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AGEGE (LAGOS) SINCE THE 1950s**

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**ACTORS AND INSTITUTIONS IN URBAN POLITICS IN NIGERIA: AGEGE  
(LAGOS) SINCE THE 1950s\***

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**INTRODUCTION**

With only a few exceptions (for example, Barnes, 1986), existing studies of urban politics, economy and society in Nigeria have concentrated on developments at the macro level. This is especially true of Lagos, which has been studied as a city in its own right or as part of a state in the Nigerian Federation (Baker, 1974; Cole, 1975; Aderibigbe, 1975; Adefuye et al., 1987; Olowu, 1990; and Lawal, 1994). While micro studies have their shortcomings, not least the tendency to provide details at the cost of a narrow focus, they are useful for highlighting the peculiar features and dynamics of particular wards or sections of a mega-city like Lagos. This justification accounts for the current examination of the roles of actors and institutions in a densely populated and multi-ethnic “ward” of Lagos. The study not only draws attention to local dynamics (which are often ignored or lost in the thicket of generalizations) but provides material for comparative analysis. Compared to Ajegunle, the subject of a recent study (Olukoju, 2005), for example, Agege provides interesting contrasts and parallels, which enable us to attempt some generalizations about the elements and dynamics of ward-level politics and society in metropolitan Lagos and its environs since the mid-twentieth century. Our focus on actors and institutions underscores the complementary roles of these dynamics in urban politics in Lagos.<sup>1</sup>

The actors vary in size, influence and functions; there are individual, group and corporate actors. Given the sheer size of the community being studied, the various actors and their impact change in accordance with changing circumstances or contexts of their interactions. In terms of power relations in Agege, as in other parts of the city, there are clearly defined layers of power and authority, which are both formal and informal. Though the ward often seems to be unwieldy and “artificial”, it is a sort of moral community with its own rules, the violation of which is a major cause of conflict. Security is a major issue at this level and the institutions and actors have devised (formal

and informal) ways of maintaining law and order. As will be shown in this piece, ward-level actors have a large capacity for social mobilization for good or ill. They can instigate or forestall communal clashes, social unrest or political crisis. They play some overt or covert political roles and enjoy varying forms of state patronage. This relationship is symbiotic but not devoid of tensions.

### **THE STUDY AREA**

Agege Local Government Area (henceforth, ALGA) has a landmass of about eighteen square kilometres.<sup>2</sup> It is bounded in the north by Ifako/Ijaiye Local Government Area, in the west by Alimosho Local Government Area and in the east and south by Ikeja Local Government Area. The Agege community, as might be expected, is older than the unit known as ALGA as it had been settled since the seventeenth century by Awori-Yoruba, whose dispersal point was at Isheri-Olofin. It was from there that some elements moved to Orile-Agege, the original homestead of the Agege community. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, another settlement emerged near the railway station on the Lagos-Abeokuta line, constructed by the British colonial government between 1895 and 1911. Over time, the newer settlement took advantage of its strategic location to draw a steady influx of migrants and settlers till it became a much bigger community than the original homestead. Indeed, as commercial opportunities around the station expanded, the settlement extended to and incorporated Orile-Agege itself!

The “new” Agege that thus emerged evolved its own political and administrative institutions. The community was divided into four wards, each administered by a council of eight male elders. In 1952, the membership of this council of elders was doubled to sixteen, the additional members being younger men who were expected to complement the elders and improve their performance. In 1954, Agege was made the headquarters of a District Council carved out of the Ikeja Native Authority, which also became a District Council. However, in 1967, following the creation of Lagos State and the onset of military rule, Agege was merged with (and subordinated to) Ikeja till it became an autonomous Local Government Area in 1989. Two other local government areas – Alimosho in 1991 and Ifako/Ijaye in 1996 – have since emerged from the original local government. In the face of the uncertainties and instability occasioned by these

administrative changes, the wards in the community functioned as the basis of administration in the area.

## **EVOLUTION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN LAGOS**

The city of Lagos consists of a core on the Island of Lagos and adjoining settlements, which have been steadily absorbed by an expanding metropolis since the nineteenth century. This process was accentuated by the British take-over of Lagos in 1861 and the subsequent expansion of colonial rule over increasingly larger areas of the hinterland. As Lagos was a Crown Colony, the settlement was placed under the direct administrative control of the British. In reality, effective administration was limited to the city, and did not cover the entire dependency. The Northern District, in which Agege was located, and the adjoining settlements did not receive as much attention as the Island in terms of infrastructure and integration into Crown Colony administration (Olukoju, 2003a).

In 1927, the Northern District was virtually separated from the Municipality with the setting up of local districts first at Agege and later at Ikeja. The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, and the subsequent exigencies of the war, disrupted any extensive plans for a coordinated administration of the Lagos Districts. However, by the 1950s, the politics of regionalism in the context of decolonization placed Lagos in the Western Region in 1953, a position that was reversed following the Kano riots of 1953, and opposition from the Northern and Eastern Regions. Under the Lyttelton Constitution of 1954, Lagos municipality was detached from the Western Region to constitute a Federal Territory as part of the concessions made to avert the break-up of the country. However, the Lagos Districts remained in the Western Region.

By 1954, suburban Lagos had four district councils namely- Mushin District Council, the Ikeja District Council, the Ajeromi District Council and the Agege District Council, the present study area. These were subject to the Government of the Western Region, the headquarters of which was at Ibadan. However, with the creation of Lagos State in 1967, mainland settlements like Agege were added to the Municipality to constitute the smallest state (though one of the three most populous) in Nigeria.

The creation of Lagos State finally resolved the anomaly in the administration of Lagos. Until then, mainland settlements which were territorially contiguous with the Municipality were part of a Region whose capital was over a hundred miles away. This had serious implications for the provision of social services and physical infrastructure in the area (Olukoju, 2003a). Meanwhile, up to 1975, the Lagos metropolitan area comprised four districts: the Mushin Town Council, the Municipality of Lagos, the Ajeromi District Council and the Ikeja District Council, in which Agege was situated. The nationwide local government reforms of 1976 constituted a landmark for some reasons. First, they harmonised, for the first time, local government administrative practices across the country. Second, local government was formally recognised as the third tier of government below the State and Federal governments. Third, this was the first step in the continuous fragmentation of the local government areas in the country. Fourth, the foundation was laid for the constitutional allocation of a certain percentage of revenue from the Federation Account to local governments in Nigeria.

Yet, the imposed uniformity across the country has affected the local government system in diverse ways. For much of the era of military rule (1967-79, 1984-98), unelected officials were detailed to administer local governments other than theirs, thus reducing the scope for local participation. Conversely, democratic elections, whenever they held, have provided the local people the best opportunity of direct participation in local government affairs. However, regardless of the prevailing order (military or civilian), traditional authorities were consulted on issues of crime, law and order, mobilization for development, land and chieftaincy disputes etc. Hence, though it might appear that it was only during elections that the people were “involved” in local government, we shall see that they have always played some role (no matter how marginal) even if through their rulers or representatives.

### **TRADITIONAL POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS IN AGEGE**

The year 1952 was a landmark in the evolution of traditional political institutions in Agege. First, it was the year that the government of the Western Region under Chief Obafemi Awolowo, introduced sweeping local government reforms, the impact of which has been studied at the regional and local levels (e.g. Olukoju, 2003b). Second, as in

other parts of the Western region, Agege was also experiencing political changes which either anticipated or were induced by the developments at the Regional level. At that time, the Agege community comprised four administrative wards: Ward A – Isale Oja and Gbogunleri Quarters; Ward B – Seriki Quarters; Ward C – Atobaje and Tabon Tabon Quarters; and Ward D – Sango Quarters. By the authority of the Western Region House of Assembly, the *Olu* of Agege stool was created and each of the aforementioned quarters was placed under a traditional chief, who was responsible for the day-to-day administration of his domain. The chiefs listed in order of seniority were/are the *Balogun*, *Otun*, *Osi* and *Ekerin* – who were in charge of the quarters – and the *Asiwaju* who was not attached to any specific quarter. The chieftaincy stool was filled whenever there was a vacancy in any of the quarters as the five titles were held in rotation by the four quarters. A sixth title, that of the *Ashipa*, also created in 1952, was later abolished. Selection into the four senior titles is by promotion meaning that junior chiefs move up accordingly. Hence, a new chief is, therefore, first appointed as *Asiwaju* from which position he would ascend the ladder from the rank of the *Ekerin*.

The four wards of the Agege community fall under the jurisdiction of the *Olu*, who, together with the four senior chiefs, constitute the kingmakers of the Ilu committee of Agege. To fill any stool, names of qualified candidates are submitted to the kingmakers who then select the candidate by voting. The chiefs so appointed, including the *Asiwaju*, constitute the traditional council of the *Olu* which is charged with advising and assisting him in the administration of the community.

However, it should be noted that the *Olu* is not the only traditional ruler in ALGA, though he is the only first class *Oba* (King). The other rulers, second class chiefs, are the *Alayige* of Orile Agege and the *Ologba* of Ogbaland. The former title was created by the Western Region House of Assembly in the 1950s while the first occupant of the latter stool was installed only in 2001. Since the *Alayige* stool is fairly old, its occupant is the vice chairman of the chieftaincy committee of ALGA. Both *Alayige* and *Ologba* too have subordinate chiefs who assist them in administering their respective domains.

In addition to these senior traditional rulers are eight *baale* of the various wards/quarters of the community. In Sango Quarters, for instance, there is the *Baale* of Keke while in the Atobaje and Tabon Tabon Quarters there is a *Baale* of Tabon Tabon.

Each *baale* has a chieftaincy committee which assists in the administration of his domain. One of these *baale*, that of Dopemu, is a part two *baale* while the others are part three *baale*. While the Lagos State government appoints part two *baale*, part three *baale* are appointed by ALGA on the recommendation of its chieftaincy committee. Part two *baale* could be elevated by the Local Government Chieftaincy Committee to the status of an *oba*. This is based on precedent because all the *oba* in ALGA were originally *baale* before they were elevated. The three *oba*, part two *baale* and senior chiefs in charge of the administrative wards in Agege are members of ALGA's Chieftaincy Committee.

The complex system of administration in ALGA detailed above has served its purpose in complementing the "modern" system of local government inherited from the colonial era. The traditional authorities have continued to serve as a veritable bridge in the indispensable exchange of communications between the government and the grassroots. In another sense, they also function as godfathers and intermediaries to the politicians who are conscious of their close touch with the common people. Indeed, their political endorsement is vital to the electoral success of the politicians. Hence, the latter consult them on matters of state.

This, naturally, attracts various forms of compensation under the patronage system. As well, the traditional authorities remain relevant in the scheme of things within and beyond their domains given their prerogatives: they issue letters of recommendation, confirmation or introduction to people seeking government jobs, admission to government colleges and tertiary institutions, political patronage and contracts, or applying for scholarships and international passports. These recommendations are required for authenticating the state/local governments of origin of applicants in compliance with the "federal character" principle applied to employment to public offices at all levels of government in Nigeria.

## **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATIONS (CDAs)**

Although the concept of "community development" is not new, the emergence of CDAs as formal institutions for achieving that goal may be dated to only some thirty years ago. But since the 1970s, they have become potent instruments for harnessing and coordinating the efforts of the people with those of the government to effect



improvements in the social and economic conditions of the people in ALGA and to enable them to participate meaningfully in national development. At present, there are 42 CDAs in the local government area and they are spread all over the constituent wards. Two or three adjoining streets could resolve to form a CDA for the purpose of developing their locality. Each CDA has an executive council comprising the Chairman, Vice Chairman, General Secretary, Assistant General Secretary, Treasurer, Financial Secretary, Social Secretary, Welfare Officer and Ex-Officio members. All offices are elective.

Though the officers of the CDA are in charge of its daily operations, they are obliged to report back to the membership at regular monthly meetings where various issues are subjected to rigorous discussion. Every member of the community is an automatic member of the CDA of his/her area and is entitled to participate in its activities, including decision-making and election of officers.

Given the rationale for CDAs, their officers and members identify the needs of the community and mobilise efforts toward initiating and executing appropriate projects aimed at mitigating the plight of the downtrodden commoners. Thus, when Agege was a rural community, CDAs initiated and completed many projects there. In the 1970s and 1980s, they hired graders (road-making equipment) to open up the rural roads, most of which were later tarred by the local government; constructed most of the drains in Agege; provided culverts; sank deep wells in many communities; constructed community halls and built maternity centres all through communal effort. This was in consonance with the philosophy of self-help in the face of the gross dereliction of duty by the various tiers of government.

To be fair, some support (albeit paltry, between N3,000 and N5,000) often came from the government especially in the 1990s. In 1997, the administration of the then local government chairman, Chief Enoch Ajiboso, took over the management of a maternity centre at Oko-Oba, which had been built, staffed and run up till then by a CDA. In the same year, the Ajiboso administration also took over an uncompleted maternity centre project from the Iloro CDA. ALGA complemented the efforts of the CDAs in rural water supply by sinking some boreholes, though many of them ran dry afterwards.

Power relations between the ALGA government and the CDAs are complementary and symbiotic. Elected officials of ALGA rely a lot on the CDA/CDCs to mobilise grassroots support for their programmes, especially election to office. The elections of April 2003 amply demonstrated the potency of the CDA/CDCs in delivering the massive votes which ensured the re-election of Governor Ahmed Bola Tinubu. But this was after protracted negotiations following complaints by the CDA/CDCs of neglect by the state government. Once they were reassured with firm commitments, they went to work to support the governor, the only one of five governors produced by his party, the Alliance for Democracy (AD), to have been re-elected.

In the area of conflict management, CDAs have been very effective at nipping crises in the bud. Such efforts averted a bloodbath in ALGA, which has a large population of Muslim-“Hausa” (Northerners), during the Maitatsine riots that spread to Agege. It required top-level meetings among community elders and leaders to bring the situation under control. The same approach was adopted in forestalling the spread to Agege of the OPC/Hausa crisis which broke out in Ajegunle in October 2000. Other matters requiring arbitration, such as police cases (involving civil rather than criminal offences) and land disputes, are also handled by the CDAs in conjunction with the other stakeholders in ALGA.

Security of life and property is a key issue of common concern, and CDAs have been most prominent in dealing with it. They have been instrumental in the erection of security gates on several streets to check the onslaught of armed robbers and other hoodlums. Moreover, some members of the CDAs also belong to the Neighbourhood Watch, an organization in charge of security in ALGA. The CDAs, through the CDC, also liaise with Market Associations and the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) to rid the markets and motor parks of undesirable elements, who pose a threat to security in the locality.

Allusion has been made to CDCs, which are the umbrella organizations of all CDAs. The function of a CDC is the coordination of the activities of its constituent CDAs. The Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer of each CDA are automatic members of the CDC, which has the same number of elected officers as the CDAs. The CDCs also have a coordinating body at the state level known as the State CDC. Its membership

consists of the Chairmen and Secretaries of the various CDCs. The ALGA CDC meets once a month (on every last Thursday) to deliberate on common problems requiring solutions. Such problems are discussed with appropriate officials of the state government. At the local level, the *oba* and *baale* are grand patrons and patrons respectively of the CDA/CDCs in ALGA. Their honorary membership thus legitimises the activities of the committees in the locality and the legitimacy streamlines their activities in the various communities. In relation to ALGA, the CDAs and CDCs are organized under the Community Development section of ALGA's Department of Agriculture. Officers of this section liaise with and attend the meetings of the committees. They inspect their projects and report to the local government.

After all is said and done, the impact of the CDAs is blunted by their relative financial weakness. As they rely largely on the voluntary contributions of their members and occasional levies for projects, finances are perennially inadequate and this hampers the execution of projects. Paradoxically, ALGA which is a revenue-generating entity has failed to match its better financial status (compared to its constituent CDAs) with practical results.

## **MARKET ASSOCIATIONS**

ALGA is a major component of the urban sprawl that is Metropolitan Lagos, the core of Lagos State. Expectedly, the size of its population (which is in excess of one million persons) also corresponds to the scale of commercial activities in the area. As Agege had emerged around a railway station, it has had its regular markets since the 1920s. The first of such markets, located on the site of the present main market, was established opposite the railway station for the convenience of farmers from the adjoining communities of Ayobo, Igando, Isheri and others. Until 1951, the market was associated with agricultural and perishable items, such as foodstuffs, only. Agege was a major supply centre for the Lagos metropolis on the island in such commodities as *gari*, yam, cassava, yam flour and vegetables. But from 1951, non-perishable consumer items like cloth, shoes and dresses were introduced.

All this while, there was no market association in the true sense till the 1960s, when an overall leader emerged. By 1964, the second *Iyaloja*, one Madam Somolu, had

become a notable leader of market associations in Agege. She organized meetings with leaders of the various market associations to deliberate on matters relating mainly to the markets. Each of the sixteen market associations in ALGA has an executive committee that directs its affairs but all come under the umbrella of the Agege Local Government Market Men and Women Association, a body led by the *Babalaja* and the *Iyaloja*, male and female leaders respectively. The Association also has a Secretary General, Treasurer and Auditor, among others. The General Secretary runs the affairs of the body from a secretariat inside the main market, with the assistance of secretaries of the sixteen constituent associations, who double as Under Secretaries of the umbrella organization.

This wider body regulates market activities in ALGA in several respects. It safeguards the interests of consumers by ensuring just pricing and protects those of its members by outlawing underselling; it regulates methods and means of attracting customers; provides appropriate sanitation facilities and ensures sanitary conditions in and around the markets and ensures security of life and property in the same localities. The umbrella organization also imposes sanctions on defaulting members. In discharging the aforementioned functions, it liaises with agencies or organs of both the state and local governments on issues of environmental sanitation, street trading (Lawal, 2004) and related matters.

The funding of the market associations is dependent on levies on members. Such levies are collected by executive members of each association for remittance to the coffers of the central body. Part of the proceeds of such collections is devoted to paying the wages of security guards and cleaners engaged to get rid of waste after the mandatory sanitation exercises in the markets; payment of electricity bills; and support for members in case of emergencies such as untimely death and accidents or on the celebration of wedding and other social ceremonies.

Power relations within the market associations and between them and other social and political actors at the ward, local government and state levels are characterized by cooperation rather than confrontation. First, leaders of market associations hold weekly meetings at Alausa, the state capital, with executive members of the Lagos State Markets Association, which, incidentally, is led by (the *Iyaloja* of all *Iyaloja*) Alhaja Abibatu Mogaji, the mother of the current state governor, Ahmed Bola Tinubu. Second, as a

reflection of its political affiliation, members of the market associations in ALGA hold regular meetings of *Afenifere*, the pan-Yoruba cultural organization that produced the ruling Alliance for Democracy party. We may note that *Afenifere* was polarised by a protracted factional crisis over the re-election of the state governor. Whatever be the case, the market associations have a substantial measure of political leverage given their capacity for voter mobilization and potential for precipitating civil unrest in the event of a political or communal crisis. Hence, leaders and members of the associations have reaped political patronage in the form of government contracts and other largesse as a compensation for their incorporation into the prevailing political order.

The market associations also play crucial roles in conflict prevention and management in an ethnically plural and potentially volatile community. Up to the mid-1980s, there were no reported cases of internal crisis in the market associations. But, in 1986, a leadership struggle broke out when a particular woman exploited the support of a few powerful persons in the community to impose herself on the market associations in ALGA. Majority of the market men and women denied her recognition as the *Iyaloja* though she kept parading herself as such. The polarisation of the body was finally resolved in 2002 when the new *Olu* of Agege constituted a committee of leaders of the community to intervene in the matter. This incident demonstrated the possibilities and limits of external interference and intervention in the affairs of market associations.

Another crisis also erupted over the sale of new stalls and shops at the Agege main market. The developer had demanded as much as N350,000 for a single shop space while the project was under construction, a price that the market association considered prohibitive and exploitative. They insisted that genuine market women should pay no more than N120-130,000 per shop and N20-30,000 per stall, depending on their size. The issue polarised the community given the vested interests involved in it. While the former *Olu* of Agege backed the Developer, his successor as well as the former chairman of ALGA, Chief Enoch Ajiboso, supported the Market Association. Eventually, the latter position prevailed and ALGA decided to sell the stalls on the basis of a monthly payment of only N120.00 per shop and N80 per stall. The Association also ensured that the shops were bought by those who claimed to have bid for them and not speculators who would

acquire the stalls only to re-sell them at a huge profit. Still, where the genuine owner had to sublet the shop or stall, the Association insisted that only moderate rates were charged.

On the settlement of disputes within the markets, the Association has devised mechanisms for amicable settlement. Both parties are given a chance to ventilate their grievances and, if the matter was relatively trivial, the guilty party was openly rebuked. If it was a serious matter, the guilty would face sanctions including suspension from the markets for two or three days or longer, depending on the gravity of the offence. The suspension, known as “lock-out,” entails that the person cannot display her wares for the duration of its enforcement. This translates to a considerable economic loss, which has a direct impact on the livelihood of the guilty party, and thus acts as an effective deterrent against such behaviour. It is worth noting that the Association discourages its members from reporting disputes to the police, and defaulters are duly sanctioned to deter recurrence.

On the vital question of security, the Association takes measures to secure the Agege Central Market against the activities of hoodlums who use it as hideout. On occasions, perpetrators of armed robbery hid in the market to evade arrest by the police. Consequently, the Association erected security gates at the entrance to the market and hired security guard to maintain vigil there from 8.00pm to 6.00 am daily. During this period, nobody is permitted to enter the market and this has contributed to a reduction in the incidence of robbery or burglary in the market.

## **RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES**

### **The Muslim Community**

There is a fairly large Muslim community in Agege dating back to introduction of the religion to the locality by Hausa clerics and traders from Northern Nigeria, well before the late nineteenth century. The construction of an eponymous mosque by one Seriki Asani, a migrant from Abeokuta, in 1925 provided a rallying point for Agege Muslims. However, ethnic divisions between Hausa and Yoruba Muslims over succession to the office of Chief Imam caused a sharp division. Hausa Muslims had refused to be led by a Yoruba Chief Imam because the resilience of some indigenous cultural practices among the latter was seen by the Hausa as proof of the syncretism among Yoruba Muslims. The

Hausa, therefore, broke away to establish the Sango mosque where they held their own *Jumat* and daily prayers. From Sango they moved to Mosalasi Alhaja in the 1960s while the Yoruba moved from Seriki Asani mosque to Atobaje Central Mosque in 1955.

In spite of the initial split among Muslims in Agege, the Muslim Community is organized in line with the administrative divisions of ALGA. Adopting the nomenclature of indigenous traditional office-holders, it is administered as follows: “A” ward is headed by the *Balogun* and *Ekerin* of the Muslim Community; “B” ward by the *Seriki* and *Baba Adeen*; “C” ward by the *Bashorun*; and “D” ward by the *Otun* and *Are* of the Muslim Community. Under these leaders are the Imams who head the various mosques within the wards. Each ward has an average of five or six mosques. For the Friday (*Jumat*) service, Agege Muslims congregate at the Atobaje Central Mosque, which provides a forum for the dissemination of important information. In addition, leaders of the community could wait after the service to discuss important matters. Information and decisions emanating from such meetings would then be relayed to the members through the Imams of the mosques. In that way, even those who did not attend the *Jumat* service would have easy access to information on matters of concern to the Muslim community.

The Agege Muslim Community plays an important role in conflict management in ALGA. Its intervention has helped to forestall or minimize intra- and inter-group conflicts, which have a potential for snowballing into wider conflagrations. A notable example is the Hausa-Yoruba clashes in Agege in which leaders of religious and ethnic communities have had to interact to take steps to avert reprisal killings in the event of fresh attacks on Yoruba and other Southerners in Northern Nigeria. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to act fast enough to prevent violent clashes. Nevertheless, the *Olu* of Agege has had to convene peace meetings with leaders of the various groups in attendance. Leaders of the Muslim Community across the ethnic divide would then ensure that the message of peace was preached in their respective mosques at daily and *Jumat* services.

In the field of community development, the Muslim Community has contributed substantially to the educational development of ALGA. Various Islamic Missions have established primary and secondary schools in the area. Indeed, the oldest secondary school in ALGA and one of the best public secondary schools in Lagos State, Ahmadiyya

College, was established in 1943 by the Ahmadiyya Mission in Islam (Olowu-Adekoya, 2003: 8). To be sure, Arabic schools have also been established by such Missions as an aid to religious proselytization. Furthermore, the entire Muslim community has its own journal, *Ojise* (meaning, the Emissary or Messenger), which not only advances the cause of Islam but facilitates religious tolerance among the people of ALGA, in particular, and of Yorubaland in general.

In terms of power relations in ALGA, the Muslim Community is quite powerful. This is because some of the traditional rulers (*oba* and *baale* inclusive) are Muslims. For example, the *Asiwaju* of the Muslim Community is also the *Ekerin* of Agege in his own right. He has deployed this leverage to advance his interests even up to the state level. In return, he has converted his large followership in ALGA to political capital for his patrons especially in securing popular votes at elections.

### **The Christian Community**

Like their Muslim counterparts, Christians are widely distributed all over ALGA, a reflection of the antiquity and acceptance of the religion, and of the diversity of the inhabitants of the area. Christianity began in the Agege area also in the nineteenth century, given its proximity to Lagos, where Christian Missions had commenced their operations in the 1840s. In any case, it was here in 1901 that one of the “African Churches” that broke away from the European Missions was founded. By 1910, the denomination, known as The African Church, and led by a cocoa planter, J.K. Coker, had established a Church at Ifako. The spread of Christianity and of the African Church was facilitated by the railway, which had a station at Agege and whose staff were mainly Christians, and the consequent influx of produce buyers and representatives of expatriate firms. Such persons commuted from Agege, which was then a village, to Ifako where the first Church in the area was located. By 1917, a church was built at Agege with money contributed by pioneer Christians there, such as Messrs Adesewo, Sodipo, Thomas and J.A. Williams, each of whom paid twenty-five guineas (£25 25s or £26 5s) sterling. In due course, other denominations joined the African Church in establishing parishes in Agege such that, today, the number of Christian Missions in ALGA is virtually uncountable.



Up to the 1960s, the relatively small size of the Christian Community and the limited number of denominations made it possible to direct its affairs with relative ease. However, from the colonial period, a feature of Nigerian Church history has been the phenomenon of “breakaway Churches.” This led to the proliferation of Churches, a trend that has escalated since the 1990s. It was largely in an effort to manage the attendant problems and to coordinate the affairs of the Christian community that the Christian Association of Nigeria (C.A.N.) came into existence in the area. We may note that CAN as a national body had emerged during the presidency of General Ibrahim Babangida (1985-93), when Christians interpreted the country’s surreptitious membership of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) as a ploy to islamize Nigeria.

At present, CAN in ALGA serves as the umbrella body for all Christian denominations in the area. Its executive council is headed by Bishop (Dr.) J.D. Adeagbo. The ALGA chapter of CAN meets twice a month at the Holy Saviour’s African Church Cathedral, Atobaje to deliberate on matters affecting the Christian Community at large. Every first Monday of the month is reserved for the executive meeting of CAN while the general meetings hold on the second Monday of the month. Decisions taken at such meetings are relayed to members through the clergymen in charge of individual parishes.

The Christian Community in ALGA has contributed its quota to the peaceful religious atmosphere in the locality. It has been a key actor in defusing inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions, especially between the Hausa and Yoruba, through sermons exhorting its members to peaceful co-existence. Members of CAN have always been involved in all the peace initiatives in the area aimed at quelling religious, political or social crises. For example, prominent members of CAN – especially, Dr. Adeagbo and Mrs Ositelu – were invited by the *Olu* of Agege to intervene in the crisis that rocked the Agege Market Association to which reference has been made above. Their contribution facilitated the resolution of the lingering crisis.

In the social development of ALGA, the Christian community has made significant contributions in the provision of social services by establishing and operating educational institutions and health facilities. Various Missions – African Church, Methodist and Anglican – established primary and secondary schools, such as the Lagos African Church

Grammar School (LAFROGRAMS), a notable institution in the community. Some of the Missions also operate hospitals which offer efficient services.

Like the Muslims, Christians in Agege are involved in the power politics of ALGA. Though religion does not feature overtly in the politics of many Yoruba communities, it is likely that the diversity of Agege would have demanded some sort of sectarian political affiliation. Still, it is remarkable that a Christian, Enoch Ajiboso, emerged the popularly elected Chairman of ALGA in spite of the preponderant Muslim population in the area. This probably indicates that religion does not count as much as party affiliation, attachment to relevant political patrons and membership of influential social networks.

### **AGEGE YOUTH COUNCIL**

The Agege Youth Council (AYC) is the umbrella body for all youth clubs and voluntary organisations in ALGA. It was established in March 1993 for the purpose of coordinating the activities of affiliate bodies. Its Executive Council comprises ten persons who direct the activities of 85 affiliate members. Membership of the Council is drawn from a wide spectrum of ethnic, religious, economic, political and social groups and strata. All the positions on the executive council are elective.

The chairman and secretary of the AYC at the local government level are automatic members of the State Youth Council. All offices at state and local levels are filled by ballot. However, some affiliate organisations have often opted to select rather than elect their leaders. For example, offices of the Sheriff Guards are partly elective and partly appointive. Being a paramilitary organisation, its officers are appointed at the state level. At the local level, only the chairman and secretary are appointed, while the others are elected.

The AYC draws its financial support from affiliate clubs and organisations, which contribute a fixed sum levied by it, and from occasional donations from patrons. Some of the latter also donate trophies for competitions among the youth clubs in ALGA. Occasional financial assistance is rendered by the Local Government but this is often too little and too late in coming because of red tape.

In spite of its precarious finances, the AYC has contributed significantly to social development in ALGA. It has organised seminars and symposia toward the eradication of

drug trafficking and addiction, and the prevention of infection by the HIV/AIDS virus. The Council has also organised essay competitions among secondary schools on various topical issues such as “The Role of the Youth in Political Development” and “Expectations of Youths in the New Millennium.” As its goal is public enlightenment in the campaign against the aforementioned social vices, the AYC invites other organisations, such as the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) and market associations, to its programmes. The latter demonstrate support by making financial donations to the AYC.

The activities of the AYC have attracted official recognition at the state and local levels. In 1994, it won the first trophy ever presented by the Lagos State Youth Council. Members of its affiliate table tennis clubs won trophies at the 1995 Star Championships and eventually represented Nigeria at the All-Africa Games in Harare, Zimbabwe. Members of the AYC also won presidential Gold Awards in 1991 and 1995.

The activities and programmes of the AYC have been promoting peaceful co-existence in Agege. In the event of a crisis, its uniformed affiliate members always assist in maintaining law and order. Moreover, AYC has turned the heterogeneity of its membership to advantage by mobilizing them to rein in their respective constituents. At times, members of the AYC attend both the *Jumat* and church services to appeal to the various communities in Agege to give peace a chance.

#### **THE “STRANGER” COMMUNITY: THE HAUSA**

Allusion has been made to the existence of a substantial Hausa-speaking or Arewa (Northern) community in ALGA. This Community comprises non-Yoruba Muslim peoples from the old Northern Region, including the Kanuri and Nupe, who are also classified as “Hausa” by speech and religion. The Arewa or “Hausa” Community is a major player in the power relations of ALGA. Migrations from Northern Nigeria into the area have been traced back to the eighteenth century. However, the “Hausa” did not settle in Agege initially as it was a mere transit point on their journey to the Gold Coast, then a major source of kolanut imports. At Agege, they sold merchandise such as onions, garlic and ginger, and purchased kola and other articles. Over time, some of them settled in Agege, their first settlement being at Sango. The settlers soon operated as “middlemen”

traders between the itinerant ones and the Yoruba at Agege. Next, they moved into the interior settlements of Ifo and Sagamu to purchase kolanuts and other items. In Agege itself, they later expanded from Sango to Isale Oja and Alfa-Nla, all of which have come to constitute the core of the Hausa settlement in the town. Today, this settlers' community cuts across two administrative wards in Agege – IsaleOja/Gbogunleri and Sango.

By the 1950s, the Hausa settlers had evolved a powerful administrative structure in the tradition of their homeland in Northern Nigeria. It is headed by the *Sarkin Hausawa*, who is assisted in the day-to-day running of the administration by a council of chiefs consisting of the *Ciroma* (Crown Prince), *Galadima*, *Waziri* (Prime Minister), *Magaji Gari*, *Garkuwa* (Supreme Commander), *Turaki*, *Wali Gari*, *Sarkin Gabas* (East), *Sarkin Yama* (West) and *Sarkin Kudu* (Youth Leader). For effective administration, the four administrative wards were placed under the supervision of the junior *sarki* – *Sarkin Gabas*, *Sarkin Yama*, *Sarkin Kudu* and *Sarkin Arewa*. They administer these areas and report on them to the chieftaincy council from time to time. The *Sarkin Samari* takes care of the youths and the *Garkuwa* commands the troops as the occasion demands. The chieftaincy council is headed by a person other than the *Sarkin Hausawa* and, in addition to advising the *Sarki*, functions as the council of kingmakers which selects a new *Sarki* in the event of the death or deposition of the incumbent.

The Hausa Community has contributed a fair share to community development in ALGA. This has been made possible by the integration of settlers into the wider community and has been reflected in the election of Hausa councillors into ALGA in the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, during that period, one of them became the vice-chairman of the Local Government. The Hausa Community has also built mosques and schools in which Arabic and English are languages of instruction at Gbogunleri and Morcas. The schools admit children of all ages up to secondary school level. Computer literacy has also been introduced into the schools' curricula.

In terms of entrepreneurship, the Hausa of Agege have made a mark and produced notable merchants, such as the famous Alhaji Harunah, a wealthy trader, who owned cinema houses and real estate, among several assets. At a point in the 1980s, he became a political patron of some significance especially because his Northern Nigerian kinsmen were in control of the Federal Government, with all the patronage that it entailed. This,

however, made him controversial as members of the Yoruba Community in Lagos State resented him as the local agent of Northern imperialism in their own land.

The Hausa Community has been an active player in conflict management in ALGA. Its leaders were involved whenever any communal crisis in Northern Nigeria was likely to cause reprisal attacks in the South and vice versa. The Imams of the Hausa mosques and the junior *Sarki* were mandated to preach the message of peace to those under their control or jurisdiction. In addition, these leaders participated in all the peace meetings convened to avert or minimise crises. Moreover, they always responded to complaints lodged against their members by members of the non-Hausa communities, such as the Igbo and Yoruba. If their own members were found guilty they were promptly sanctioned to the satisfaction of the complainants. Such fair dealings have always assuaged frayed nerves and promoted a culture of peaceful co-existence. Indeed, the efficacy of such adjudication has meant that complaints are normally lodged with the *Sarkin Hausawa* rather than the police!

## **CONCLUSION**

This study has highlighted the actors and institutions, and the power relations among them, in the local politics of Agege, an important community in metropolitan Lagos. The actors and institutions – which are either “traditional” or modern; indigenous or “foreign” – are engaged in the self-reinforcing politics of influence peddling to gain access to the levers and profits of power and influence both at the state and local government levels. The system is oiled by a well established patronage system, which, however, allocates the benefits, such as contracts, political appointments and social amenities, unevenly. It is worth noting that patronage could benefit the entire community, rather than individuals as such, through the provision of infrastructure or social amenities to a political ward or community. Still, the political clients could also benefit by handling the contract for the provision of the public facility granted their community.

While the state and local governments play the decisive role in the politics of Lagos, state actors’ overarching power is moderated by that of non-state actors. The traditional chieftaincy institutions, religious communities, youth associations and the CDAs, have been shown to have exerted a credible measure of countervailing influence,

though mainly as clients. Even the “stranger” communities have succeeded in registering their impact in the politics of the community. Security, provision of infrastructure and control of common facilities are the points of convergence of these diverse elements. State and local government control of the markets has robbed the chiefs of a traditional source of income from market fees. This has accounted for the relative weakness of the chiefs vis-à-vis the former. Nonetheless, non-state actors have managed to exert some influence at the ward level on the issues of security and crime control, and in the management of common facilities. Significantly, non-governmental organizations do not feature in the administration of the wards. Women have been most active and dominant in the running of the markets (especially as *Iyaloja* of the markets), and in less formal roles in various organizations (such as CAN) at the ward level.

Each actor or institution highlighted in this study consciously strives for relevance in the public domain and seeks to exert some influence where its interests are at stake. However, they are all agreed on the need to maintain peace by forestalling or resolving conflicts, especially the politico-religious ones. Members of the “stranger” community (the “Hausa” or Northern Nigerian Muslims) have been integrated into the structure of power at the local level either through antiquity of settlement, intermarriage, demographic leverage, religious affiliation or economic importance. It is worth stressing that their common religious affiliation with many members of the indigenous ruling groups has aided their integration into the community, reinforced by the economic complementarity of both groups. In any case, their numerical significance and the antiquity of their residence has enabled them to secure electoral representation – even up to the position of vice-chairman – in the local government. Although it is not overtly stated, it is clear that traditional forms of social control – specifically, membership of “secret” (esoteric) societies such as the *Ogboni* – are employed in influence peddling in ward-level politics.

Placing this study in a comparative context within the literature on Lagos, one observes for Agege, as well as for the Ajeromi-Ifelodun (AJIF) Local Government Area (Ajegunle), the unquestioned legitimacy of the traditional institutions and other actors. Equally striking, however, is the relative powerlessness of even the “traditional” elements vis-à-vis the modern (state and local) government functionaries who exercise

considerable regulatory powers. Yet, in their relative powerlessness, the former manage to remain indispensable as political power brokers in the modern democratic politics of the state and local governments.

However, unlike the case in AJIF, there is no discernible trend towards the systematic penetration of the power structure of the “modern” system of government by the “traditional” elements (Olukoju, 2005). That is, there is no equivalent of the practice in Ajegunle of “traditional” elements successfully penetrating and straddling the “modern” sector through electoral politics and employment within the structures of the local government.

Second, unlike in AJIF, there is no evidence that chieftaincy families in ALGA have been re-inventing themselves by embarking on a systematic take-over of titles hitherto given to “settlers.” Princes of the Oluwa and Ojora royal houses in Ajegunle now bid for the *baaleship*, a subordinate and an ordinarily less glamorous position in the chieftaincy hierarchy, because of its new importance in the evolving political order at the local level. This also indicates that traditional title-holders in AJIF are more entrenched in the power structure than those in ALGA because of their antiquity and the less diffuse nature of traditional authority there. Third, the dominant stranger community in ALGA is Hausa-speaking, and it is less in number and diversity than that of AJIF. In contrast, Southern Nigerian settlers are the more important elements in the stranger community in Ajegunle. Fourth, and arising from this, are the implications for the nature of conflicts in AJIF and ALGA between the Yoruba and the dominant “stranger” community: conflicts in AJIF between the Yoruba and Izon, for example do not have any religious undertones unlike the one between the Yoruba and the Hausa. Moreover, Hausa/Yoruba conflicts in both ALGA and AJIF reflect the trend of national politics elsewhere and often take the form of reprisals for killings in the North and vice versa. In the case of Yoruba/Izon ethnic tension in AJIF, it is generally the product of local grievances.

On the whole, non-state actors play an important role in Agege, as in other wards of Lagos. The CDAs, for example, initiate and execute self-help projects where the government had failed or been slow in responding to requests for state intervention. The Associations have had to resort to community mobilization to solve pertinent problems of electricity and water supply, insecurity and poor road access. As well, most of the

facilities in the markets – toilets, water supply and security - have been provided by market associations.

This study has demonstrated the need for ward-level analysis for a better appreciation of the dynamics and trajectories of politics (governance) in a densely populated and diverse settlement like Lagos. It also indicates that there is a symbiotic, though uneasy, working relationship between the "traditional" and "modern" actors and institutions. While there is a striking invisibility of NGOs at this level of governance, CDAs appear to be functioning as a *de facto* fourth-tier of government.

## NOTES

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1. This paper reports on an aspect of an ongoing project and has been restricted in scope to developments up to 2004, owing to the developments alluded to in the note below.
2. The Lagos State Government has since created additional local governments, increasing the number from 20 to 57, a decision that was challenged by the Federal Government. Though the Supreme Court ruled in its favour, the state government has not been able to make good its victory owing to the intransigence of the Federal Government. Hence, the unit of analysis (ALGA) in this paper existed in law but not in fact. However, in July 2005, the Lagos State Governor yielded to the political pressure exerted by the hostile PDP Federal Government to scrap the local governments and revert to the twenty local government units in the Constitution. There is an extensive coverage (news and analysis) of this in, among others, *The Punch* (Lagos), 29 July 2005.



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