

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

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. The Lagos: Ownership and Identities events therefore seek 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 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?

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)



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LAGOS: OWNERSHIP AND IDENTITIES

A Month-long Programme of Roundtables, Discussions and Exhibitions

The Lagos African Cluster Centre (LAGOS ACC) is a centre domiciled in the Institute of African and Diaspora Studies, University of Lagos, Nigeria. The aim of the Centre is to reconfigure African Studies and open new vistas of multidisciplinary and multisectoral enquiry and engagement. In line with this, the Lagos ACC will be hosting a series of roundtables, discussions and exhibitions with the theme “Lagos: Ownership and Identities”

Below are the details of the series of events for the month:

1. Premiere of Documentary on Lagos Ownership and Identities

Date: 2nd of November, 2020

Time: 11:00am

Venue: Board Room, Faculty of Arts, University of Lagos

Zoom link: <https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJMsdeygrD8uHdSgWAm-SuoYeZMzP0jrx41d>

2. Opening Session: Historical Discourse on Origins, Identities and Colonial disruptions

Keynote Speaker: Prof. Enocent Msindo (Rhodes University, South Africa)

Topic: **African Urbanisms: Histories, Trajectories and Challenges**

Date: 3rd November, 2020

Time: 11:00am

Venue: Authur Mbanefo Digital Research Centre, Beside Medical Centre, University of Lagos

Zoom link: <https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJ0kf-uqrzkeE9ODWLTJumXHEFbxpt-wyCVg>

3. Photo Exhibition on Lagos Ownership and Identities

Date: 3rd November – 29th November, 2020

Time: 10:00am – 6:00pm Daily

Venue: Gallery, Institute of African and Diaspora Studies, J.P. Clark Building, University of Lagos.

4. Artists Roundtable

Date: 19th November, 2020

Time: 11:00am

Venue: Institute of African and Diaspora Studies, J.P. Clark Building, University of Lagos

Zoom link: <https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJ0pfu-trjkqH92sXW6WbZZOWH-4thNkyoOS>

5. Closing Session: Discourse on Current Tensions relating to Indigeneship, Citizenship and the Right to the City

Speaker: Dr. Taibat Lawanson

Topic: **Who Owns the City? Reflections and Emerging Perspectives for Research and Engagement**

Date: 29th November, 2020

Time: 2:00pm

Venue: Board Room, Faculty of Arts, University of Lagos

Zoom link: https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJ0qfuqsqzwpGtbZ_JnFv52KLMjoCvLgxmWr

For further information, visit project microsite: https://iads.unilag.edu.ng/lacc/?page_id=1617

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