



From an Invocation Space to a Commercial Emporium: The Evolutionary Dynamics of the Ladipo Auto Spare Parts Flea Market in Lagos, Nigeria – the 1950s to 2016¹

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Abstract

So much has been written about the municipal polities, economy and society in Nigeria with emphasis on Lagos. However, little attention has been given to the peculiar features and dynamics of spaces within Lagos whose constitutive nature and activities have had enormous implications for organization of social existence, politics, trade and inter-ethnic relations in Nigeria, and for (in)formal economies in Africa. One enduring economic space which has emblemized the enterprise of low-end globalization in the informal economy arena in Nigeria is the Ladipo auto spare parts market in Lagos. Ladipo has transformed from an inconspicuous ritual space to a twenty-first-century mega flea market. This article tracks the developmental trajectory of Ladipo and its streets' spare parts trade in metropolitan Lagos. It interrogates the transformation of a religious space into a market, the spread and organization of trade, the regulatory institutions and associations that have evolved and how Ladipo has become a vote bank and platform for sub-regional economic interaction. It examines the interface between trade, politics and religion. It analyzes the changes and adaptation in the ethnic composition of Mushin, factors responsible and the impact of these dynamics. It concludes that without structural adjustment there may not have been the Ladipo flea market. Without the market, it would not have become a commercial hub for the spare parts' trade and skill specialisation which would also have diminished Igbo influence in contemporary Lagos politics. It has also helped to create a dynamic trade culture that has helped to improve livelihoods and to blur ethnic and economic boundaries among the different ethnicities that constitute the market space, thus fostering peace among the different ethnicities in Lagos and by extension, Nigeria.

Keywords: Lagos, invocation space, Ladipo flea market, trade culture, trade associations.

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Résumé

Tant de choses ont été écrites sur les politiques municipales, l'économie et la société au Nigeria, en particulier à Lagos. Cependant, peu d'attention a été accordée aux caractéristiques singulières et dynamiques d'espaces à l'intérieur de Lagos dont le mode de constitution et les activités ont eu des grandes implications dans l'organisation de la vie sociale, la politique, le commerce et les relations interethniques au Nigéria et pour les économies (in) formelles en Afrique. Un espace économique durable qui a symbolisé l'entreprise de mondialisation de bas niveau dans le secteur de l'économie informelle au Nigéria est le marché de pièces de rechange automobiles de Ladipo à Lagos. Ladipo est passé d'un espace de culte discret à un méga marché aux puces du XXe siècle. Cet article retrace la trajectoire de développement de Ladipo et le commerce de pièces de rechange de ses rues dans la métropole de Lagos. Il interroge la transformation d'un espace religieux en marché, la propagation et l'organisation du commerce, les institutions et associations de régulation qui s'y sont développées et comment Ladipo est devenu un réservoir de votes et une plate-forme sous-régionale d'interaction économique. Il examine l'interface entre commerce, politique et religion. Il analyse les changements et l'adaptation dans la composition ethnique du quartier de Mushin, les facteurs responsables et l'impact de ces dynamiques. Il conclut que sans ajustement structurel, le marché aux puces de Ladipo n'aurait peut-être jamais existé. Sans le marché, Ladipo ne serait pas devenu un centre commercial de pièces de rechange et de spécialisation des compétences, ce qui aurait également réduit l'influence des Igbo dans la politique du Lagos contemporain. Il a également contribué à créer une culture commerciale dynamique qui a amélioré les moyens de subsistance et estompé les frontières ethniques et économiques entre les différentes ethnies qui constituent le marché, favorisant ainsi la paix entre les différentes ethnies de Lagos et, par extension, du Nigéria.

Mots-clés : Lagos, espace de culte, marché aux puces de Ladipo, culture commerciale, associations commerciales

Introduction

In her seminal work on Mushin, Lagos, *Patrons and power: Creating a political community in metropolitan Lagos*, Barnes affirmed that in 1972, the Yoruba and the Igbo population in the enclave were about the same (Barnes 1986:77). Little did Barnes know that the Ladipo Market street, embedded in the heart of Mushin, would become a major commercial player in low-end globalization and bring regional and global visibility to the area in just three decades. With the exception of just a few works (for example, Barnes 1986; Olukoju, 2005–2006), studies of the metropolitan politics, economy and society in Nigeria have focused on changes at the macro level. This is particularly true of Lagos, which has been studied as a city in its own right or as an integral part of the Nigerian federation. While micro-studies have their limitations, not least the constricted focus and inclination to amplify details, they are useful for uncovering the unusual features and dynamics of

particular constituencies, areas or sections of a multicultural mega-city like Lagos whose influence and cultural affluence extends well beyond its boundaries (Fourchard 2011:66-68). This article interrogates the evolutionary dynamics of the flea market on Ladipo streets, the agency of traders, and the roles of their embedded structures, the actors and institutions in a densely populated space. It not only draws attention to local dynamics (which are often ignored or lost in the undergrowth of oversimplification), but also highlights implications the street trade has had for socio-economic existence and intergroup relations.

Markets are central to the socio-economic and political lives of human societies, not least the inhabitants of Lagos. Beyond their economic utilitarian value, markets are important spaces for a variety of social exchanges and interaction. Multiple forms of sociality are enacted in these spaces and this in turn strengthens communal ties. They are also sites for reproduction of public discontent and disputes where conflicting interests are negotiated (Held 2017:2). Activities in these spaces have consequential implications for the larger human society. **In existing literature on markets in Nigeria, there are no serious academic works on Ladipo, Lagos, its evolutionary nature or the growth of its spare parts trade despite the site's popularisation of low-end globalisation in Nigeria.** Works related to Ladipo Market in Lagos include that by Grossman (2017) who compared the associational mode of governance in two Lagos markets (Oke Aarin and Ladipo markets) and affirmed that the former exhibited traits of good governance in market administration while the market leaders in the latter displayed behaviour illustrative of predatory control. Grossman's conjecture is faulty because in Ladipo Market, the layers of authority relations, the federated nature of the market unions and the holding of periodic democratic elections (where varied views are represented) have helped to disincentivise episodes of dictatorial control and conflict while it has ensured that elected union leaders grow relationships that strengthen peace and unity among local networks.

Ogboo (2011) in her dissertation examined the spatial interaction of goods and traders between Ladipo Mmarket, the Auto Spare Parts and Machinery Dealers Association (ASPAMDA) in Ojo, Lagos and supply points in Europe, Asia and North America. She posited that traders in both spaces have contributed a great deal to both the economic and spatial development of Lagos. The establishment of the roll-on-roll-off (RORO) port infrastructure in Lagos clearly demonstrates Nigeria's active participation in the globalization process essentially driven by these two markets. Neuwirth (2011) analysed the activities of informal sector workers globally and made allusion to the resourcefulness and entrepreneurial initiatives exhibited by Ladipo Market

street traders. For Neuwirth, this reinforced Ladipo Market's indispensability in the new global economy. **The received wisdom in Ekere's (2007) and Ukpebor's (2007) works is that Ladipo Market in Lagos remains central to the sale, supply and redistribution of vehicle spare parts to Nigerian and West African markets.** Afolayan et al. (2011) discussed the dynamics of local and international mobility of traders in the informal sector with ASPAMDA, a market similar to Ladipo Market as one of the sites for interrogation. They tracked the shifting demographic pattern of traders' movement within Africa, Western Europe and North America, giving us insight into the age groups of different categories of most Igbo traders and the motive for their involvement in the spare parts trade. Barnes (1975, 1986), Fourchard (2011), Ayodeji (2003, 2005-2006), Aluko (2010) and Keziah (2009) all interrogated important issues of urbanisation, infrastructural development, traditional institutions and modern state actors in Lagos without specific focus on Ladipo Market. The value of these works lies in their exposé on urbanisation matters in Lagos which has helped to create some good background for this current study.

This study departs from these earlier works as it focuses on the evolutionary nature of Ladipo Market and how the market has helped to redefine relations in the socio political and economic landscape of Lagos. It examines the evolutionary nature of the prayer canal in Ladipo, its transformation and the development of the spare parts market in the same geographical space. The identification of sub markets within the larger Ladipo Market and an interrogation of how the traders within such spaces interact to maintain seamless trade transactions despite the potentials for conflict are also addressed. The work also analyses how informal traders and artisans within the market organise their own social existence outside of the framework of the state. The response of market associations to infrastructural deficit and state failure in the evolution of good market policies is also interrogated.

The spatial and ethnographic context

The Lagos metropolis, home to the Ladipo international auto spare parts market, is located on the Southwest coast of Nigeria. The Lagos metropolis comprises both the island and mainland. The mainland includes Yaba, Ebute Metta, Ojo, Apapa, Oshodi, Isolo, Shomolu, Surulere and Mushin. The metropolis spreads in all directions to include former suburbs which are now thriving residential and commercial centres (Afolayan et al. 2011:24-27). The centre of the city's formal economy is Lagos Island; however, most banks, departmental stores and businesses maintain a strong presence at the western end, across the Lagos seaport from the mainland. The

Lagos metropolis is both Nigeria's and Africa's most populous urban hub (Babajide et al. 2014:66; Oshodi et al. 2016:20). Over the past five decades, the population size of metropolitan Lagos has grown from less than a million to more than 23 million people today. It is ranked seventh among the largest cities of the world and one of the fastest growing cities on the planet (Afolayan et al. 2011:24-25).

The evolution of Lagos has been due to its administrative function, commercial vitality and overwhelming trade potential (Neuwirth 2011:31-33).²

For over three decades, it was the seat of government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, before it moved to Abuja. Lagos is home to over 65 per cent of Nigeria's total commercial activities and about 250 major financial institutions (Ogunleye 2016:4; Lagos 2012:32). It has over 80 per cent of the national and multinational corporations in Nigeria concentrated within its state borders and driving its economy (Nwoko and Osiki 2016:125). Its status as the chief air and seaport city of the country means that it is also the most densely inhabited conurbation in Nigeria (Afolayan et al. 2011; Hopkins 1968:584; Barnes 1973:77). Constantly attracting diverse groups of people, modern Lagos is an amalgam of peoples, ethnicities and nationalities from within and outside Nigeria. This agglomeration has exerted great pressure on the critical infrastructure. The dearth of financial resources and land to build necessary facilities to meet the needs of this teeming people has meant that market facilities in Lagos are overcrowded (Oyekanmi 1987:264). **How did Ladipo Market start out and why?**

From a prayer forest to an informal market: the Odo Aladura community

In the early 1950s, a faction of independent African churches, otherwise known as the Aladura churches, that were seeking cheap and free land moved from the Lagos hinterland into uninhabited land in the Ladipo area of Mushin². The church founders, led by David Ogunsanya, came together, created their own commune and began paying rent of two shillings six pence per month to the Isolo owners of the land (Champion 1993:23). The land was swampy and heavily forested. It was initially called Iju Aladura (prayer forest) by the religious community³. As urbanization increased, the swamp land appreciated in value. Incidentally, the land tenure system then in Nigeria was such that ownership of land was vested in the traditional authorities. Thus, by 1969 Oba Disu Farombi of Isolo land, Lagos requested the chairman of the Aladura community to purchase the land. The community paid two pounds and two shillings to the Oba (Champion 1993:23). The church leaders built semi-permanent structures, which included churches, mission houses and other

buildings (Sunday Telegraph 2016:6). As the forest receded because of human activities, Iju Aladura (prayer forest) was renamed Odo Aladura (prayer canal) as the swampy nature could not be altered. The swamp met critical domestic and spiritual needs of the religious community. Among the Aladura, water is used to solve existential problems of individuals through ritual baths; the Aladura churches believe that ritual baths fortify children against wicked human agents and unseen negative forces, and ward off danger⁴ (Baiyewu 2014:20). Most Aladura churches are located around wetlands for easy access to water.

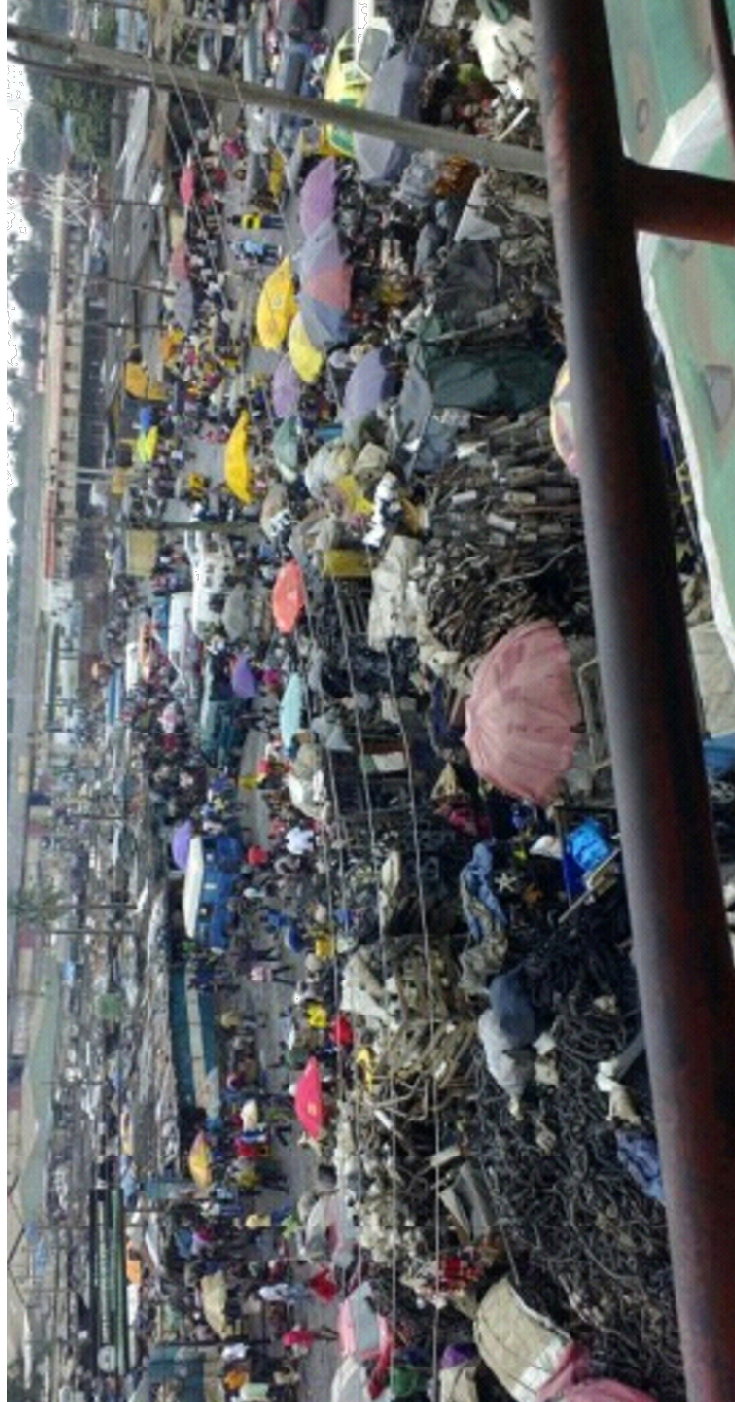
In 1978, the federal military government instituted the Land Use Act which vested ownership of all lands in the country in the federal government. However, the state government held it in trust for the federal government (Nwoko 2016: 81-82). In that same year, the federal government took over ownership of the land occupied by the Aladura group without displacing them. Nevertheless, Alhaji Owoyemi, a neighbour in the community sought to exploit the Land Use Act to evict the Aladura churches and wrest ownership of the land from them. The Oba of Isolo intervened by convening a peace meeting between both parties. The issue was resolved and the churches were allowed to remain. Again in 1979, Bisiriyu Farombi, the son of Oba of Isolo, approached the Aladura community and extorted ₦ 1500 from each church leader. In 1981, Governor Lateef Jakande of Lagos state accused the Aladura churches of building illegal structures on land in the area. For this, the churches were made to pay fines of one thousand naira (₦ 1000) each (Champion 1993:23). In 1985, the then military Governor of Lagos state, Colonel Raji Rasaki, as part of his urban renewal programme, dredged the swampy land area in Ladipo creating a canal with embankments on both sides⁵. The Aladura community lost some land in this process and subsequently decided to lease portions of their undeveloped land to Igbo traders who were now trickling into the Ladipo area.

Several considerations led the Aladura community to lease their land to the Igbo traders. Firstly, it was to discourage encroachment by land grabbers who were threatening the community. Secondly, it brought in funds which helped the community cope with the grim consequences in the cities of the neoliberal economic adjustments of the 1980s (Olaniyi 2013:93). Thirdly, the influence of Aladura Christianity was waning in the face of the emergence of new Pentecostal churches, which dominated the media and the social landscape, and attracted huge patronage from the Nigerians (Baiyewu 2014:xviii). Fourthly, the extensive informalisation of labour since the 1980s had made the Ladipo area a suitable and attractive location for the second-hand auto spare parts business because, again, especially due its proximity

to the sea and airports in Lagos. These developments have caused a huge population inflow into the area.

Given the different threats of encroachments, in 1987 the Aladura churches regularized and received certificates of occupancy for their land from government (Champion 1993:23). This in a way secured their rights to the land. In 1993, Alhaji Owoyemi threatened the community ownership of lands in Ladipo again. The Aladura churches, under the auspices of the Odo Aladura Community churches, petitioned the Military Administrator of Lagos, Colonel Buba Marwa, to save them from the threats of Alhaji Owoyemi (*ibid*). In 1995, the Odo Aladura community began to lease out large portions of their land for commercial purposes to Igbo traders who paid rent to them, hence the acronym Odo Aladura Traders' Association (Sunday Telegraph 2016:7). In 1998, perhaps envious of the huge rent collected by the Aladura churches from traders, Alhaji Owoyemi went again together with thugs⁶ to the Odo Aladura section of the market with a court judgment claiming Owoyemi family ownership of the land (Sunday Telegraph 2016:6-7). They were strongly resisted by the traders and occupants. The tussle over the land continued between the Owoyemi family and Odo Aladura community, which now had over two thousand traders in that section of the market, and it is ongoing. The Owoyemi family is bent on forceful takeover of the Odo Aladura market portion from the churches so as to be able to benefit from rents paid by the Igbo traders. The Owoyemi family has disregarded several court orders on this matter and has continued in a like manner⁷. The Mushin local government has encroached on the Aladura churches' land to the point whereby in 2017, the five acres initially bought by them had dwindled to less than five plots. Only one permanent church structure survives out of the several buildings that were initially on the land. Some portions of the land were taken over by government, some leased to spare parts traders, and some was also appropriated by land grabbers. The Owoyemi family is presently threatening to appropriate the remainder.

Plate: Over head view of Ladipo Market, Lagos



Ladipo in the urban context of Mushin

The socio-economic history of Ladipo Market in Lagos tells us the story of urbanization, especially from the 1980s to the present. Ladipo Market, nestled in between the Oshodi and Isolo areas, is mainly entrenched in Mushin, a suburban area in Lagos. Mushin is host to the Ladipo automotive spare parts market which is the largest auto spare parts market in Nigeria and West Africa as a whole (Ogboo 2011:40; Ekere 2007:15; Ukpebor 2012:6). It is one of the poorest land grade areas that was not planned, but only developed after 1948 by Lagos Executive Development Board (LEDB) (Aluko 2010:68). Mushin's problem was further compounded by the urbanization and intensification of land use, which has led to increased housing density (Oduwaye 2008:132). It was inhabited primarily by migrants, and since the Second World War has experienced certain periods of rapid urban growth. Consequently, Mushin had had an eclectic character coupled with increasing public stratification and contrasting everyday life (Fourchard 2011:68). The area's population, according to Barnes, had reached 600,000 by 1972 and at the time was divided into 30 political wards. In 1972, unlike much of the Lagos metropolis, Mushin was more ethnically balanced with about 15 per cent fewer Yoruba and 15 per cent more Igbo-speaking residents (Barnes 1973:77). Unlike other ethnic groups, the Igbo (the second largest group in Mushin after the Yorubas) had culturally ingrained themselves into the social, religious and recreational milieu of Mushin. According to Barnes, '...for the ordinary people (hosts and immigrants), residence was a social melting pot'. The metropolitan area housed one of the most heterogeneous concentrations of people in the nation. Houses and neighbourhoods reflected this heterogeneity with one exception: the Hausa who often lived in fairly homogenous enclaves (Barnes 1986:14).

Igbos usually immersed themselves into the culture and practice of their host communities, learning the hosts' language, adopting the manner of their hosts' clothes, enjoying their staple foods, and making it obvious that the Igbo culture is one adaptive to change (Agozino and Ayanike 2007:240). These interactions have led to the development of hybrid identities and identity renegotiation in a more positive sense (Watson and Studdert, 2006:3) which were subsequently carried over into the market space. This strengthens the validity of the intergroup contact theory in explaining the seemingly seamless trade and extra market engagements between the Yoruba and the migrants in Mushin save the Hausa (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006:767-768)⁸. The migration of the Igbo into Lagos, and by extension Mushin, came after the conclusion of the thirty-month Nigerian Civil War in 1970. It created a network of Igbo inhabitants in nearly every part of Nigeria (Meagher 2009:36). Beyond the civil war, the emerging informal Lagos economy provided a means for Igbos,

especially Igbo youth, to survive the depression in the Nigerian economy as it required little or no education and minimal capital outlay which the Igbo youths could comfortably fit into (Olutayo 1999:150). For Meagher, the lack of state assistance in the process of reconstruction of Eastern Nigeria after the civil war combined with disadvantageous state policies governing the economic re-absorption of Biafra fractured Igbo involvement in the formal economy and deepened their focus on the informal sector of the Nigerian economy (Meagher 2009:37). It is within this circumstance that Ladipo Market comes into the picture.

Tracking the trajectory: the spare parts trade in Ladipo, Lagos

As far back as the 1960s, Idumota on Lagos Island was home to vehicle spare part sales (new). The initial merchants at the time were the Yoruba Ijebu who were agents and distributors for multinational firms such as the United Trading Company (UTC), Compagnie Francaise de l'Afrique Occidentale (CFAO) and R.T. Briscoe. This practice endured into the mid-1980s. Implementation of austerity measures in the early 1980s, which disincentivised the purchase of new vehicles and encouraged trade liberalization, resulted in the relocation of the automobile spare parts market from Idumota to the Federal Trade fair complex, Lagos in 2000. It was commissioned by former president Olusegun Obasanjo in 2003 (Ogboo 2011:35). Concurrently, Igbos who returned to Lagos after the Nigerian civil war started dealing in new spare parts as well. They were concentrated in the Oko Awo area, around Jankara market on Lagos Island. Gradually, some of the Igbo traders extended their networks from Lagos Island to Owode Onirin on the outskirts of the Lagos mainland dealing in auctioned Nigerian second-hand and accident vehicles, most of which were scrap. They engaged in this enterprise alongside Yoruba traders. Owode Onirin was initially perceived as being on the outskirts of Lagos, way out of the Central business district of Lagos. Gradually, the networks spread to the Ladipo area of Mushin local government with the first port of call being Daramola Close, a stone's throw from Ladipo where they still traded in new and Nigerian used motor parts.

As noted earlier, the Ladipo neighbourhood was originally referred to as 'Odo Aladura' in the early 1960s. The Igbo nicknamed it Ogu ewu (abattoir for goats) as by the mid 1970s there had been some makeover. Occupants of an open market space around the canal traded in cattle, sheep, goats and rams most often brought in periodically from Northern Nigeria. Besides the Odo, the Aladura neighbourhood in the Ladipo area, there were in the initial instance three big adjoining structures used for warehousing goods around

the area, owned by the Lagos State Ministry of Agriculture, First Bank and Alhaji Abibu Oki. Other structures were later constructed and used by private businessmen as bonded warehouses⁹. Though originally designated as an industrial zone in the master plan of Lagos state government, the livestock market and adjoining parcels of land on which part of Ladipo Market now sits¹⁰ were acquired by Mushin local government¹¹ which subsequently built the first set of one hundred shops on it in 1979. The acquisition was a fallout of the promulgation of the Land Use Act enacted by the military in 1978. However, these shops were initially outlets for the sale of agricultural produce and other perishable items which included foodstuff such as garri, yam, and pepper to complement the livestock market in the area¹².

In 1983, the administration of President Shehu Shagari in Nigeria put in place austerity measures, which constrained the purchasing power of Nigerian citizens and encouraged trade liberalization (Olaniyi 2013:93) This led to increased import of used vehicle parts. Igbo, who had at this period migrated as far as North America, Europe and Asia and had accumulated wealth, pooled their resources together. They bought used vehicles, cannibalized them, and exported the parts to Nigeria as completely knocked down parts (CKD)¹³. The recipients were Igbo traders who had relocated to the Ladipo area. The second-hand vehicle spare parts were known as Tokunbo in Nigerian parlance. Patronage was relatively low in the initial period as there were other competing markets around Lagos, especially in the Ikorodu and Badagry areas which also sold these variants of auto spare parts¹⁴. In addition, Nigerians at the time were not well acquainted with Tokunbo spare parts.

Given the poor patronage, the landlord of a popular building '186' that housed some shops around Ladipo, Alhaji Akinwumi, (aka Olowopapa) would offer to feed the traders for free (Alofetekun 2009). As the economy worsened from the mid-1980s with neoliberal structural adjustment policies of the federal military government, the tokunbo vehicle import business attained mammoth proportions (Olukoju 2003:11). Coupled with a favourable import policy by the government, traders in these spare parts began to enjoy patronage from car owners who either could not afford new vehicle parts or clients that perceived new parts to be of inferior quality¹⁵. In essence, Ladipo thus began to assume a central place for spare part sales and distribution. With their transnational travel and networks in Nigeria, it was easy for Igbo traders to move easily into the used automobile business where no other ethnic group has been able to rival their influence (Nnadozie 2002:57)¹⁶. Transnational migration reinforced the dominance of the Igbo amongst other traders in the business, highlighting how interactions in Lagos' informal economy were shaped by global forces. By 1991, Ladipo Market had grown

and covered over 200 hectares of land within the vicinity (Alofetekun 2009). The bonded warehouses and those owned by government all around Ladipo were converted into large depots that received 20' and 40' containers from Western Europe, North America and Asia through the seaports in Lagos. The containers primarily contained used vehicle engines and other second-hand vehicle parts and accessories with a value of goods running into billions of naira.

Today, the livestock market, a submarket within the larger Ladipo Market family, is christened Ladipo Main Market (LMM), because of the enormous amount of trade transaction that goes on within it. The initial bungalow buildings in this submarket were built by the Mushin local government authorities. Other notable auto spare parts outlets have sprung up within the Ladipo area. Among the outlets are Promise land and Aguyi Ironsi International Market. The other facilities are the sixteen warehouses which play host to 20' and 40' containers. These containerized imports have increased trade traffic of used automobile parts and led to the construction of the roll-on-roll-off (RORO) infrastructure at the Tin Can Island port in Nigeria in the post-military dispensation (Ogboo 2011:14). The activities of these informal traders have contributed enormously to the development of Lagos' economy, the revenue base of the federal government through the Nigerian Ports Authorities, the promotion of international trade and also represents interconnectedness without the state (*ibid* 28-30).

Whipple identified the port of entry, crossroad, resource, and accommodation as the criteria which cause a town or market place to form and the components necessary for a marketplace to survive. As long as commercial centres continue to satisfy one or more of the above criteria, they will continue to flourish; when the needs no longer exist the commercial centres will decline (Ogeah and Omofonmwan 2013:65; Bello and Muazu 2015:1031). Ladipo, and by extension Lagos' nodal position, is a major gateway to the auto spare parts markets in Nigeria. Ladipo has remained the destination of first choice for importers for a number of reasons. First, it enjoys the advantage of heritage and proximity from all sides. It is straddled between the Apapa seaport and the Murtala Mohammed International airport in Lagos. Importers can dispose of their goods wholesale and catch the next available flight home. It is also very cost effective as importers do not have to transport containers to other states, removing the risks of accidents and extortion by law enforcement agents. It is easier to get wholesale buyers in Lagos, and the city's population provides the requisite market for these products. Hundreds of millions of naira exchange hands in commercial transactions in Ladipo Market on a daily basis (Awosika et al. 2009:12). How is Ladipo governed?

The Ladipo Central Executive Committee (LACEC)

By 1993 Nigeria was still in the throes of military dictatorship. According to CBN, the Nigerian labour market showed signs of further deterioration as the unemployment situation worsened owing to the slow-down in the tempo of general economic activities experienced during the first half of 1993 (Muojama 2013:575-576; CBN 1993:17). Consequently, the confidence of Nigerians in the military was fast eroding in the face of unbridled corruption, the inclement climate of political uncertainty and the economic crisis (Bassey 2005:34). The structural adjustment programme was still being implemented and it had austere effects and social consequences for Nigerians (Muojama 2013:576). This led to a massive influx of the unemployed into the informal market in Ladipo. There was also chronic underfunding of public services and infrastructure by the state (Amaghionyeodiwe 1999:389). This affected public sanitation services as filth mounted all around the market area. Traders also became susceptible to street urchins who stole their earnings made from sales at the end of the day's business around the Ladipo area. Much more importantly, the evolution of an unfair government tax regime in the market in the light of the dwindling nature of government earnings from other veritable sources incited traders' hostility against the government.

In the attempt to tackle these three fundamental issues, traders came together and formed the Ladipo Central Executive Committee (LACEC). Thus LACEC was formed to aggregate and articulate traders' demands in negotiations with government, lobby for a fair tax regime, deal with insecurity and coordinate sanitation efforts in the market. LACEC federated the original five unions which had fragmented into over forty automobile spare parts associations. Their representatives sit and make recommendations on security, sanitation and tax to the federating union. The body subsequently registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission in Abuja¹⁷. At the apex of the federated traders' union is the Board of Trustees headed by Chief Innocent Ejike (PM News 2014), followed by the stakeholders, with LACEC-elected officials on the next layer of authority while the federating units sit at the base as delegates. The executives of LACEC over the years have emanated from the different units that make up the entire Ladipo Market. The layers of authority relations, the federated nature of LACEC and the holding of periodic democratic elections (where all shades of opinions are represented) have helped to diminish incidences of conflict in the market and ensure that elected union leaders develop relationships that have reinforced peace and unity among local networks. All of the units contribute financially to LACEC for overall security, sanitation and running of the central secretariat.

The sanitation issues, which have necessitated market closures, have provided platforms for politicians seeking elective offices to gain cheap publicity among the mass of traders. When government threats of shutting down the market facility are carried out, the majority of the traders who are of Igbo extraction usually point to Yoruba victimization of Igbos, who by virtue of their numerical strength control the politics and economy of the market situated in the heartland of the Yoruba territory. In the process, politicians from Eastern Nigeria have appeared on the Lagos scene, jockeying for opportunities to interface between the traders and the government of Lagos state over the market¹⁸. Igbo political actors play the peoples' hero and get unusual publicity with the expectation that those Igbo traders would reciprocate the gesture in subsequent general elections by coming to cast their votes for them in the East. This validates Lindell's assertion that many politicians regard these growing crowds (traders) as vote banks because the informal market space has become a space of intense political competition (2010:3). Awomolo also asserts that civilian politicians use the market place for propaganda and constituency building where traders become mere pawns in the hands of political power brokers who use them to foster parochial interests (1998:123). Seven different governorship aspirants from the East and Lagos in Ladipo appeased and appealed to traders for votes¹⁹. Politicians rely on these traders for support in their attempt to capture political power at different levels of government. The gubernatorial and presidential elections of 2007, 2011 and 2015 amply demonstrated the strength of LACEC and the Igbo traders in mobilizing votes for Governor Babatunde Fashola of Lagos and President Goodluck Jonathan²⁰. The Igbo traders' much more obvious impact was felt in the March 2015 National Federal House of Representatives elections where Igbo candidates won three federal seats in Lagos with one being the Oshodi/Isolo federal constituency²¹, a stronghold of non-indigenous and the area where Ladipo Market is nested in Lagos. This development is unprecedented given the culture of exclusivity in Lagos politics. The Igbo merchants in the Ladipo area, through their sheer numerical strength, demystified that culture. Their association leaders have also reaped huge political patronage and other largesse for their incorporation into this prevailing political order.

The LACEC has not managed the market efficiently and has flouted state government orders and the memorandum of understanding it signed with government on issues of sanitation and tax (The Guardian 2014). The central body also collects illegal tolls from those who trade on the streets and from cars parked in the vicinity of the market, which causes severe gridlocks. Those who have refused to comply have been locked up in temporary cells

created by the executives in the secretariat. In addition, all of the tolls collected are kept by members of the executive who have wrangled how they should be shared. This has led to intense struggle among traders to be elected into the LACEC executive. One episode in the series of this intractable crisis happened on 3 April 2015 where thugs sponsored by a faction of market executives attacked 'rebellious' traders, unleashing mayhem on them. Despite this scenario, the federated Union has tried to maintain some level of institutional restraint in market transactions, sanctioning anti-social behaviour in relations between its members.

Despite the apparent ineptitude of the leadership, the market has remained vibrant and part of the duties LACEC carries out include helping the government to collect levies from the traders in all the markets, ensuring the sanitization of the business environment, protecting the traders and guaranteeing security of their goods in the market vicinity. In an attempt at harmonious relationships within the market and with the host community, the federated Union of Ladipo Market sponsors a yearly carnival which brings Igbo and Yoruba traders, families and the host community together. Periodically too, popular televangelists are invited to conduct prayer sessions for the market community. LACEC has its own central alternative dispute resolution system and structure. Matters that need arbitration which are beyond the different units' ability to handle are brought to the Central Public Complaints Committee and handled appropriately.

Conclusion

The emergence of Ladipo Market has helped in redefining relations in the economic, cultural and political landscape of Lagos. The transformation of the religious-come-residential space into a commercial emporium for the spare parts trade would not have been possible without the downturn in Nigeria's economy in the 1980s. This necessitated the neoliberal structural adjustment of the Nigerian economy, which facilitated the emergence of the flea market economy around the Ladipo area to cater to the needs of the poor and middle class. The depressed state of the economy, the Nigerian civil war, and the recent religious crises in Northern Nigeria all made the market an attractive space for Igbo migrant traders. The market also became a vote bank for politicians jostling for political offices in Nigeria. The recent victories of Igbo politicians in the House of Representatives elections drive home this point that they have become significant in contemporary Lagos politics. Given its unique role in trading vehicular parts, Ladipo Market has led to city expansion, a dynamic trade culture, and a systematized apprenticeship that has improved lives and social relations among traders. It

has produced a symbiotic relationship in which Yoruba have remained largely as landlords and artisans with Igbos as leaseholders and traders. Continuous informal market operations have deepened market governance and the artisanal skills of traders and blurred ethnic boundaries among the different ethnicities that constitute the market space, thereby fostering peace among the different ethnicities in Nigeria. The market and consumers face dangers from the importation of fake spare parts from China (Matthews and Yang 2012:98)²² and defective spare parts from the Western countries. The state has to strengthen its regulatory institutions and impose sanctions where necessary to curb these nefarious activities.

On a final note, Ladipo Market has provided a formidable platform for the emergent geography of automobile spare parts import, re-export and distribution across the West African landscape to as far flung areas as Central Africa and South Africa. This regional economic interaction makes Ladipo Market a regional distributor of automobile spare parts in Africa. Therefore, the automobile spare flea market in Ladipo represents the inter African hub for intra-African trade (Ogboo 2011:32). This scenario illuminates several ways of appreciating the global dimensions of an informal economy. Even though neo-liberalism has its serious drawbacks, its associated liberalization policy has created opportunities for gainful trade among Ladipo traders and made them active participants in the globalization process with trade partners in the diaspora²³.

Notes

1. The initial draft of this paper was presented at a seminar in the West African Research Centre (WARC) Dakar, Senegal during my Postdoctoral Residency Programme there in April 2015. Funding for the research leading to this publication was provided by the American Council for Learned Societies under their African Humanities Programme Postdoctoral fellowship programme.
2. The Aladura Christianity emerged in Southwestern Nigeria in 1918 when a few members of the Anglican church Ijebu Ode formed a prayer group (Precious Stone Society) as a response to an influenza epidemic which defied orthodox and traditional medicines. They later metamorphosed into four major strands of Aladura churches. See Baiyewu (2014). These are the Cherubim and Seraphim Church, Celestial Church of Christ, Church of The Lord Aladura and Apostolic Church. They were most prominent on the Nigerian religious landscape between the 1920s and 1960s. The specific Aladura churches initially in the Ladipo area were the Sanctuary of Liberty Mission, Healing Temple Church of Cherubim and Seraphim, Ijo Awamaridi, Cherubim and Seraphim Praying Band Church, Apostolic Church, Christ Church Imole Otito II, Imole Titun Cherubim and Seraphim Church, Mount Zion Church and Ona iwa Mimo Cherubim and Seraphim Eternal. See Champion Newspaper (Lagos), 3 November 1993.
3. Oral interview with Ayo Hossana, a worker in the Mission house of Imole Otito, Cherubim and Seraphim Church on 16 November 2017.

4. The Aladura churches believe that ritual baths fortify children against wicked human agents and unseen negative forces, and ward off danger.
5. Oral interview with Ayo Hosanna, a worker in the mission house of Imole Otito; Cherubim and Seraphim Church on 16 November 2017.
6. Alhaji Owoyemi is a landowner in a neighbouring community bordering the Aladura community. It is alleged that he had earlier sold his own land in the area to a biscuit company and suddenly decided to encroach on land belonging to the Aladura community. Available at <http://news.bestnaira.com/posts/view/ladipo-market-land-feud-deepens-as-family-demolishes-houses-churches> Accessed on 20 November 2017.
7. Available at <http://thenationonline.net/lagos-assembly-urges-cp-to-investigate-murder-trader/>(1 March 2016) See also <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/03/thugs-demolish-2000-shops-at-ladipo-market/9/3/2016>) Accessed on 20 November 2017.
8. The intergroup contact theory states that increased contact between diverse groups has the potential to reduce inaccurate perceptions of the other, thereby increasing intergroup tolerance and understanding. This helps to explain the symbiotic relationship and peaceful coexistence between Yoruba and Igbo traders in the same market space at Ladipo.
9. Interview with Alhaji Habibu Oki. He is the *Baba Loja* General of Ladipo Market. He is viewed by many as the traditional head of traders in Ladipo even though this is disputable.
10. Interview with Mr D. Ogunmuyiwa, a trader at Ladipo Market in August 2014.
11. Available at <http://en.afrikinfos.com/2014/10/05/ladipo-market-chief-denies-reconstruction-claim> Accessed on 17 March 2015.
12. Discussion with Kingsley Ogunor, President of the Ladipo Main Market Spare Part Traders' Union, 17 July 2014.
13. Ifeayin Okoli, former President of AIITC said this much in the account of his ordeal with Alhaji Olakojo's family. Available at: <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2013/09/my-ordeal-in-prison-says-okoli-ladipo-market-leader/#sthash.HOpO5A2z.dpuf> Accessed on 15 March 2015.
14. Discussion with Omofaje Adewale, a spare parts trader in Ladipo Market on 7 December 2014.
15. Most of the new spare parts flooding Nigerian markets were made-in-China products which were of inferior quality compared with those from Western Europe and North America. See Mathews and Yang (2012:98).
16. In fact Emmanuel Nnadozie estimates that Nnewi indigenes, a sub group of the Igbo ethnic group control between 80% and 90% of automobile trade in Nigeria.
17. Interview with Paul Ijeoma, the Secretary of LACEC, 15 September 2014.
18. Uba begs Fashola to reopen Ladipo Market. Uba was a senator of the federal republic but was hoping to contest the gubernatorial elections in his state, 3 March 2013. Available at <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2013/03/uba-begs-fashola-to-re-open-ladipo-market/> Accessed on 14 July 2015. See also 'Okorocho's worthy mission to Ladipo', 10 March, 2013 d<http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/okorocho-s-worthy-mission-to-ladipo/141708/>' Accessed 4 August 2015. Okorocho Rochas is the sitting Governor of Imo State in Eastern Nigeria.

19. Oluwapomile, A., 'Ngige takes campaign to Ladipo'. Available at <http://thenationonlineng.net/new/ngige-takes-campaign-ladipo-market/> Accessed 25 October 2013. Ngige Chris was then a senator of the Federal Republic now a minister of the Federal Republic having lost the gubernatorial elections in his state. See also 'Obiano I will surpass Obi's achievement', 23 October 2013. Available at <http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/obiano-i-ll-surpass-obi-s-achievements/162403/> Accessed 4 July 2015. Obiano Willie is the sitting Governor of Anambra State. See also Lagos stands still for APGA, available at <http://sunnewsonline.com/new/?p=41359>, 22 October 2013. This was during Governor Peter Obi's visit to Ladipo amongst other venues visited for the campaign. Accessed 4 July 2015.
- Babatunde Fashola in Ladipo Market seeks support for Akinwunmi Ambode, accessed 10 February 2015. Available at <http://www.punchng.com/news/fashola-in-ladipo-market-seeks-support-for-ambode/> Governor Babatunde Fashola is the sitting governor of Lagos State, accessed 4 July 2015.
- 'I will stop multiple taxation in Lagos markets'- Agbaje, 4 March 2015. Available at <http://www.punchng.com/politics/ill-stop-multiple-taxes-in-lagos-markets-agbaje/> Accessed on 4 July 2015. Agbaje Jimi was a gubernatorial aspirant for Lagos State.
20. Despite the fact that the ruling party in Lagos, the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), had its own presidential candidate for the 2011 elections, masses were asked by the Lagos state government to vote for the incumbent PDP candidate, President Jonathan who is more or less from the East. He got massive votes from the Igbo traders and the trade-off worked well as Lagos state governor too benefited from the votes of the Igbo in Lagos that returned him for a second term in office.
21. Mr Tony Nwoolu, an Igbo man, defeated a Yoruba man and candidate of the All Progressive Congress (APC) in Yoruba homeland when he won the Oshodi/Isolo federal constituency elections under the banner of PDP. See *PM News (Lagos)*, 'Igbo candidates win Lagos Reps seats', 31 March 2015. See also Templer (2015).
22. Some manufacturers of vehicle spare parts are instructed by traders intentionally to manufacture fake spare parts for Nigerian markets. These are shipped down to Nigeria and sold on the Nigerian market. See Mathews and Yang (2012).
23. I was on a postdoctoral residency programme sponsored by the American Council for Learned Societies in Senegal in March 2015. In my discussions with traders, I noticed that Igbo traders domiciled in Dakar at Lusuophone Marche in Senegal went as far as Banjul in Gambia and Ladipo in Lagos to restock their spare parts shops in Dakar.

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