

Identity, Neighbourhood Cultures and the Re-definition of Social Values in Colonial Lagos

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Colonial Lagos has enjoyed enormous scholarly historical interrogations and interpretations. The existing body of knowledge cut across social, political and economic history. Despite this however, there is a huge gap to be filled in the cultural and social history of Lagos. Thus, this paper examined identity neighbourhood cultures and the re-definition of social values in colonial Lagos. I argue in this paper that British socio-economic policies and political manipulations impacted greatly on the sub-structure and super-structure of the society. Besides, the heterogeneous society of Lagos experienced identity formations and dilution in cultures, which fostered re-definition of social values. The paper concludes that colonialism re-defined neighbourhood cultures by introducing new urban life and culture as well as provided the platform for the growth in crime, begging culture, destitution, prostitution and juvenile delinquency.

[Identity; Neighbourhood Cultures; Social Values; Colonial Lagos]

Introduction

Identity is a known phenomenon all over the world. People define themselves one way or another.¹ Despite the contestations and ambiguity around the concept of identity, the concept has continued to define human relations in different ways.² Identity is defined as “*the way individuals and groups defined themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language and culture*”.³ The period

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¹ I. M. ALUMONA – S. N. AZOM, Politics of Identity and the Crisis of Nation Building in Africa, in: S. O. OLORUNTOBA – T. FALOLA (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Politics, Governance and Development*, New York 2018, p. 292.

² Ibidem.

³ F. DENZ, *War of Visions: Conflict of Identities in Sudan*, Washington DC 1995, p. 33.

of colonialism and its features of urbanisation and modernisation in Lagos impacted greatly on the people and their lifestyles. They experienced identity formation, dilution in cultures and social values. From the mid- nineteenth century when Lagos was ceded to the British, there emerged a new social hierarchy, with the British officials, missionaries and even traders as the aristocracy, the immigrant black elite as the middle class, and the indigenes of Lagos as the lower class.⁴ The two major immigrant groups that exerted considerable influence on the transformation of indigenous Lagos community into an urban metropolis were the Brazilian/Cuban and Sierra Leonian repatriates.⁵ There was no doubt that as they began to settle firmly in parts of the town specifically allocated to them, they acquired “foreign” lifestyles in dress, food, religion, education and language which they brought with them. These became quite noticeable and distinguished them as possessing some prestigious social attributes despite the historical experience of their previous enslavement. The Brazilian repatriates lived at Portuguese town or *Popo Aguda*; the *Saro* or “Sierra Leonians” (recaptives or liberated slaves from Sierra Leone) lived at *Olowogbowo*; while the indigenous Lagosians occupied the rest of the Island.

During the period of their sojourn in Brazil, Cuba and Sierra Leone, they had acquired considerable skills in several trades and vocations. Many of them had also acquired professional training, a very high standard of education and of cultural sophistication.⁶ Echeruo describes these “repatriates” as constituting themselves into “a unique community maintaining ties with the Yoruba homeland, and yet sharing a great deal with the small but prominent and prosperous expatriate community”. He continues: “Whether they were repatriates from Brazil and the Americas, immigrants from Sierra Leone and Liberia or simply educated migrants from England, these men were a force in setting Lagos apart as the youngest and fastest growing community on the West coast.”⁷

⁴ T. EUBA, Dress and Status in 19th Century Lagos, in: A. ADEFUYE – B. AGIRI – J. OSUNTOKUN (eds.), *History of the Peoples of Lagos State*, Ikeja 1987, p. 142.

⁵ F. AKERE, Linguistic assimilation in socio-historical dimensions in urban and suburban Lagos, in: A. ADEFUYE – B. AGIRI – J. OSUNTOKUN (eds.), *History of the Peoples of Lagos State*, Ikeja 1987, p. 160.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ M. J. C. ECHERUO, *Victorian Lagos: aspects of nineteenth century Lagos Life*, London 1977, p. 16.

The ego of the Sierra Leonians who wore so much clothing to compete with the King of Lagos redefined the attitudes and mode of dressing of the Lagosians in the twentieth century. Before contact with the Europeans, the common Lagosian, male or female, wore very little clothing themselves, but as late as 1933, an observer noted that: “Lagosians do not care much for clothing as a covering, but they were very fond of it for purposes of display, and on great occasions, exhibit it in great quantities, and in all colours and shades of colour. And that on ordinary occasions many people content themselves with less clothing than decency requires. The young of both sexes are very often allowed to go without clothing and when it might be expected that their own sense of propriety would lead them to seek the use of it.”⁸

Dress is an image maker and image destroyer. The phenomenon of dress in the social life of Lagos in the 19th century, both for its own sake and for the insight it gave into the cultural history of the Yoruba who formed the majority of the population of Lagos cannot be overlooked as far as the changes in social life was concerned. Of all the immigrants in Lagos, the Saros as they were popularly called were the Sierra Leonian repatriates in Lagos, who were at the forefront of the cultural dilution. The Saros wanted the better of the two worlds.⁹ They wanted to be English yet never gave up their right to be African, “to go Fantee” as they termed it. But ever mindful of their status as “black English”, they tended to be apologetic about their African impulses.¹⁰ The attitude of one contributor to the *Anglo African Times* in November 1863 was probably typical of all but the most extreme Saros: “We in Africa assume a kind of indulgence – we do not hold ourselves amenable to all the formalities and exactions of fashionable life in Europe. We can dine in frock coats or without coats, if by doing so we add to our comfort. We can smoke in the house, even in our dining rooms, and indeed when the cloth is removed, cigars are as often present as fruits and wine- and not a few of our veritable gentlemen might often, a few always, be seen in collar shirt, waistcoat and sometimes even culotte(except our loose pyjamas are dignified with the name of trousers) – so too we are not over-particular as to when we make a call, especially if it be on business, so that we do not arouse a man at

⁸ J. B. WOOD, *Historical Notices of Lagos, West Africa and on the Inhabitants of Lagos, their Character, Pursuits and Languages*, Lagos 1993, pp. 53–55.

⁹ EUBA, p. 150.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

*midnight; and many of us are all the more pleased if a visitor calls at dinner time, for them we ask him to take a chair and be welcome, and if our neighbours are well behaved and respectable we don't usually make them feel that we esteem ourselves their superiors. Such is life, in the main, amongst us Africans; and it is necessary that it should be so far, far more than it can be at home, we are dependent upon each other."*¹¹

The above remark reveals the attitudes of the Saros to the Lagosians and other groups in Lagos. These translated into the need to carve for themselves unique identities. Thus, the expression of unique identities in dress and fashion became a popular culture amongst the Saros, Brazillian returnees, Yoruba Lagosians, and Hausa immigrants from the hinterland as well as other groups. Subsequently, the process of cultural dilution and assimilation became entrenched in the city of Lagos.

Islam and Christianity played important roles in the redefinition of social values and the cultural dilution of the society in the nineteenth and twentieth century Lagos. For instance, the Islamic religion was already quite prominent in Lagos during the latter half of the nineteenth century. By the 1870s, a sizeable number of indigenous Lagosians had already embraced "Mohamedanism".¹² The assimilatory influences of the Islamic religion on the cultural life of the people of Lagos are evident in the use of Muslim names like *Lateef*, *Nojeem*, *Akeem*, *Monsur*, *Kassim*, *Nurudeen*, *Ibrahim*, *Bashir*, and so on as first names.¹³ These Muslim names are usually used in conjunction with indigenous Yoruba personal or family names as *Lateef Kosoko*, *Sultan Ladega Adele*, *Rabiatu Ajala*, *Kudirat Oyekan*, and so on.¹⁴ In fact, among the non-literate members of the community, some of these Muslim names had been assimilated into the phonological structure of the Yoruba language, for example *Latifu*, *Rabiatu*, *Kudiratu* and so on. Besides, Islamic religion created initially seasonal means of livelihood, which later translated to full-fledged occupation on the entertainment platform. This seasonal means of livelihood according to *Mabinuori*, was in the form of those Muslims who moved around the town in the early morning during the month of Ramadan to wake up their

¹¹ *Anglo African Times*, 14/11/1883, p. 2.

¹² AKERE, p. 173.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

brethren for prayers by beating of pans, drums and sticks in return for money from the Islamic faithful. For years, this practice, popularly known as were, and the youth involved known as *ajiwere* continued undisturbed, and the number of youths engaged in it increased on yearly basis.¹⁵ In fact, by the late 1950s, it transformed into what is today known as Fuji music and was no longer a seasonal means of livelihood but a fully-fledged occupation.¹⁶

Apart from the impact of Islamic religion on the social space of Lagos during the period of study, Christian missionaries also impacted greatly on Lagos. They recognized the importance of music and entertainment in Lagos life, as the Methodist movement opined that the new urban community in Lagos desired entertainment whether holy or profane.¹⁷ As implied in the comment of August 1888, by *Observer* newspaper, if Lagos did not have music in their churches, the pews would become vacant, and the music halls and entertainment houses would flourish in consequence. This observation was targeted at discouraging the growth and patronage of entertainment houses and music halls for the Christian missionaries to sustain the loyalty and steadfastness of the Christian faithful. During the Emancipation celebrations in Lagos in October 1888, the principal sermon was devoted to a condemnation of the concert.¹⁸ The preacher “condemned the tendencies of the rising generation for Balls and concerts with other kindred pleasures to the detriment of those by which man is elevated”.¹⁹ Ironically, the report ended with a listing of the rest of the day’s programme of events, including “A Grand Ball at the Glover Memorial Hall, A Dramatic Entertainment at the Roman Catholic School Room, A musical Party at the Glover Memorial Hall, a Carnival Procession through the town, and a fancy Dress Ball at the Glover Memorial Hall”.²⁰

Apparently, concerts, music and similar entertainments introduced by the settler population (Brazilian and Sierra Leonian returnees) were satisfying the cultural and the social needs of the people to the

¹⁵ Oral Interviews held with Mabinuori Kudirat, 68 years, trader at 9, Pashi Street, near Alli street, Lagos Island on 1/08/2012.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ ECHERUO, p. 72.

¹⁸ *Observer*, Comment on Emancipation Celebration in Lagos, 13/08/1888.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ ECHERUO, p. 73.

disadvantage of missionary activities. This was in addition to the traditional music popularized by Brimah Danmale and Oranyan in the early nineteenth century Lagos. Subsequently, the missionaries had no choice but to adopt entertainment in their styles of evangelism. The *Observer* in 1888, praised *keri keri* dance as “the real thing” and when the new C. M. S. Yoruba Hymnbook was published in 1888, the *Observer* was quite enthusiastic: “*The Yoruba Nation at least is a nation of poets. Without music, they are inert; without poetry, they are inane [. . .] Take away singing from the Churches of Lagos today, and the pews will be vacant and innumerable music halls and entertainment houses will sprout up.*”²¹

Corroborating this view, Echeruo opines that traditionally, Lagos was a city of drummers and singers. Similarly, in a report of April 15, 1865, the *Anglo-African* remarked on this assertion, arguing that: “*Native women were apt at song-making. Every event of interest was, as it were, recorded on the memory of these people in this way; and one could almost produce a history of any locality by compiling the many songs which, from day-to-day, are on the lips of women and children.*”²²

The point being made here is that apart from the traditional music and dancing, entertainment had been part of pre-colonial Lagos, this became re-defined in the city as a result of the influence of immigrants from the hinterland, the British colonialists, and influence of Islam and Christianity as well as the activity of the Sierra Leoneans and Brazilian repatriates.

Educated Elite, Urban Life and Identity in Lagos

The first generation educated elite were not a product of the Nigerian situation: they were slaves, or children of such slaves who, it was believed by society, were a happy riddance banished for ever from Nigeria.²³ Ironically however, in the modern history of Nigeria the banished slaves and their offspring that were hitherto rejected stone was to become the corner – stone of the Nigerian edifice. For when they returned to Nigeria the *Saro*, as the first generation Western – style educated elite came to be widely known, had been metamorphosed in such a way that they began to see themselves as leaders who should be

²¹ *Observer*, Editorial comments, 11/08/1888 and 18/08/1888.

²² *Anglo Africa*, “Music in Lagos”, 15/04/1865, p. 1.

²³ E. A. AYANDELE, *The Educated Elite in the Nigerian Society*, Ibadan 1974, p. 9.

followed by the rest of the Nigerian society.²⁴ They returned with a different conception of man, his world – view, his religion, his life – style, his value system, the attributes a leader should have and the course of history society should chart.²⁵ These educated elite took the entertainment and theatre industry in Lagos like a colossus and improved it by setting up dramatic companies as well as organised concerts of various kinds.

Outside the missions, favourable to the growth of the concerts in Lagos was a small, well-educated and “cultured” elite made up mainly of the expatriate colonial Civil Servants and the Missionaries, the Brazilian Community which increased in number after the emancipation (1888), Sierra Leonians who came out as professionals with the Mission, in the Government Service, or on their own, and a number of ‘educated’ Lagosians.²⁶ In spite of the mixed culture of the community, concert and entertainment industry assumed an “international character”, which in turn gave an impetus to the growth of indigenous participation as a result of the activities of these educated elite. For instance, the Brazilian Dramatic Company, under the patronage of the German Consul, Heinrich Bey, performed a “Grand Theatre” in honour of Queen Victoria’s jubilee on May 23, 1882. This concert, according to Echeruo, was so humorous, dramatic and eventful that there were requests for repeat performances.

Entertainment, Popular Cultures and Livelihood in Colonial Lagos

Drumming, singing, concert organizing, stage theatre and cinema business provided employment for the residents of Lagos during the colonial period.²⁷ Besides, Lagos had well-established drama festivals and masquerades which provided regular entertainment of near professional quality. Apart from *keri keri* and *Batakoto* that were indigenous to Lagos, the returnees in Lagos from Sierra Leone and South America featured new forms of entertainment in which many people were engaged.²⁸

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ ECHERUO, p. 75.

²⁷ Oral Interview held with Muritala Isiwatu, 70 years, trader at 70, Are-Ago street, Agbado-Ijaiye, Lagos on 2/08/2012.

²⁸ *Keri Keri* and *Batakoto* were so popular that women often followed its musicians for

Ade – Ajayi in his study of Christian missions in Nigeria has drawn attention to the skills of the slaves from America in theatre and singing as emanating from their experiences before emancipation.²⁹ When these Brazilians came back to Lagos, they brought back their great love for song, and made it more elaborate by the addition of many refinement of European musical practice.³⁰ Names like J. J. da Costa, J. A. Campos, L. G. Barboza and P. Z. Silva (for a long time stage manager of the Brazilian Dramatic Company) were well known in Lagos concert circles.³¹ Besides, the Syrian businessmen operated cinema houses, Corona Cinema at Alli Street; Rialto Cinema at Offin Street and Casino Cinema at Broad Street were the popular spots.³² These increased cinema outlets impacted greatly on the entertainment space of Lagos by providing the residents new relaxation spaces, which hitherto were unknown to the people before these periods.

By the middle of the twentieth century, the migrants from the hinterland – the remote and underdeveloped regions outside Lagos had introduced different kinds of music to boost the entertainment industry. Theatre plays by the late Hubert Ogunde Company were staged at Glover Hall along Victoria Street.³³ Quite dominant were also the social activities that went on most weekends, parties by families naming the new-born, or celebrating marriages or burying the dead. These were the regular platforms for musicians and musical outfits like Ayinde Bakare, Tunde Nightingale and Yusuf Olatunji.³⁴ Thus, an appreciable number of migrants found survival in the entertainment industry in the course of their sojourn in Lagos as singers, dancers, drummers and theatre artistes. Drumming and singing, for example, had been regular (almost daily) features of Lagos life. On several occasions, the chiefs, the police and the government were in open conflict. The introduction of ordinance prohibiting drumming on the streets of Lagos in 1903 generated grievances and sharp responses from the res-

days without going back to their houses. See M. J. C. ECHERUO, *Victorian Lagos*, London 1978, p. 74.

²⁹ See for details J. F. A. AJAYI, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841–1891: the Making of New Elite*, London 1965, p. 43.

³⁰ See for details *ibidem*.

³¹ See for details *ibidem*, p. 44.

³² W. AKIN, *The Lagos we lost*, www.vilagesquare/forum [2019–01–27].

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

idents, particularly the chiefs. The chiefs met with the governor and the police over the matter. Out of the report of this meeting (published in weekly Record of January 2, 1904), the responses of Chief Kasumu Giwa and Chief Aromire are worth quoting in *extenso*, because their responses reinforced the challenges such decision posed to the livelihood of those engaged in singing and drumming for survival: *"This is almost strange in the land. If people are drumming in connection with marriage ceremonies, they are prevented from doing so. If those who are drummers by trade go about from house to house to beat for hire, they are also prevented from doing so. A town without a sound of the drum is like a city of the dead. Even those who go about in the early morning during the month of Ramadan to wake up their brethren for prayer by beating of pans were also prevented from doing this religious act. We have never been dealt with this manner, and we have therefore decided to bring the matter to the notice of the Governor."*³⁵

Similarly, more concern for drummer's predicament was obvious in Chief Aromire's response: *"It works hardship on the town to stop drumming, and besides this, the drummers would starve. Drumming was their only trade. When they sang the praises of our fathers and their brave deeds we are glad to give them 2nd or 3rd and so they got something from house to house and make their living."*³⁶

The above comments by the chiefs were meant to persuade the government on what could be the aftermath of prohibiting drumming on the streets of Lagos. Subsequently, the Governor instructed the Commissioner to reduce the hours of drumming to 6 in the evening, but still insisted that there should be no night drumming.³⁷ These regulations culminated in the loss of jobs for drummers in Lagos, especially in the Island. Consequently, those who could not find other alternative means of livelihood took to crime in order to survive. A veritable example was Salami Bello Jaguda, who was a famous drummer in Lagos. His drumming career shall be discussed in the next section under crime and criminality in Lagos.

Entertainment brought about the emergence of new neighbourhood cultures in colonial Lagos. Behind Marina, Brazillian emigrants settled

³⁵ This was Chief Kasumu Giwa's response at the meeting held on "the drumming question" in Lagos published in the *Weekly Record* of 2/1/1904.

³⁶ This was Chief Aromire's response at the meeting held on "the drumming question" in Lagos published in the *Weekly Record* of 2/1/1904.

³⁷ See The Editorial, *Weekly Record*, 1904.

in the east around campus square, with Sierra Leonians, or “Saro”, in the west at Olowogbowo.³⁸ There was great rivalry between these groups from the beginning, and in terms of their young people, this was symbolically marked every Christmas and Easter when boys from Campus and Olowogbowo carried masquerades – the *carreta* – and paraded round the town dressed in brightly coloured clothes, some riding on horseback.³⁹ Members of each group carried horsewhips and, wherever the two groups met, they engaged in merciless, ferocious and whipping of each other: “the notorious ‘Campus Square boys,’ the ‘Lafiaji Boys,’ the ‘Agarawu Boys’. Each of such group of youths had taken their identities from the localities in which they lived and which they concentrated their acts of thuggery during festivals like ‘Egungun,’ ‘Eyo,’ ‘Igunnu’ and other masquerades’ outings. They had readily served as the whip wielding vanguards of such masquerades who taunted opposing masquerades and spectators, so as to ferment and undertake a free-for-all looting of shops and houses.”⁴⁰

Youths divided Lagos Island into two districts: those living north and northeast of Tinubu Square were eligible for the “Olowogbowo Alkali Society,” with the remainder of the island under the “Lafiaji Alkali Society.”⁴¹ It seemed as though the societies interpreted Boxing Day to mean the day when youths were exempted from criminal responsibility for assault: “Each society recruited fighting squads, and generally on December 26 of each year met each other in inter-district group fighting which, in actuality, were something bordering on internecine warfare. [...] The equipment included paper headgear, mask for the face, boxing ring, ‘hippo-rod’ or the cat (o’ nine tails) fitted with a number of nails and sharp-edged blades, daggers and any amount of charms calculated to render the combatant invisible.”⁴²

It is from this act of hooliganism and bravery that the Agarawu area of Lagos derived a song composed in its praise, which is very popular among musicians and the people of the island:

³⁸ L. LINDSAY, To Return to the Bossom of their fatherland: Brazillian Immigrants in Nineteenth Century Lagos, in: *Slavery and Abolition*, 15, 1994, pp. 22–50.

³⁹ B. LAOTAN, The Brazillian Influence on Lagos, in: *Nigeria Magazine*, 69, 1961, p. 165.

⁴⁰ S. HEAP, Their days are spent in Gambling and Loafing, Pimping for Prostitutes, and Picking Pockets: Male Juvenile Delinquents on Lagos Island, 1920s–1960s, in: *Journal of Family History*, 35, 2010, p. 55.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

<i>Agarawu eriaa</i>	-	Agarawu area
<i>Bi won ti kere mo to yen</i>	-	As compact as it is
<i>Awon ti owa nibe, awo ni won oo</i>	-	The residents are highly respected. ⁴³

Therefore, it can be said that Agarawu area was known for boldness and fearless confrontation against external aggression. It could be concluded that colonialism introduced new sub-cultures in entertainment and lifestyles of Lagosians. It also reinforced the existing youthful exuberance commonly associated with celebration of masquerades such as *Adamuorisha-Eyo* and the notorious *Bamgbose* masquerades in the city of Lagos.

Begging Culture, Destitution and Juvenile Delinquency in Colonial Lagos

Between 1930 and 1950, Lagos witnessed phenomenal growth in population. This resulted from the economic crisis, which provoked an unparalleled development of unemployment in contrast to previous decades of relative scarcity of labour.⁴⁴ According to the commissioner of police in charge of a report on unemployment in Lagos, in 1927, there were probably 1,000 or more unemployed persons in Lagos, even if it was difficult to know the exact figure on account of the movement into and out of the town.⁴⁵ Before this time, precisely in 1915, a Lagos newspaper had to decry the ease with which people migrated into the city and forewarned of its consequences. It noted that many of these people were "*indigent persons [...] without feasible means of support and without friends*" the newspaper declared that "*if some means are not devised to stem the flow of these undesirables, a serious problem will confront the administration, which will entail a good deal of handling, careful handling*".⁴⁶

Several years later, the same newspaper observed that Lagos had "outgrown herself" in 1927, it described the city as the "*dumping*

⁴³ Oral interview with Mrs Oluwole Comfort, 72 years, pensioner at 2 Alli street, Lagos Island on 2/8/2012.

⁴⁴ A. OLUKOJU, The Travails of Migrant and Wage Labour in the Lagos Metropolitan Area in the Inter-war Years, in: *Labour History Review*, 61, 1996, pp. 62–63.

⁴⁵ National Archives Ibadan (hereinafter NAI), Commissioner of colonies (hereinafter Comcol) 1, file 69, Report by the Commissioner of Police of Lagos, September 2, 1927.

⁴⁶ *Nigerian Pioneer*, 1/7/1915: "Random notes and News".

ground for all sorts and conditions of the poor and the maimed (sic) from everywhere, even from the neighbouring Colony of Dahomey". The uncontrolled movement of the migration is attributable to the loose transport system of the period, especially the railway system. Also, it is important to note that the experience of Alhaji Sherifdeen Abubakar Namama, who travelled to Lagos from the far North in 1947 on board a passenger train from Nguru (Northern Nigeria) in company of his kinsmen numbering fifteen, aged between 10 and 20 to Lagos, without any job and definitely with no plan on what to do, was just one of the numerous ways through which the city became flooded with the beggars and destitute.⁴⁷ He emphasised that, for ten years, he slept at the railway terminus in the absence of any worthwhile accommodation. In addition, hundreds of boys between ten and fourteen, commonly known as *alaaru* (porter) worked as carriers at the train station and in large markets of the township. They came in bands from Oyo and Ilorin and lived together, twenty, or thirty in a room.⁴⁸ "They lived in the slum districts of Lagos Township, kept on their person the same dirty clothes for several days, sleeping in them and without a bath for days in succession. [...] Their death rate is said to be very high."⁴⁹ They generally sent money to their indigent families in the country. This uncontrolled movement of immigrants, and their search for livelihood culminated in the increase of destitute and beggars in the city of Lagos.

Besides juvenile destitution, begging was also used by the poor as a strategy for survival in colonial Lagos. What appeared confusing was whether begging had been part of the culture of the indigenes, or a redefined cultural practice. According to Iliffe, the Yoruba were few compared to the number of Hausa beggars who flooded Yorubaland during the twentieth century.⁵⁰ As earlier mentioned the beggars invaded the streets of Lagos and became problems to the colonial authorities. Subsequently, steps were taken, and the police found 153 beggars in 1944, but the real number was probably much greater.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Oral interview with Sherifdeen Abubakar Namama, 74 years at Yisa street, Isale Oja, Agege, Lagos on 26/9/2009.

⁴⁸ NAI, Comcol 1, file 2600, D. E. Faulkner, Report on Juvenile Welfare in the colonies, 15/07/1943.

⁴⁹ NAI, Comcol 1, file 2600, *Alaaru* question in Lagos, 26/8/1943.

⁵⁰ J. LLIFFE, *The African Poor: a History*, Cambridge 1987, p. 192.

⁵¹ NAI, Oyo Prof, file No. 1176, Resident Oyo Province to District Officer, Ibadan,

According to the census carried out on beggars, they were said to be mostly Muslim and Hausa (90 %), they were often married (65 %), and they were very often blind (77 %).⁵² Their “profession” was so entrenched in the city that by 1921, the beggars in Lagos elected the leader with the title “Head of the Blind”.⁵³ The fact that most of the beggars were disabled supports the view that they probably came to Lagos as professional beggars from the North in order to earn a living. The opinion of the long - time residents of Lagos interviewed is that begging was not part of the Lagos culture; rather, it can be said to be one of the redefined neighbourhood cultures introduced by migrants. In fact, Fausat Thomas and Raji Risikatu asserted that an average Lagosian is so proud that he or she could embark on the street begging when in need; instead, he or she would prefer to depend on family and friends for survival. In spite of this argument, this redefined culture became so entrenched in Lagos that even in the post-independence period, it was modified by the street urchins, popularly known as the “area boys” most of whom were young men of Yoruba background, perhaps those that grew up in Lagos from the 1950s.

Juvenile Delinquents and Livelihood in Lagos

Apart from the beggars and the destitute, juvenile delinquents were obsessions of the late colonial period. Vagrant youths were nothing new.⁵⁴ In the nineteenth century they had joined East African war bands or the “swarms of ragamuffins” around the Freetown docks.⁵⁵ Lagos and Freetown had youth gangs in the 1920s, Dares Salaam in the 1930s.⁵⁶ Although mention had been made of the activities of Jaguda Boys and their pickpocket activities in the preceding section under crime and criminality, the Boma Boys, Cowboys, Alkali Boys, the teenage female sex hawkers, and the under aged street hawkers constituted formidable set of juvenile offenders that cannot be overlooked.

According to a 1948 report on juvenile delinquency in the British Empire, continually increasing numbers of juvenile delinquents were

7/1/1935.

⁵² NAI, Comcol 1, 791/1, Vol. 2, Census of Beggars in Lagos, 1944.

⁵³ LLIFFE, p. 192.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 187.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

evident in Nigeria, Kenya, and Northern Rhodesia. The report saw it as a specifically urban phenomenon.⁵⁷ The 1930s and the 1940s saw an increase in the number of juvenile offenders and the appearance of organized juvenile groups.⁵⁸ There were 50 to 100 cases of juvenile offenders brought before courts in southern Nigeria a year between 1923 and 1929 and around 1,000 cases a year for all Nigeria between 1945 and 1947.⁵⁹ Donald Faulkner in his report on vagrant boys of Lagos in 1941 found hundreds of them sleeping in gutters, parks, railway yards, markets, mosques and graveyards: *“Here at night come stealthy figures. Small and agile, they scale the walls quickly and dropping lightly on the other side, disappeared into the gloom. Some carry fowls under their arms, some yams, while others come swaggering, smoking cigarettes, with money chinking in their pockets. They are desperadoes of 12–14 years of age who make this graveyard their home, stealing food from the market places, cooking and eating it communally in the evening, later sleeping under the stars. Their days are spent in gambling and loafing, pimping for prostitutes, and picking pockets. Criminal- because that is the way to live, carelessly, irresponsibly, among good companions.”*⁶⁰

One boy in three had a home in Lagos. Those under twelve *“have been left stranded in Lagos, are orphaned, and truants from school or run-aways from home”*.⁶¹ They lived by begging and petty theft. Older youths fell into three groups: newly arrived, inexperienced boys who found themselves destitute and lived rough; boys entirely adapted to a vagrant life of petty theft; and older, generally unemployed ‘Boma Boys’ who acted as guides or touts for brothels.⁶²

Ugboajah argues that, between 1920 and 1950, three important features shaped juvenile delinquency: the increase in the number of young offenders, the affirmation of the existence of male offender youth groups, and the emergence of an organized network of juve-

⁵⁷ L. FOURCHARD, *Urban Poverty, Urban Crime, and Crime Control: The Lagos and Ibadan Cases, 1929–45*, in: S. J. ŠALM – T. FALOLA (eds.), *African Urban Spaces in Historical Perspective*, Rochester 2005, p. 297.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁹ Police prosecution records on juvenile offenders in Nigeria, *Police Annual Report, 1945–1947*.

⁶⁰ NAI, D. E. Faulkner, *Social Welfare Report on Lagos*, p. 1.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*.

⁶² *Ibidem*.

nile prostitution.⁶³ He classified the young offenders as those involved in petty theft of less than five pounds; which comprised half of the cases brought before the Juvenile Court of Lagos in 1945–1947 and in the 1950s.⁶⁴ The second feature of the period, according to Ugboajah was the emergence of youth criminal groups. Prominent among these groups were Jaguda Boys, who were synonymous with pickpocket activity and stealing. Alkali boys and the Cowboys also belonged to these youth criminal groups. Unlike Jaguda Boys and Boma Boys, they were known for molestation and hooliganism. The Inspector – General of Police gave a vivid description of them: “Cowboys clad themselves in cowboy’s dresses, armed themselves with horsewhips, cudgels and sticks, and some dangerous weapons during Xmas and New Year festivities, and parade the township with their banners and flags singing native songs and when anyone comes on their way he will be whipped, beaten and cudgelle.”⁶⁵

The last of the features identified by Ugboajah is the emergence of an organized network of juvenile prostitution. He avers that child prostitution, the commercial provision of heterosexual labour by female juveniles occupied the most strategic position among the numerous social questions of this period. Child prostitution was prevalent, especially among the immigrants from the hinterland. This study also argues that this practice redefined the cultural lifestyle of the young girls in the neighbourhood from the hardworking teenagers providing economic support to their families as street hawkers and traders to teenage sex hawkers, and instrument of exploitation in the hands of the greedy adults.

The term “Boma” was brought down to the West Coast of Africa from America, where “bum” means a vagrant good-for-nothing.⁶⁶ It is also claimed that Boma Boys were repatriated Nigerian stowaways from Freetown in Sierra Leone, where “bom” meant to beg.⁶⁷ The important point, however, is that the term “Boma” was foreign, and can be said to be a creation of the colonial capitalist formation in the

⁶³ P.K.N. UGBOAJAH, *Juvenile Delinquency and Its Control in Colonial Lagos, 1861–1960*. Ph. D. thesis (unpublished), Department of History, University of Ibadan 2010, p. 130.

⁶⁴ Ibidem.

⁶⁵ NAI, Comcol 1/2403, Inspector-General of Police versus O. David, K. Oneman, A. Jonathan, A. Labayiwa, Lagos Magistrate Court, 01/06/1953.

⁶⁶ “Boma Boys”, *West African Pilot*, 16/11/1940.

⁶⁷ Ibidem.

Lagos urban domain. Thus, a Boma Boy is defined as one who acts as a guide or a tout for houses of ill-fame.⁶⁸ Initiation into the Boma Boys way of life took different stages of development. At the first stage, he was a simple unsophisticated out-of-work boy introduced to the trade by a friend, a casual guide without an arrangement with a particular house. He had not the experience to make the work very remunerative, so he still slept outside and led rather a meagre existence.⁶⁹ When he became more experienced and by his glib tongue and polite manner could get more customers, he lived in a house, dressed well and fed well. He might earn upwards of £2 per month. He probably had a definite arrangement with special harlots or particular houses.⁷⁰ Further, he was gradually deteriorating morally and eventually became a sophisticated cynical youth, up to all the tricks of the trade, lazy and immoral, perhaps acting as a master to a group of younger Boma Boys. Lastly, he became mature to the stage of working on a percentage basis as an important partner of an organised trade.⁷¹

Many Boma Boys were not initially inclined to commit crimes; guiding sailors and seamen was a convenient means of livelihood, particularly those who had reached a high standard of elementary education. They were ashamed of the work but regarded it as the only means of supporting themselves.⁷² With no ships in harbour, Boma Boys took to gambling on the sandy patch on Marina in front of the Kingsway Store. When ships docked, Boma Boys sprang into action: *"cheeky ragamuffins who force their loathsome services on seamen and voyaging tourists at the Marina."*⁷³ Indeed, Boma Boys filled a necessary economic function: proprietors of hotels and bars wanted hard drinking, free-spending customers, and sailors needed guides. Boma Boys guided many unwary sailors and seamen to brothels, *"sordid and disreputable places, and even when the victims are drunk they 'bomb' them by relieving them of what money they have in their pockets"*.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ NAI, Comcol 1, file No. 2471, Boma Boys in Lagos, p. 3.

⁶⁹ Ibidem.

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

⁷¹ Ibidem.

⁷² Ibidem.

⁷³ HEAP, p. 59.

⁷⁴ "The 'Boma Boy' Problem", *African Mirror*, 14/08/1940.

The menace of Boma Boys had negative effects on social values. These are explicable in two ways. Firstly, Boma Boys succeeded in changing the orientation of the youths, by treating local boys to glamorous stories that fired their imagination; ambition to see “life” abroad was usually all that was required for entrapment. Because of the Boma Boys relationships with the seamen, the stories had always been that, if the boys could find some money, they would be introduced to someone on board a ship who would take them to Europe or America as a stowaway.⁷⁵ Consequently, youngsters who were duped in the process by Boma Boys, mostly of their school fees, discovered they had been deceived, became afraid to go home and face the punishment and began to loiter about, gradually degenerating into Boma Boys themselves.⁷⁶

Secondly, Boma Boys occupation as unlicensed tourist guides promoted juvenile prostitution in Lagos. For instance, European seamen were persistently accused by the public for helping child prostitution to thrive. Constable Ajani, a policeman who was sent on a fact-finding mission to Apapa reported that European seamen had strong “love” for girls in their teens.⁷⁷ Child prostitution during this period flourished on the activities of the Boma Boys, especially their intricate network with taxi drivers, sailors and seamen as well as the owners of brothels, nightclubs and long chains of greedy adults, who found livelihood means in bringing young girls from the hinterland for the purpose of prostitution, and, in some cases, hawking. Child prostitution was a well-entrenched, social, sexual and economic relation.⁷⁸ The significant indices include the presence of brothels, and other places where child prostitutes solicited, the method employed in procuring them, and the entire conditions that facilitated demand and supply.⁷⁹ Child prostitution was an aspect of urban subculture that was widely known as an “inevitable” social and sexual network in the culturally heterogeneous domain of colonial Lagos.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ HEAP, pp. 59–60.

⁷⁶ Ibidem.

⁷⁷ NAI, Comcol 1, file No. 2844, Officer Alani’s Report on Prostitution in Lagos.

⁷⁸ S. ADERINTO, *The Girls in Moral Danger: Child Prostitution and Sexuality in Colonial Lagos, Nigeria, 1930s–1950*, in: *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2, 2007, p. 3.

⁷⁹ Ibidem.

⁸⁰ Ibidem.

Most of the available evidences relating to the place of birth of child prostitutes indicate that they came from places outside Lagos and were brought to the city as child prostitutes or became child prostitutes after they had worked as girl hawkers, traversing the major streets of Lagos, selling wares, or placed under poor parental control.⁸¹ The experience narrated in a petition written by Rose Ojenughe, a child prostitute, in establishing criminal charges against her procurer, Alice Etovsodia, of child prostitutes in Lagos illuminates the fact that various unscrupulous means of making livelihood out of child prostitution were devised by the parties involved: *"In the year 1945, she asked me to follow her to Ikeja where I shall be better trained. We arrived Ikeja early in 1945 when I was given to a certain army who took my virgin and he paid £3 to this woman, from there I was forced by her to become a harlot. Sir, all the money that I have been gathering from this harlot trade from 1945 is with this woman [...] I do not claim for all the pounds that I have foolishly worked for her. I want £10 only from her and the £3 my virgin fee all £13... please sir, ask me and I will tell you how I, a little girl like this will be forced to keep three over-sea soldiers at a time."*⁸²

This petition was later accepted as evidence in a Lagos court on the 21st of December that same year, 1945. Alice was sentenced to two years in prison for violating sections 222B and 223 subsections 1, 2, 3 and 4, of the Criminal Code Ordinance (1944 Amendment) of Nigeria. These sections of the Criminal Code Ordinance prohibit the procurement, defilement, illegal guardianship and allowing an "underage" girl to live and work as a prostitute in a brothel.⁸³

The above example represents one of the numerous strategies adopted by those who made procuring child for prostitution their livelihood. Excerpts from archival materials identified the network of those involved in child prostitution to include aunts; cousins; uncles; relatives of an orphan; Boma Boys and other agents. The modes of operations are described as follows: *"In the case of child marriage, a girl of 15 from Owerri said that a woman came to her village and paid dowry for her to marry her son. She was brought to Lagos and told by the woman that the son was still too young for intercourse, so these other men were provided."*⁸⁴

⁸¹ Ibidem, p. 9.

⁸² NAI, Comcol 1, file No. 2844, Child Prostitution in Lagos, 1942–1944.

⁸³ Ibidem.

⁸⁴ Ibidem.

The above reveal that the usual practice was for women to go up-country and bring girls as wives ostensibly to train them, actually for prostitution. Another strategy employed by parties involved in child prostitution is succinctly described below: *“At twelve midnight, the Europeans were standing around Tinubu Police Station. There were several stationary taxis around, and the drivers began offering to take them to girls. The Europeans stated that no man would have any difficulty in being provided with a girl of any age, virgin if desired. The young girls would undress to show the men their breasts to prove their age. Some of the girls appeared passive: others enjoyed themselves and were evidently being used to being given money and cigarettes. The usual price appeared to be about 10/-, and more for a virgin. These places are patronised by European seamen.”*⁸⁵

The above explains the role of taxi-drivers who acted as touts; scouting for drunken seamen that they conveyed to clubs, hotels and other places notorious for prostitution. Available evidences also buttressed the fact that child hawkers were vulnerable to prostitution. Elderly men, especially, enticed young hawkers into their homes, gave them money to cover their goods, and then engaged them in intercourse. Also, girls’ hawkers were often sent out late at night to solicit and lead men to adult prostitutes.⁸⁶

Child prostitution redefined the lifestyles of girls in Lagos, particularly the child hawkers as a result of the prevailing moral dangers in the community. This became a matter of serious concern to the residents of Lagos and the British administrators. As a follow – up to the police investigation report, it was suggested that:

- (A) there was need for ordinance to prevent the dangers of child hawking,
- (B) which would enable action to be taken against the procurers and seducers, give the means and opportunities for rehabilitating the children through boarding;
- (C) making registration of girls entering or leaving Lagos compulsory would help this department to check the girls who are married as children; and

⁸⁵ Ibidem.

⁸⁶ NAI, Comcol 1, file No. 2844, Police investigation Report on child prostitution in Lagos, 1944.

(D) police could be asked to take more frequent actions against brothel-keepers and be asked to bring in more girls suspected as being in danger.⁸⁷

These suggestions, particularly the prohibition of street hawking in Lagos, generated reactions from the women's party led by Oyinkan Abayomi, Tinuola Dedeke and Iyalode Rabiatu Alaso Oke. In a letter to the Editor of *Nigerian Daily Times*, the women movement condemned and described the thought to prohibit street hawking as prejudice, ignorance and hypocrisy.⁸⁸

Despite the position of the women, it is important to point out the fact that hawking by children evolved under the peculiar circumstance of life and trade in a metropolitan area. Therefore, the vulnerability of the girls to immorality and prostitution is explicable not in the context of custom as the women would want us to believe. Rather, it was an informal means of livelihood for all the parties involved, which impacted negatively on the existing culture and redefined the social values.

Conclusion

The main argument of this paper is that colonial Lagos witnessed dilution in cultures and re-definition of social values. It is glaring from the above narratives and analysis that identity formations which characterised the early colonial Lagos cultural landscape emerged not due to colonialism but rather through the existence and influence of the Brazilian repatriates and Sierra Leonean returnees. However, the values entrenched by these repatriates and returnees as well as the indigenes of Lagos became re-defined during the colonial era. The British socio-economic policies and enunciation of ordinances threw up new urban lifestyles, culture and livelihood challenges; which to a very large extent cannot be isolated from the British socio-economic aspirations. Thus, in response to these challenges, the heterogeneous society construed in Lagos witnessed the growth in crime, begging culture, pimping, hooliganism, destitution, prostitution and juvenile delinquency.

⁸⁷ Ibidem.

⁸⁸ *Nigerian Daily Times*, Moral dangers in the community, 24/11/1944.