oba*) have customized titles, often derived from their settlements. However, an Oba of Lagos, Eshugbayi, who reigned twice (1901-25, 1931-32), was styled “Eleko.” It is not clear why he adopted that designation, which apparently died with him. But, unlike the Benin monarchy, succession in Lagos as in other Yoruba kingdoms is not by primogeniture. Lagos abandoned that principle since the accession of Ologun Kutere in the late eighteenth century. Indeed, it can be claimed that, historically, from that time, the present Lagos ruling family lost claims to its Benin origins since its paternal ancestors – the sons of Erelu Kutu, a daughter of a king of Bini descent – were fathered by an Ijesha traditional physician.⁸ That said, while the Bini left an imprint on the demographic, cultural and political institutions of Lagos, this should be recognized as just one phase in the evolution of the community.

Third, migrants of Nupe (Tapa) origins also settled in Lagos, mainly as retainers of the monarchy and chiefly families. Fourth, recaptives from Freetown and returnees from the Yoruba Atlantic Diaspora in the Americas, especially Brazil, formed another layer of the Lagos

population. This fourth group settled in the Olowogbowo and Popo Aguda quarters, respectively, on the Island. To Okunnu's four waves may be added two others: the descendants of persons of servile origins (*Arota*), retainers and former operatives of the colonial military and police forces in Lagos; and the relentless waves of migrations in two post-bellum epochs: the aftermath of the Second World War and the Nigerian civil war. These waves of migrations and settlement took place over several hundreds of years, but it can be said that the status or identity of Lagosians had been consolidated in colonial Nigeria.

Okunnu's position has been corroborated by another Lagosian of a younger generation, Senator Musiliu Obanikoro, and a newspaper columnist.⁹ Obanikoro asserted as follows:

the history of the obaship in Lagos can be traced to Benin kingdom; nobody can dispute that. But aside from the oba (sic), there are other settlements in Lagos which have nothing to do with Benin. The original owners of Lagos are the Aworis and there is no dispute about that. ... I am an Awori man, though I have the Benin blood in me because I am also related to the Eletu Odibo, the Prime Minister to the oba, who is also from Benin. (Aborisade, 2017: 15)

Incidentally, Okunnu and Obanikoro, like many Lagos notables, acknowledge their maternal or paternal descent from either Nupe or Bini settlers in Lagos.

We may conclude that Awori-Yoruba communities in Lagos as we now know them played host to, and absorbed, a series of newcomers. Among these were military invaders and settlers from Benin of Edo State; fugitives, refugees and adventurers from the hinterland Yoruba kingdoms, ranging from those displaced by nineteenth-century Yoruba inter-state wars and the *Ifole* in Abeokuta (13 October 1867); retainers of chiefly families of Nupe origins; returnees and deportees from the Atlantic and West African diaspora; descendants of British colonial-era "Hausa" constabulary and Royal West African Frontier Force (RWAFF) personnel; and individuals who were absorbed as retainers and guests of notable Lagos ruling families. The indigenous

Lagos identity is thus a combination of Awori-Yoruba, hinterland Yoruba, Bini, Nupe, European and other influences over time.

What emerges from the foregoing is that Lagos is both a melting pot and a cultural and multiethnic mosaic. Practically every household, street, neighbourhood or settlement has a (hi)story of its own, which is keyed into the evolution of Lagos through the ages. As a melting pot, Lagos has an uncanny ability to absorb and indigenize diverse peoples of Yoruba and non-Yoruba origins, moulding them into Lagosians. The Awori-Yoruba core appears to have an inexhaustible absorbent and blending capacity to digest and mutate digestible newcomers over time. In culinary language, Lagos is akin to a fruit blender or a bread toaster, either of which delivers a finished product by altering the original element and adding value to it.

It has a parallel in the evolution of Ibadan as an Oyo-Yoruba community since the 1820s, absorbing elements from Ife, Ijebu and Owu, with an Oyo-Yoruba core (Falola, 1985). Lagos and Ibadan demonstrated inventiveness, experimentation and sagacity in moulding disparate elements into a homogenous culture around a core sub-ethnic group.

Yet, Lagos has been far more successful in absorbing and assimilating migrants from the Yoruba hinterland. Unlike Lagos, Ibadan indigenes are identified by their *agboole* (compound in the city) and *abuleko* (farmstead in the suburbs). However, Lagos may be contrasted with Abeokuta, which, unlike Ibadan and Lagos, is a composite settlement of Yoruba groups and communities, which are still clearly distinguishable – Egba Alake, Egba Oke Ona, Egba Agura (Gbagura), Owu and Ibara. While the communities retained their separate identities in specific locations in Abeokuta, individuals and communities dissolved into the core groups in Lagos and Ibadan. That said, for much of the colonial period, Abeokuta was a twin of Lagos as an outpost of British imperialism and Christian missionary activities. These common links, relative proximity and the Ogun river waterway facilitated the movement of people and ideas between both places. Some notable Abeokuta/Egba indigenes have a foothold in both cities till date.

This writer's position is that there is a limit to the nativity question. Any suggestion that Lagosians descended from the sky or emerged from the sea should be dismissed out of court. External sources contributed to shaping the community, even down to present times, but the Awori-Yoruba, the owners of the land, undoubtedly originated from the hinterland Yoruba kingdoms and communities in waves and layers of migrations and settlement. Names and *oriki* of Lagos families are clear pointers in this direction. It is not for nothing that we have telltale place names such as Ikoyi, Isolo, Ijesha, Ijora, Ejigbo, Ilaje and Mushin, all of which have counterparts in hinterland Yoruba communities. The various non-Awori elements cannot be asked to revert to the identities of their ancestors, just as the British royals cannot return to their ancient Saxon roots in Germany. Otherwise, we might have to resort to the absurdity of asking Lagosians of Nupe ancestry to self-deport to Bida and members of certain aristocratic families in Lagos to return to Benin. We would then have to deport the Benin royals themselves (and the Lagos returnees) to Ile-Ife! In that event, the core Awori indigenes can then reclaim their land and aristocratic titles. However, we need not mire ourselves in such absurdities.

What matters, ultimately, is the length and depth of the assimilation of diverse elements in Lagos, a process that combines elements of solidity and fluidity. This is in keeping with the character of the Yoruba littoral, of which Lagos is the major lynchpin, a subject that has been examined elsewhere.¹⁰ However, any group or individual can choose to resist the melding process by retaining their identity and language, and cluster in non-integrating communities in the city and state. Paradoxically, it is members of such groups that describe Lagos as a "no-man's land," having adjudged themselves outsiders in the community where they reside and from which they have excluded themselves while acquiring wealth from it. Clearly, theirs is self-exclusion, which enables them to have their cake and eat it by planting their feet in the two communities of origin and residence, thereby retaining a dual identity as "Lagosians" and non-Lagosians. The same persons deliberately keep themselves outside the Lagos sociocultural mainstream. Such individuals and communities will remain outsiders for as long as they live in real or virtual ethnic enclaves, declare allegiance to chiefs of their ethnic groups and bury

their dead in their ethnic homelands. However, modern politics has provided a vent for the accommodation of such unintegrated Lagosians. During the colonial era and since 1999, they have got into various appointive or elected offices at State and Federal levels on various political party platforms. Some of them have also returned to their hinterland homesteads to advance their political careers. Nonetheless, their presence ensures that the character of Lagos as a mosaic of diverse ethnic, religious and cultural groups complements the city's character as a melting pot (Ajaja, 2017: 18-19).

Both as a melting pot and/or as an ethnocultural tapestry, Lagos is the site of multiple identities negotiated as its indigenes and residents jostle for access to chieftaincy titles, political offices, property and other benefits. Yet, there is another group of Lagosians, the "Diaspora Lagosians," who deserve some mention.

The Lagos Diaspora

Two major categories of the Lagos Diaspora in Southwest Nigeria are hardly ever mentioned in the literature. In the first category are Lagos indigenes who migrated in waves and different numbers from the island to the mainland, the Lagos Districts, Abeokuta and Ibadan. Lagos indigenes moved to the mainland areas of Yaba, Ebute Metta and Surulere during the inter-war years, especially in the aftermath of the bubonic plague of 1926-30 (Olukoju, 1993). They were encouraged to relocate to the colonial-era housing schemes in those places. More of such movements took them to other places on the mainland and beyond. Between 1880 and 1920, the cocoa industry provided a vent for the movement of the Saro, pioneers of commercial agricultural enterprise in Agege (the Cokers) and Ijon (J.P.L. Davies) in the outlying districts of the Colony. A variant of this migration was the enterprise of the Ricketts at Agbowa, on the eastern marches of Ikorodu (Adefuye, 1983). Abeokuta and Ibadan were the other destinations of Lagos emigrants. The former was the twin city of Lagos in the flow of people and ideas, as epitomised by the careers of Madam Tinubu and Hon. S.H. Pearse in both cities. Ibadan was another destination of Lagos emigrants. First, individual Lagos families resettled in the city in contemporary times. Two relations of W.A. Dawodu, Nigeria's pioneer automobile engineer and wholesale merchant, members of the Mabinuori Dawodu family

of Lagos Island – his son, S.A. Dawodu, and his nephew, Alhaji A.R.O. Dawodu – settled at Molete and Mokola, respectively.¹¹ The Daranjios are also present in Ibadan.¹² Second, an entire community of erstwhile workers on the Lagos-Ibadan railway (presumably joined by Ibadan returnees from Lagos) settled in Ibadan in the area known as Ekotedo, which means “settlement of Lagosians.”¹³

The second Lagos Diaspora is that constituted by non-indigenes who left the city for the hinterland since the 1900s. As indicated in an earlier passage, many “Lagosians” resettled in the southern parts of Ogun State having been driven out by rising costs of living. Another variant of this category of Diaspora “Lagosians” comprises the hundreds of thousands of returnees from Lagos in the city’s far-flung hinterland, extending into the distant Yoruba hinterland and other parts of Nigeria. Such returnees might be described as “The Other Lagosians.” This is exemplified by non-indigenous Lagosians who made their economic and political fortunes in Lagos but became more prominent in their native communities, not least the likes of Sir Louis Ojukwu, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, and Ogbeni Rauf Aregbesola. To these may be added two very modest examples from Oka in the craggy hills of Akokoland in Ondo State during the 1930s, which illustrate the qualitative reach of Lagos far beyond its immediate vicinity.

In one instance, a young prince who came to Agege as a farm labourer in the famous J.K. Coker farms in the 1920s eventually converted to Coker’s African Church, returned home as a preacher and emerged king ahead of better endowed candidates. This was Oba Abraham Olategbon Omowa II, Olubaka of Oka (1936-72). In another instance, James Akintola Olukoju, who had acquired rudimentary literacy and experienced life in the Colony boldly challenged the exercise of royal prerogative of seizing as bride his niece, Esther Remilekun. The intrepid James, presumably acquainted with knowledge of citizens’ rights in the Lagos Colony, had thus exported Lagos radicalism to the hinterland. He abducted his niece from the palace and took her to the District Officer (D.O.) in Owo to seek redress. The D.O. brought them in his car to Oka, where he publicly reprimanded the king, warning him to desist from exercising such ancient rights. But James, the Lagos returnee, only achieved a

Pyrrhic victory: His niece regained her freedom but his nephews were forced to stop schooling for the three years that the community ostracized the entire family for its reckless challenge to royal authority.¹⁴ James and the Olukoju family thus experienced outside Lagos in colonial Nigeria what Gani Fawehinmi, Beko Ransome-Kuti, Femi Falana, Chima Ubani and other human rights activists would later discover in independent Nigeria: Fighting for or claiming human rights comes with a price tag.

There could be many such instances of the qualitative impact of Lagos on its far-flung hinterlands. Lagos is that city that enables you to (re)define yourself and to (re)write your own (hi)story, which adds to the multiple (hi)stories of Lagos. This is a tribute to the transformative power of the city.

Melting Pot and Transformative City

Meanwhile, Lagos has demonstrated remarkable transformative prowess and a reputation for turning rustic yokels into denizens, the street-smart alecs. Hence, the saying *Eko Akete, Ilu Ogbon*, which depicts Lagos as a place of savvy, where, literally, whoever is not smart will not survive and cannot prosper anywhere else. It is a place where fortunes can change overnight, where the legitimate and illicit cohabit (*Eko gbole, o gbole*). The transformative power of Lagos is measurable by the number of national legends who owe their stardom to it. First, no political leader in Nigeria attained national renown without some connection with Lagos. Beginning with Herbert Macaulay and continuing through Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Lagos has incubated many of the best known civilian leaders in Nigerian politics till the onset of military rule. In this league also are tested political leaders, such as S.O. Gbadamosi, Lateef Jakande, Ganiyu Dawodu, B.S. Hundeyin, Adeniran Ogunsanya and the flamboyant T.O.S. Benson. Second, military and political leaders in ancient Lagos – Oshodi Tapa, Ipossu, Balogun Jayesimi, etc – have their modern counterparts in acknowledged builders of modern Lagos (Mobolaji Johnson, Lateef Jakande, Bola Tinubu and Raji Fashola) with signs that the incumbent state governor, Akinwumi Ambode, might join the legends. Third, Lagos is the city of old and new wealth, epitomised by the storied lives of such legendary figures as D.C. Taiwo (“Taiwo Olowo”), Candido da

Rocha, S.B. Bakare, Henry Fajemirokun, M.K.O. Abiola, Wahab Iyanda Folawiyo and Razaq Okoya of the Eleganza business empire fame. It is also the site of achievers on more modest scales, such as the famous “Alajo Shomolu,” the operator of a cooperative thrift society who kept impeccable records of all subscribers and their subscription by heart!¹⁵

It should not be assumed that Lagos was a place where patriarchy smothered the genius of the womenfolk. Instead, Lagos has a history of the assertive female, typified by the redoubtable trio of Aina Elewure, who reputedly invited the Benin invaders to Lagos, Erelu Kuti, the ancestress of the current royal family, and Madame Efunroye Tinubu, an Egba woman with marital ties in both Abeokuta and Lagos. The city is also the birthplace of Amazons, notably, Charlotte Olajumoke Obasa, daughter of the notable Lagos businessman, R.B. Blaize and Lady Oyinkan Abayomi, daughter of the formidable Anglo-African attorney, Sir Kitoyi Ajasa. Obasa was the founder of the first municipal bus transport in Lagos, The Anfani Bus, so named because it was run more for charity than profit. In contemporary times, the new Madame Tinubus – Alimotu Pelewura and Abibatu Mogaji – deployed success in business in achieving popular mobilization and political influence. It may be noted in passing that a significant blow for women’s rights in Lagos had been struck as far back as 1912 in the landmark Lewis vs Bankole case. The dispute actually involved members of the famous Mabinuori Dawodu Family,¹⁶ and the court verdict was to the effect that female members of the family were as entitled to inheritance as male ones. The court established that this was standard practice in Lagos, unlike in the Yoruba hinterland kingdoms and communities.

That Lagos is a city-state of immeasurable possibilities was vividly portrayed in the billboards celebrating fifty years of the creation of the State in 2017. Driving along Ikorodu Road, one observed that notable individuals of diverse origins were celebrated as epitomes of the virtues of the city: entrepreneurship and wealth creation; legacy in leadership; performance in office; peaceful coexistence and equal opportunities (“A Home for All”). Lagos is also a vast laboratory of ideas and experimentation of new ways of doing things. This often entails subverting tradition in pursuit of modernity. For example, the

tombs of some eminent Lagosians were displaced by the military government of Brigadier Mobolaji Johnson (1966-75) to make way for urban facilities. That tells a lot about the willingness of a proactive leadership and a consenting community to pay an admittedly high price (this time, the obliteration of landmarks with the embedded history in the epitaphs on the tombstones) to make Lagos a competitive mega city. Likewise, iconoclastic politics is the norm in Lagos as witnessed by cycles of insurgency, anti-establishment politics and periodic leadership changes. This is illustrated by the emergence of the Lagos/Nigerian Youth Movement and the National Council of Nigerian Citizens during the colonial period, followed by the ascendancy of the Unity Party of Nigeria and Lateef Jakande in the 1970s-80s and of Bola Tinubu on various party platforms since 1999. The point is that Lagos has a peculiar way of selecting its leaders and taking a stand on any local or national issue. Yet, Lagos has a less enviable side. The lack of commuter electric train services, a feature of all megacities, is a serious dent on the reputation of the city. After cancellation of the metroline project of the early 1980s, an effort was made during the previous civilian administration to actualize the dream but it has yet to materialize. A second issue is the degradation of the environment in Lagos, which has three dimensions: the browning of the city since the late colonial times, a trend that is being slowly reversed; the haphazard planning of the city, which is coupled with the challenge of waste management; and the unrelenting population pressure which has a deleterious effect on transportation as well as on quality of housing and cost of living.

A third issue is the high rate and variety of criminality that has been associated with urbanisation in Lagos right from the colonial period.¹⁷ The rampant daredevilry of men of the underworld may be traced to the anonymity of the urban landscape, greed, deprivation and a quest for the quick money that has come to be identified with the city. Bello Jaguda, “Omopupa,” Ejigbadero, Isola Oyenusi, Babatunde Folorunsho and “Mighty Joe” epitomise the violent exploits of street toughs and the criminal underworld. They also evoke celebrated criminal court cases such as the Apalara case of the early 1950s, and the WAHUM robbery of 1971 and the Oyenusi saga. A corollary of this is the rise of violent street gangs wreaking

mayhem on the community for any or no reason at all. The Akala Boys of Mushin and similar violent gangs in Bariga and other parts of Shomolu are the worst examples of this trend. To be fair, criminal elements constitute only the fringe of the Lagos population.

The rest of the population consistently engages in civic action against social and political oppression at the local and national levels. The point is that the street is a potent factor in the evolution and practice of Lagos politics and society. This was witnessed during the June 12, 1993 crisis following the annulment of the Presidential Elections won by M.K.O. Abiola, which culminated in the Abacha despotism of 1993-98. Moreover, various anti-people policies of military and civilian governments in Nigeria, especially steep rises in fuel prices or other arbitrary exercises of power, have met a brick wall on the sensitive and volatile streets of Lagos. Such positive instances of civic engagement can be seen in street carnivals – a legacy of Brazilian influence¹⁸ – and the organization of neighbourhood watches and the running of informal and formal sociopolitical structures, such as community development associations (CDAs), Local Governments and Local Council Development Areas (LCDAs).

Lagos is also the fashion and entertainment capital of Nigeria, where the first cinemas, live bands, travelling theatres, club houses (Caban Bamboo, Kakadu, Afrika Shrine) and the music superstars – Bobby Benson (“Sisi Eko”), Roy Chicago, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, Ebenezer Obey, Sunny Ade, Fatai Rolling Dollar of the “O kere si number” fame, etc., made their debut or fame. Indigenous musicians of Lagos origin also thrived, the best known being the bard known as Kokoro. The same can be said of modern television and music stars, many of whom emerged from the most humble Lagos neighbourhoods, especially Ajegunle. Lagos has also produced an array of great sports personalities – footballers, boxers and athletes – often from school and youth ranks. From the days of Teslim “Thunder” Balogun through the era of Muyiwa Oshode and Haruna Ilerika to the modern era of products of Ajegunle street football (such as Odion Ighalo), the city has been responsible for a sizeable number per capita of national football team players and athletes.

The foregoing discussion leads us to two important dynamics in Lagos history: agency and exceptionalism. We shall see how these driving forces contributed to making Lagos what it is.

Agency and Exceptionalism

Agency and exceptionalism run through the spectrum of Lagos history and society. These dynamics have made for invention and re-invention, propelling Lagos to an enviable position as the pacesetter state in Nigerian economy and politics. “The story of Lagos,” it has been noted, “provides redemptive tropes for the whole of Nigeria and how a nation of heterogeneous tribes (sic) and diverse people can successfully congeal and cohere around a central idea of political freedom and economic liberalization for all its denizens” (Tatalo Alamu, 2017).

A striking feature of Lagos is that it has been, since the nineteenth century, the hotbed of agency, driven by the residents’ can-do and daring spirit. It is the dynamic dialectical juxtaposition of various kinds of agency that makes Lagos tick. This is manifest at different levels and in various forms. The rich and powerful can pull strings, but the *sans culottes* – street or area boys, the neighbourhood toughs, the lumpen proletariat of all kinds, who rule and run the streets, with acts ranging from “shakara” (bluff and bravado, depicted in Fela Anikulapo-Kuti’s “Shakara Oloje”) to sheer mayhem – are an irresistible force. The motor parks are places of daily strife and struggle, as captured by the expression: “agbero o ko’ku” (“the tout can stake his life for a living”). The newspaper stands, commuter buses (“Molue” and “Danfo”), recreational joints, street football tournaments and other public places in the high-density areas of Lagos represent the people’s parliament, where the vociferous and irrepressible voices of the common people are ventilated. Popular sayings capture the daily struggles for meaningful existence in the city, which is depicted as unsparing of wimps and unforgiving of failures: “Eko o gba gbere.” The demographic pressure on transport and public facilities is recorded in popular songs, notably the protest songs of the legendary Afrobeat exponent, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti: “Suffering and Smiling” and “Eko o ni gba ’gbakugba.”

Lagos epitomises love for the good life. It may be said that persons cannot pass through Lagos without Lagos passing through them. Anyone addressed as a “Lagos boy or girl” anywhere in Nigeria and even beyond is bound to attract attention on account of the imprimatur of the city on its residents’ manners, taste for celebration and ostentation (captured in the greeting: “Mo yọ fun ẹ, mo yọ f’ara mi”), opulent “owambe” parties, avant garde dress style and street slang (“Jeun s’oke”, “Mo ko ẹ jẹ”, etc.). The “Eko for Show” epithet captures the swagger, panache and bravado of the denizens of the city. It should be noted that Lagos invented the uniform ceremonial dress culture – the *aşọ egbẹ* (uniform dress of club members) of the elite club, Egbe Kila, and the *aşọ ẹbi* (uniform dress of family members and friends), the latter an innovation of post-World War I commercial boom (Olukoju, 2004, 2006).

Lagos has its distinctive linguistic subculture, as contrasted with the hinterland (“ara oke”¹⁹) Yoruba, especially its Awori dialect and the famous Lagos lisp. The non-Lagosian Yoruba tease their Lagos kinsfolk on their peculiar pronunciation of the letter “r” as in “Mo fẹ ra akara tọrọ, ẹ ba mi fi brown paper wrap ẹ.” The Lagos lisp is undoubtedly an import from “Sa Lone” (Sierra Leone) thanks to Saro returnees. Likewise Central Yoruba “mo ti” (“I have”) is rendered as “mi ti” in the Lagos expression. The Awori-Yoruba language is rich in idioms and expressions that define the city. Lagosians of Awori extraction are known for their peculiar salutation: “Ki tii gbe?” (equivalent to the common Yoruba expression: “Bawo ni nkan?”). The distinguished sociolinguist, Professor Funsho Akere, related the experience of an “ara oke” Yoruba taxi driver when he asked his prospective Awori client how many passengers he was to carry. The latter replied “mẹta laa” (meaning “just the three of us” in Awori), to which the befuddled driver wondered aloud how he could cram thirteen passengers (“mẹtala” means thirteen in Yoruba) into his cab! Lagos exceptionalism also has its political dimensions. The kingship and political structures are peculiar, including the physical symbols of authority, most visibly the sartorial style of the White Cap Chiefs, with their signature *kerevesi* (*crevet*). This political exceptionalism drove the quest since the colonial period for autonomy from the Yoruba West. Unlike the advocates of West Merger in the former Ilorin Province and their local counterparts in the Lagos Colony,

powerful interests in Lagos declared the autonomy of Lagos in the slogan: “Gedegbe l’Eko wa, danfo gedegbe”! Such claims are also expressed in a different context in the peculiarly Lagos expression: “Aguda o je l’abe Geesi,” meaning the Catholics (Portuguese) are not subject to the English/British (Protestants).

The ultimate political exceptionalism has been the pacesetting developmental strides of Lagos State since the 1980s, heightened since the late 1990s. Such has been the impact of successive governors of Lagos State that their counterparts from other states and even the Federal Government came to understudy the workings of the Lagos State government in the critical areas of modernization of the judiciary, spectacular physical infrastructure (admittedly dating back to the maze of overhead bridges and dual-carriage highways in the era of General Yakubu Gowon in the 1970s), fiscal administration and social welfare. A commentator noted that “Lagos State with a Gross Domestic Product of \$91bn and a current standing as the fifth largest economy in Africa can be fittingly commissioned to replicate its development strides as a trustee to states that are struggling, after all the Federal Government had humbly sourced some of its economic policies from Lagos” (Gboloibai, 2017: 18).

But this has come at a cost – the disruption and displacement of entire communities and heavy financial outlay. The harrowing experiences of the denizens of Maroko, Otodo Gbame and, to some extent, Makoko point to the pains of urban renewal, a persistent challenge to governance in Lagos.

Lagos and the Rest of Nigeria

As a corollary of Lagos exceptionalism, we shall reflect briefly on the future of Lagos as a part of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. As canvassed elsewhere (Olukoju, 2016), affirmative action should be taken to protect indigenous Lagosians.²⁰ They are becoming an increasingly vulnerable minority in their homeland, with no other home than here, who need to preserve their culture and corporate identity in the wider worlds of Yorubaland and Nigeria. It may be suggested that in the political realm, elective political offices should be reserved for bona fide indigenes of Lagos while appointive offices and the exercise of the franchise should be open to all. So far,

indigenous Lagosians, with help from other Nigerians, are doing well in operating what is acknowledged to be the best-run state in Nigeria. Everyone else has a homestead outside Lagos where they can accede to traditional and modern political offices. We should concede that right to indigenous Lagosians in their own homeland. Second, and more controversially, states whose citizens have been driven to Lagos by bad governance should reimburse Lagos for hosting and creating an enabling environment for their citizens to prosper and remit capital to their home states. Those who find this disagreeable may relocate with their supposed Midas touch to Port Harcourt, Warri and Calabar, if all that Lagos offers is a seaport.

We need to acknowledge that Lagos has consistently been the safety valve that defuses the potentially catastrophic pressure unleashed by underemployed migrants from other parts of Nigeria. To that extent, Lagos has not only shown the way in good governance and the optimal harness of human and natural resources, but has helped to avert social upheavals likely to ensue from popular uprisings against bad governance in many of the hinterland states. As is well known, entire clans and communities have found a haven in Lagos, from which they exported Lagos influences and the profits of their endeavours in Lagos to their blighted native communities. We often associate remittances with foreign currency transfers from Nigerians in foreign countries but Lagos is also the major source of remittances in local currency – in the billions of naira – to the hinterland states of Nigeria. Given that the majority of bus conductors, street hawkers, vendors, commercial sex workers, criminal elements and security guards in Lagos are traceable to particular hinterland communities, their states of origin owe Lagos a substantial compensation for taking the pressure off their resources. However, Lagos would not have been what it is without the productive energy unleashed by most of these migrants from the hinterland.

That said, it can be stated that there is a symbiotic relationship between Lagos and the rest of Nigeria. We can imagine for a minute an incomplete Nigeria without Lagos and an unfulfilled Lagos without the territory, demographic pressure and renewal, as well as the sociocultural influences and economic and human capital provided by hinterland Nigeria.

Relations between Lagos and the rest of Nigeria raise the often charged issue of inter-tier (Federal-State) and intra-tier (State-State) relations, which can be viewed in two contexts. The first context – the national/vertical/inter-tier – is the fiscal and administrative relationship between Lagos and the Federal Government. In chronological sequence, Lagos has suffered unfair treatment by virtue of the cancellation of the Lagos metroline project in 1984, the unfruitful political battles over the control of roads within the metropolis and the seizure of legitimate accruals to local governments in Lagos State by an all-powerful Federal Government between 2003 and 2007. Lagos has always been at the receiving end in such asymmetrical Federal-State contestations. A second context – the regional/horizontal/intra-tier – is the relationship with the proximate Ogun State, the southern parts of which fall within Greater Lagos. Ogun State has been the safety valve for Lagos in accommodating its overflowing population. However, the megacity has turned into a conurbation cutting across the Lagos/Ogun boundary at several points in Lagos and Odogunyan in Ikorodu. It is difficult for the non-initiate to determine where one state ends and another begins, such as at Ojodu and several points along the northern edges of the metropolis. Over time, this has created problems of policing, town planning, land use, infrastructure development, tax administration, census and voting. Unless adequate measures are taken, it is not impossible in future that boundary communities could influence close state or local government elections in either of these states! A possible solution, which is fraught with its own complications, is to relocate the Lagos/Ogun boundary to the banks of the Ogun river, with land swap where appropriate.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Before concluding this essay, we may consider some tips on how to approach the two leading questions in the title of this piece. They are intended to make us rethink some established positions.

First, to get a fuller picture of Lagos, we should focus more on the people rather than the palace. This should strike a balance between hegemonic and counterhegemonic discourses. It is also a way of

capturing the voices of the common people across the rich demographic diversity of Lagos society.

Second, we should look beyond the metropolis, which has overwhelmingly dominated studies on Lagos and its environs. A focus on Greater Lagos is rewarding for situating the metropolis in the wider context in which it has functioned from its inception. For example, Lagos trade up to 1918 was overwhelmingly dependent on its waterway connections with the proximate Egba, Yewa, Badagry and Ijebu hinterlands even in the early decades of railway transport. Badagry and Epe, well beyond the range of the metropolis, were commercial and human gateways, havens for political refugees and fugitives from Lagos, and staging posts of insurgent attacks on it.

Third, as a corollary of the above, there is more to Lagos than urban history, maritime history or political history, which are the most subscribed aspects of Lagos studies. Community history and heritage studies should be promoted to produce a more rounded history of the city and state. Reverting to the metaphor of the onion, suggestive of the many layers of narratives and perspectives, microstudies have a great potential for enriching scholarship on Lagos. Every part of Lagos deserves to be studied on its own terms, as demonstrated by Sandra Barnes' study of Mushin, which ought to be replicated for each of the Divisions and major communities, for a start. Microhistories can focus on ancient indigenous communities, notable groups and personalities (the old and modern *baba isale*), social and political leaders, and entrepreneurs. To this end, it will be rewarding to consult the private papers of local political notables such as B.S. Hundeyin of Badagry and two generations of the Opeibi/Fagbemi family of Old Ikeja District as points of entry into the politics of the old and contemporary local government areas. The private papers of David Opeibi Fagbemi, a member of the Ikeja District Council from 1955 to 1961 and his son, Councillor Solomon Alabi Opeibi of the Ikeja Local Government from 1987 to 1989, now in the possession of Professor Babatunde Ope-Davies, the third generation in public service as a former member of the Lagos State Executive Council, may be a good starting point. For good measure, we have cited earlier in this piece a 1955 petition co-signed by David Opeibi Fagbemi.

Fourth, we should harness and carefully blend the full repertoire of sources on/about Lagos. To be sure, the city-state has perhaps the most consistent series of documentation on any Nigerian community since at least the 1850s. This makes possible the documentation of many aspects of Lagos society relying almost exclusively on newspapers (*Lagos Observer*, *Lagos Weekly Record*, *Nigerian Pioneer*, *Lagos Daily News*, *Nigerian Daily Times*, *Daily Service*, etc.), colonial archives (COMCOL and the CO series; Reports of Commissions of Inquiry, etc.) and private papers (Herbert Macaulay, Henry Carr, etc.). One source that is easily overlooked is photography, which provides graphic information that complements other sources. For example, a study has reconstructed aspects of late-nineteenth century Lagos history from a series of photographs found in the collection of the Basel (Swiss) citizen, Carl Passavant, who visited West and Central Africa from 1883 to 1885 (Olukoju, 2005). Lagos cemeteries, especially those dating back to the colonial period, with their colourful marble works and epitaphs, provide striking insights into the cultural values and social life of the city.

Still, narratives based almost exclusively on the written sources, as rich as they are, cannot capture much of what made Lagos tick without the illumination provided by the rich repertoire of oral sources – traditions, songs, festivals, etc – that Lagos is blessed with. There is an urgent need to collect and preserve as much of these disappearing sources as we can. LASRAB and the History departments at the University of Lagos and Lagos State University should collaborate on this project, with funding support from the Lagos State government. We should also create popular awareness of the urgency of collecting and preserving records of the Lagos past.

Fifth, the study of Lagos is an international, indeed global, project. It is not an antiquarian subject that is the preserve of any class or nationality of scholars. We should not allow nativity or the *omo onile* syndrome to colour our approach to, and the handling of, this elephantine subject. Yet, indigenes of Lagos must play a leading role, given their emotional attachment to the subject, in shedding light on different aspects of it.

Sixth, the study of Lagos is much more than a scholarly enterprise. More amateur historians and culture enthusiasts should be involved

in preserving monuments and records, and undertaking microhistories and localized studies of particular localities in Lagos State to highlight the peculiarities of its diverse parts. The recent effort of Dr Dele Osile in writing the history of Yaba, stretching from Adekunle to Igbobi Sabe, is worth emulating. Such endeavours are timely as much of Lagos as it was is disappearing under the bulldozer. The destruction of the national heritage building “Casa Fernandez” and the “Kirsten Hall” residence of Herbert Macaulay, the acclaimed father of Nigerian nationalism, underscores the urgency of the task of preserving Lagos monuments. Both the government and the public need to be sensitized to the historic significance of ancient landmarks across the State (Oladimeji, 2017: 17). Some consolation may be drawn from the Mandilas project handled by Professor Abayomi Akinyeye, which documented in a colourful pictorial compendium the architectural landmarks across the metropolis. The government and people of Lagos should, therefore, check the obliteration of monuments and cultural artefacts that are the lifeblood of heritage and tourism.

Seventh, the study of Lagos should be accompanied by the teaching of the subject in all institutions in the state. Already courses on the history of Lagos and its environs are offered at the Universities of Lagos and Lagos State University. What is required is the publication of textbooks for use in public senior primary and junior secondary schools, a project completed two years ago that is stillborn owing to a breach of contract by some state functionaries.

Finally, we need to challenge scholars and observers of Lagos with some questions: How did you encounter Lagos? What is Lagos to you? Are you a visitor, resident or indigene? As a scholar, at what point did you engage Lagos – predoctoral, doctoral, postdoctoral or, even, post-professorial – and what narrative appeals to you? The point is that how and when people encountered Lagos will affect how they perceive and present it, and the narratives that ensue. There will surely be as many answers as the number of those who engage the subject and encounter Lagos.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, we can summarise the past, present and future of Lagos as follows. First, looking backwards, it was the Liverpool of West Africa from the 1880s onwards, on account of its preponderant role in West Africa's maritime trade. Second, its current role as a financial hub makes it the London or New York of Nigeria and West Africa. Finally, as a megacity of rising continental significance, Lagos is evolving into the Dubai or Singapore of West Africa. The point is that Lagos continues to evolve and invent itself. Accordingly, the recent celebration of fifty years of the creation of Lagos State has been described as "a historic showstopper; a moveable feast rich in culture, history, traditional politics and economics of perpetual re-invention" (Tatalo Alamu, 2017: 3).

Consequently, Lagos could be the mascot that the world might use to brand Nigeria, as illustrated by this writer's experience in Mexico City, where he had gone to deliver the keynote at the 16th Annual Conference of the Latin American Association of Asian and African Studies in November 2003. Having got his Mexican visa in London some three hours to the flight out of Heathrow, he actually sprinted towards the departure gate. Unfortunately, in his haste, he lost a document issued by the Embassy in addition to the visa. So, at the immigration centre at Mexico City airport, he was detained alongside other travellers in a similar predicament. But he was eventually allowed into the country. The official who summoned him out of the room did not bother to read out his name; he merely called out "Lagos"! This writer sprang out of the place knowing that "Lagos" was his name in that context, a pointer to how we become Lagos and Lagos becomes us in and out of Nigeria. Nigeria and Nigerians might in future be addressed as "Lagos" in the comity of nations!

At the end of the day, two questions, which we have raised in this essay, will likely recur and resonate for some time: Which Lagos are we talking about? Whose hi/story is being narrated? Answers to these questions should yield nuanced, multi-layered and multidimensional histories of Lagos that leave nothing out, while highlighting the most significant. In doing so, we should challenge meta-narratives with verifiable evidence (not "alternative facts") drawn from a multiplicity

of sources and resources across disciplines and cultures to produce alternative (hi)stories, narratives and interpretations of Lagos.

Notes

- ¹ This is a revised version of a Keynote Address presented at the Lagos State @50 Conference, Faculty of Arts, University of Lagos, Akoka, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria, 15 June 2017. It is dedicated to the memory of 'Dimeji "Sylvester" Ajikobi, a scion of the Ilorin and Lagos aristocracy, a close friend and colleague of many years, whose passing on 25 January 2017 meant the loss of a unique source and resource on Lagos and Yoruba history, culture and society. He was more than a colleague and Muse: he was a veritable "Ore bi iyekan" (a friend like a uterine sibling), the exact expression he employed to describe me in his autograph of my complimentary copy of his 2002 book: *Marina Wo Ni'yen Ma?*.
- ² The recourse to metaphor in historical writing and explanation has been justified by Dr. Joe Cribb in a Presidential Address to the Royal Numismatic Society in 2005 (Cribb, 2005).
- ³ Kasali Ogun and David Fagbemi to The Honourable Alhaji Sir Abu Bakar Tafawa Balewa, Prime Minister's Office, Lagos, 10 January 1955. I thank Professor Babatunde Ope-Davies of the Department of English, University of Lagos for access to this document.
- ⁴ I thank Abimbola Oyarinu for this insight.
- ⁵ I thank Professor Abayomi Akinyeye, a mutual friend, for this insight after Dimeji's passing. I had thought of discussing this subject with him a week before his demise but failed to do so.
- ⁶ A recent notable contribution is Lindsay (2017), a study of the Vaughan family in Nigeria and South Carolina.
- ⁷ I thank Dr. Tunde Oduwobi for this observation.
- ⁸ I thank Abimbola Oyarinu for this insightful and iconoclastic observation. This is corroborated by the chronicle and genealogy of Lagos kings in Fasinro, 2002: 45-51; 359-62. I thank Senator Fasinro's daughter, Mrs Kafilat Araoye, for giving me a complimentary copy of the book
- ⁹ Tatalo Alamu (2017) provides an insightful and well-informed discourse on identity and history in Lagos.
- ¹⁰ Olukoju, 2017.
- ¹¹ Alhaji A.R.O. Dawodu, interviewed at Mokola, Ibadan and Lagos, 1987.
- ¹² Oral information from Professor Bola Udegbe, nee Daranijo, 2008.
- ¹³ I owe this piece of information to Professor Tayo Adesina and Mrs Olubunmi Olawoyin, 22 May 2017.
- ¹⁴ Oral evidence supplied by the late Chief Israel Adeniyi Olukoju, 1970s.
- ¹⁵ My colleague, Professor Taiwo Akinyele, has completed a biographical

study of this remarkable man.

- ¹⁶ I owe this piece of information to Alhaji A.R.O. Dawodu, who showed me a copy of the judgment.
- ¹⁷ This is the subject of Osifodunrin, 2008,2010, 2012 and other publications by the author.
- ¹⁸ *Gari* (known as *farina* in Lagos up to the 1920s) was another Brazilian import, which had become a staple food by the 1930s.
- ¹⁹ “Ara oke” has the topographical denotation of “upland”, while it has the connotation of “yokel” or “provincial.”
- ²⁰ A recent study of the struggle for autonomy by indigenous Lagosians is Akinyele (2015).

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