Frontiers of Belonging and Politics of Identity: The Materiality of Funeral Rituals and Festivals in Nigeria's Urban Space.

BY

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ABSTRACT

This article draws from funeral rituals and performative festivals to reflect on how and why burials, re-burials, and performances of Eyo and Nzem Berom festivals provide excellent examples of cultural politics and represent occasions for (re)production of kinship, belonging, and claim to ownership of Lagos and Jos cities. It argues that existing literature on the politics of belonging in Africa either understates or overlooks the roles of funerals and festivals in expressing and contesting ownership of the city. Relying on institutional ethnography, the article illustrates the essentially political nature of festivals and funerals on city ownership, not only in the sense that traditional place identity benefits some groups more than others but also that it defines who belongs and who does not while inducing conflicts.

Keywords: Burials and re-burials, Belonging and cultural politics, ownership of the city, Eyo and Nzem Berom festivals; Lagos and Jos Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

Rituals and festivals are increasingly deployed not only in memory of ancestors, in the promotion of a particular (ethnic) identity, or as a tourist attraction, but also as political instruments to demonstrate and express ownership of urban spaces (Jeong and Almeida Santos 2004; Geschiere 2005; Cornish 2016). Both phenomena are in part some of the most situated, embodied, and multivalent practices that constitute the social and cultural existence of individuals and communities (Ogundiran and Saunders 2014). According to Marshall (2002: 360), 'the practice of ritual produces two primary outcomes – belief and belonging'. While 'belief' is a repetitive way to express certainty, innocence, and self-assurance that are the familiar result of rituals, 'belonging' is the echoing of attraction, identification, and cohesion (Marshall 2002). What this implies, as argued by Marshall, is that 'belief' is a step beyond knowledge and belonging is a step beyond membership, suggesting that rituals are crucial for group bonding and for the construction of values in communities.

Festivals on the other hand 'revolve around the marking of special occasions and the celebration of significant events' (Arcodia and Whitford 2006: 2). The phenomenon often draws attention to values that a community regards as salient to its philosophy such as social identity, historical continuity, and physical survival. Thus, apart from detailing a community's identity – those who are in and who are not; tracing the evolution of such communities and identities, festivals also guarantee the physical survival of communities including the political and security needs of communities. In some cases, 'while the celebrations are intended to appear inclusive, they actually involve the implementation of exclusion strategies that draw symbolic boundaries between those 'invited' and 'not invited…' (Jeong and Almeida Santos 2004: 641). What is clear is that festivals can be tools of politics through which dominant political and social groups can exercise hegemony; and 'politically and socially marginalised groups can express discontent and challenge established order' in society (Jeong and Almeida Santos 2004: 641).

Identity politics and struggles for urban space have transformed the ways in which rituals and festivals represent collective and individual religious/communal experiences. Such practices have reinforced the competition for city ownership. Arts are meant to capture creative innovations and aesthetics, but it may also 'conjure the artifice that may be entailed in innovative forms of governing' and group interactions. Yet, literature on the politics of belonging in Africa has given minimal attention to the roles of festivals and other rituals in expressing and claiming ownership of the city (Smith 2004; Geschiere 2005; Adebanwi 2021). Although there is a bourgeoning literature engaging festivals as forms of performative and

power politics, pursuing and preserving collective identity (Xiao and Ogunode 2021), an instrument for negotiating 'ownership' of local culture, performing ethnic identities and conflicts, and a tool for responding to changing contexts of national cultural politics in Africa (Lentz and Wiggins 2017), there are few attempts showing how festivals and funerals are employed to express and negotiate ownership of urban spaces.

While African urban spaces were associated with ethnic groups (Plotnicov 1972), colonial intervention in the urban milieu in Africa generated identity questions and stimulated struggles for ownership and control of cities (Onwuzuruigbo 2014). In recent years, there has been strong disagreements between different Nigerian groups over the ownership of urban spaces such as Lagos and Jos (Salvaire 2019; Trovalla et al 2014). The claim of 'no man's land' has permeated Lagos in recent years, which has in turn induced ethnic ownership questions. Similarly, ownership claims have kept Jos City frozen for many decades (Nnabuihe and Onwuzuruigbo 2021; Trovalla et al 2014). Consequently, ethnoreligious groups in these cities have devised several means to express and claim ownership of urban spaces including the use of cultural practices such as funerals and festivals.

Drawing on Eyo in Lagos; and Nzem Berom and cases of burial and re-burial in Jos, this article shows how funerals and performative festivals are forms of cultural and symbolic capital that individuals and groups use strategically to pursue interests in expressing and claiming ownership of cities. The study is guided by the following questions: What meaning do performers of *Eyo* and *Nzem-Berom* assign to their rituals and festivals in Lagos and Jos? In what ways have funeral rituals been implicated in ethnic ownership struggles of the city? How has funerals and festivals been used as political instruments to express and claim ownership of Lagos and Jos?

To address the above questions, the study relied on institutional ethnography to explain how individuals and groups deploy rituals and festivals as forms of cultural capital to strategically pursue interests, define who belongs and who does not, and claim ownership of urban spaces. The study was set in Lagos and Jos, cities with conflicting narratives of ownership by different ethnoreligious groups – Bini and Yoruba, particularly the Awori sub-ethnic group against other Yoruba groups in Lagos on the one hand and predominantly Christian Afizere, Anaguta, and Berom against Muslim Hausa and Fulani in Jos on the other. The sources of data analysed in this study include personal observation, 20 in-depth interviews (IDIs, 10 each in Lagos Island and Jos), archival materials from Ibadan and Kaduna, and newspapers. Respondents were drawn from all adults who have lived in these areas for at least

30 years and were heads of Eyo/Nzem Berom cults as well as other participants and witnesses to the rituals and festivals. All interviews were conducted between 2019 and 2022. Data were analysed thematically using the objectives of the study and benefiting from narrative and interpretive styles.

Following the introduction, the study is divided into four parts. The first drew from Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital to explain the interaction between culture and politics, showing that politics of belonging and ownership of cities are embedded in the performance of rituals and festivals. The second section discusses the background of identity struggles and the politics of belonging in the city. Here, I highlight the nature of intra- and inter-ethnic squabbles for resources in Nigerian cities. The section traces the origins of the Eyo and Nzem Berom festivals, demonstrating how these cultural assets are deployed to engage political questions. The third section explains how festivals are used in practical terms to express ownership of the city. It interrogates the relationships between funeral rituals and belonging in Nigerian cities. The fourth offers the conclusion.

CAPTURING THE HABITUS OF CELEBRATIONS: RITUALS, FESTIVALS, AND CULTURAL POLITICS

There is a close and inevitable interaction between culture and politics. This draws attention to culture as a highly disputed expression in which subjectivity, identity, and ideology are prominent (Jeong and Almeida Santos 2004). In this connection, festivals and rituals provide the links between culture and politics. While the notion of 'cultural politics' does not imply two separate categories, – the separation of culture from politics – it is the way that culture – 'including people's attitudes, opinions, beliefs and perspectives as well as the media and arts – shapes society and political opinion, and gives rise to social, economic and legal realities' (Craig 2014). Thus, cultural politics offer the opportunity for a people to advocate or contest certain notions of belonging, identity, and ideology.

To explain the ways in which rituals and festivals provide vehicles for understanding the linkages between culture and politics, I draw from Pierre Bourdieu's popularized notions of cultural capital and habitus. Bourdieu (1985) suggests that cultural capital refers to the collection of symbolic elements such as skills, tastes, posture, clothing, mannerism, and material belongings among others that one acquires through being part of a particular social class (see also Wu, Zhang, and Waley 2017). This implies that cultural capital creates a sense of collective identity and group position thereby defining who is in and who is out of the group.

As such, Bourdieu adds that cultural capital can be a major source of social inequality. He categorises cultural capital into three: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized forms. The three forms can be acquired, accumulated, invested, and converted into economic and political capital. By these categorisations of cultural capital, Bourdieu defines the state of power relations between social agents in a society.[1] Under these conditions, cultural capital, whether institutionalised, objectified, or embodied is a form of power or stake that determines the position of a group – cultural, ethnic, political, and economic – within a social space. Thus, the social space becomes a multi-dimensional domain of positions where cultural capital is deployed as 'power over' others in such a way that it continues to structure political struggles. Bourdieu extended the discourse with the notion of 'habitus' which refers to the physical embodiment of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1985:735).

To unravel the complex order of festivals and rituals, I show that politics of belonging and ownership of cities are embedded in the performances of *Eyo* in Lagos and *Nzem Berom* in Jos, as well as in the rituals of funerals. The festivals are portrayed as an active source of power, social norms, and hierarchies of being. To speak of cultural capital and habitus in relation to the festivals suggests that: first, festival practice and performance means that certain 'dispositions of the body – in a wider sense including dress, speech, movement and the like – are specific to the context and contribute to its atmosphere'. Second, it draws attention to 'the relations of the bodily forms to attitudes, ideologies and beliefs' (Schielke 2012: 36). The question of habitus in the performance of cultural rituals, therefore, is often entrenched that people repeatedly misidentified the feel of the festivals as natural rather than culturally developed.

[1] In its institutionalized form, Bourdieu draws attention to the professional or academic titles that symbolize cultural competence or authority. The objectified form relates to the possessions of material properties and/or record taking. This is used to "determine the actual or potential powers" within a group and "the chances of access to specific" opportunities that the objectified form offers. The embodied form on the other hand refers to an individual's accent or dialect which represents a 'power over' instruments and mechanisms of production' (Bourdieu, 1985:724).

BACKGROUND TO IDENTITY STRUGGLES AND CONFLICTS IN LAGOS AND JOS: ORIGINS AND GROWTH OF THE EYO AND NZEM FESTIVALS

Nigeria is usually characterized as a deeply divided state in which major political issues are forcefully or violently contested along the lines of complex ethnic, religious, and regional divisions (Osaghae and Suberu 2005). The country is one of the most complex states in Africa with its politically salient identities that have fostered chronic and seemingly intractable conflicts and instability. Three major identity-group cleavages exist in Nigeria. Apart from the competition between 'the big three' ethnic groups – The Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, there are also competitions and struggles between these three largest ethnic groups and hundreds of minorities littered around the country; and the divisions between the mainly Muslim north and chiefly Christian south (Lentz 2019). Today, Nigeria continues to be troubled by these divisions and the cleavages continue to play roles in the struggles for resources.

Ethnic conflicts have dominated the political space in Nigeria since the 1950s. Kirk-Green (1976) has traced their sources to 1914 or even 1900. Ethnic competitions and perceptions of horizontal inequality appear to engender ethnic conflicts (Mustapha, 2005; Onwuzuruigbo, 2011). Often, ethnic conflicts occur between distinct groups especially when one of them perceives that they are discriminated against or that the other group enjoys specific privileges not available to the so-called discriminated group (Nnabuihe, 2019). This variant, the inter-ethnic category, has been the dominant character of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. However, Barth (1969) suggest that such conflicts could also occur within ethnic groups at the sub-ethnic category, the intra-ethnic variant of ethnic conflicts (see Onwuzuruigbo, 2011). While the character of the conflicts and competitions in Lagos are more intra-ethnic, that of Jos is inter-ethnic. I now turn to the cases and how festivals are implicated in conflicts and political struggles in Lagos and Jos, Nigeria.

Identity struggles and intra-ethnic conflicts in Lagos: the emergence, growth, and use of the Eyo

Lagos is a megacity that sprawls across the Mainland, the Lagos Lagoon and the Island. The city is often referred to as 'microcosm' of Nigeria, reflecting the country's ethnic, regional, religious and ideological diversity (Cheeseman and de Gramont 2017; Lentz 2019). 'Alongside its melting pot demographics, there are many other ways in which the metropole reproduces the broader dynamics of Nigeria: in its …many languages, cultures, rituals, and foods…' (Lentz 2019: 59). Residents of the city come from different regions, religions, ethnic groups,

and sub-groups. This gives the metropole a cosmopolitan nature with English, Pidgin, and Yoruba dominantly spoken in the city. This cosmopolitan nature has led some regarding the city as 'a no-man's land', resulting in different forms of identity struggles.

Early traditions of the larger Lagos ascribe the settlement to specific set of people (Folami 1983; Kotun 2008).[2] Prominent among these are the Idejo chiefs (regarded as the land-owning families) who settled with their families and followers in different parts of Lagos in the 15th and 16th centuries (Okunnu, 2017). They also ruled Lagos from earliest times and were later incorporated into the monarchy as white cap chiefs – in its interaction with Benin – and they retained control of land (Animashaun 2016). Second, the Awori sub-group of the Yoruba who are the largest earlier settlers of present-day Lagos.[3] The Aworis have a distinct dialect and constitute the bulk of indigenous people in Lagos. While there are also the Egun of Badagry and the Ijebu of Epe and Ikorodu in the hinterlands or larger Lagos, the Awori are the occupiers of and or settled in the area first recognized as Lagos – *Isale Eko* or central Lagos, Ebute Ero areas (Folami 1983), as well as other areas on the Mainland -Isheri, Iddo, Agege and Ebute Metta (Akinyele, 2009). As such, "the Awori … laid primordial claim to Lagos on the basis of being the first arrivals" (Akinyele, 2009:114). There was also the Nupe, the liberated slaves from Freetown, Portugal and Brazil who returned and settled in Lagos Island.[4] There was also the Oba Orhogbua and military forces from Benin who were on expedition leading to Benin imperialism in Lagos (Animashaun, 2016). These groups and their descendants in Lagos have merged with several others including new arrivals in the city.[5] However, the Awori have kept their identity and retained their features in Lagos but mainly in Isale Eko.[6] Describing the Awori, Fouad Oki, a prominent Lagos indigene suggested that the Awori:

> …are original settlers in Eko with unique traditions. We have social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in Lagos. This dates back to over 400 years …. We are spread across the three senatorial districts and the administrative divisions of Lagos State, as the descendants of those who inhabited the geographical region known as Eko at the time when people of different cultures or ethnic origins arrived to settle … (Lanre Adewole, *Tribune online*, 2020).

[2] File No. National Archives Ibadan (hereinafter NAI), G78, Lagos History, 29 March 1939 captures original settlers, land owning families, and chiefs of areas captured in present day Lagos.
[3] See NAI, 'Intelligence Report on Awori Central Group of Ikeja and Badagry Districts' C.S.O. 26/29979 and C.S.O. 26/30030/S.1 and S2 Maps1-111.
[4] Interview with Adeyinka Ogunmola, Lagos Island, 10 December 2022.
[5] Interview with Hamzat Olowo, Lagos Island, 11 December 2022.
[6] Interview with Adeyinka Ogunmola, Lagos Island, 10 December 2022.

The above suggests the presence of very powerful migrant groups that share similarities with the indigenous groups who contend they are distinct from their dominant settler groups in Lagos. With its location in the heart of the area referred to as Yorubaland, the Yoruba language is widely spoken and officially promoted. Thus, the government of Lagos describes the state as "essentially a Yoruba environment" and stresses its "Yoruba indigeneity" (Lentz 2019: 65). Since the second republic in 1979, all democratically elected Governors of Lagos are of Yoruba origin.

While Cheeseman and de Gramont (2017) suggest that … the vast majority of the state's political leaders have come from the community', and that '… Yorubas … are not inclined to share political power with other groups' (461), recent trends suggest a reinforced quest by the Awori sub-group to completely take over the politics of Lagos. In 2016, then-Governor Akinwumi Ambode of Lagos State had chosen Noble Laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka as the Chairman of Lagos at 50 – an event held later in 2017. This event was to commemorate the official creation of Lagos State in 1967. Though a global citizen, a Nigerian and a Yoruba descent of Ogun State extraction, the announcement of Wole Soyinka's nomination as Chairman heightened the already existing tensions of indigeneity and intra-ethnic struggles in Lagos. The indigenes felt offended by the action and wondered if there was "no real Omo Eko… considered credible and capable enough to lead the planning of the golden jubilee" (*Tribune online*, 2020). To assuage the vociferous indigenous/native groups and address this challenge, the governor whose Lagos identity was contested by the indigenes at the time appointed the late Rasheed Gbadamosi as co-chair (*Tribune online* 2020).

While the appointment of the co-chair by the governor did not pacify the 'Omo Eko' groups – since the co-chair was not only incapacitated at the time but also died without meaningful contribution to the planning of Lagos at 50 – it brought to light decades of intra-ethnic struggles for the redistribution of resources: land, political offices, economic opportunities, educational privileges, and cultural visibility (see Akinyele 2009; Olukoju 2018, 2019; Nnabuihe, 2020). Different autochthonous Lagos sub-groups, particularly the Awori contend that "Lagos has been hijacked from" them "by aliens who are recent migrants to the city and are connected to Lagos only by virtue of their Yoruba identity …".[7] As such, the Awori, have deployed several strategies not only to assert their identity in Lagos but to control its resources. In their *Efe* song, sang in Awori dialect, they affirm that 'Omo Eko' has roots

[7] Interview with Niyi Adeniji, Lagos Island, 11 December 2022.

and traceable origin that is different from the migrant aliens. Through the song, they contend that:

> We, the free-born indigenes of Isale Eko, recognise ourselves through our ancestry, fishing activity, culture, peculiar rituals, i.e Eyo ventriloquistry, Efe poetry and songs, Adamuorisa, Igbe drums, and the likes. And you aliens are likewise distinct and should therefore know your limits, as you know little or nothing of the significance of the secrets… (cited and translated in Kotun 2008: 142).

It is this Efe song that makes the Eyo festival. This draws attention to the intra-group identity struggles for the soul of political resources in Lagos and brings to the fore the need to investigate the use of festivals and rituals as political instruments to express ownership of Lagos.

Lagos is characterized by several festivals with the Eyo – *Adamu Orisha* – as one of its most important, picturesque, and exciting traditional festivals (Folami 1983). The Eyo, unlike the Nzem Berom in Jos, never extends beyond Lagos Island. Originally, the Eyo was performed to celebrate the death of an Oba, a chief, or a prominent Lagosian. Often, partakers in the masquerade festival are restricted to the family of the person being celebrated. This implies that families within Lagos Island have their own dedicated Eyo.[8]

The origins of the Eyo have been the subject of controversy (Folami 1983; Kotun 2008; Awofeso 2017). There is rarely a consensus as to how the Eyo masquerade emerged nor where it came from to Lagos. Dominant discourses suggest that the Eyo originated from either Benin Kingdom or Ibefunland. Among these versions of the origins of the Eyo, one appears to have gained currency amongst the people of Isale Eko – that the masquerade 'came from Ibefun, a locale north of Lagos – as part of internment rites for the king at the time' (Awofeso 2017:1). One respondent suggested that 'Eyo arrived from Ijebu-Ibefun after the death of a prominent Lagos personality with links to Ijebu-Ibefun. The death attracted Ibefun people to come along with the Eyo costume and performed the same as an interment rite to their in-laws'.[9] It was believed the Eyo remained in Lagos and never returned to Ibefun. On its link to Benin, the Eyo appears to have been mixed up with another festival. A respondent distinguished the Eyo from Oosha and claimed that the latter came from Benin and was performed for the king.[10] This

[8] Interview, Mosopeoluwa Martins, Lagos, 20 April 2021.
[9] Interview, Baba Tajudeen, Lagos, 18 April 2021.
[10] Interview with Alhaji Akinsemoyi, Lagos, 24 April 2021.

draws attention to the conflicting narratives of the ownership of Lagos between the Awori, larger Yoruba elements, the Bini, and other ethnic groups.[11]

The Eyo is one of the several festivals in Lagos that is aimed at celebrating the uniqueness of the city. However, it differs significantly from others since it is staged to celebrate the death of prominent Lagos people – people from *Isale Eko* – marking the final rites of such people. Some respondents suggest that the Eyo is infrequently performed with the first occurring around 1750.[12] In 2003, the Eyo was performed to mark the 'final rites of the passage of the immediate past king of Lagos, Oba Adeyinka Oyekan II, who passed on early in March' of that year without which the newly chosen Oba wouldn't have been crowned king (Awofeso 2017: 25). Sometimes the honorary version of Eyo is staged for important guests to the city as well as a performance for deceased individuals who contributed to the growth of Lagos. The festival has become synonymous with Lagos in such a way that the indigenous people of *Isale Eko* relish and prepare for the performance.

Thus, Eyo's festive space is structured around the concepts of death, royalty, and belonging. Apart from having spiritual relieving effects on its adherents as they believe that the performance of the festival ushers in good tidings by addressing individual's private problems and enabling the barren to conceive,[13] the Eyo has successfully created a culture of homogenous central Lagos and bandwagon effect in such a way that it forms an instrument of inclusion and exclusion. On royalty, it is seen as Lagos' most important festival since it is tied to the celebration of death and emergence of kings in *Isale Eko* and as such cannot fade out. On belonging, the Eyo brings back home sons and daughters of central Lagos from far and near to identify with the festival and be included in the scheme of the life and politics of the city. Awofeso (2017) suggested that 'many talk of Lagos as merely a commercial city, "no-man's land" without a culture of its own' (2017: 32), the Eyo is projected as a stunning cultural asset of Lagos that portrays the identity and ownership of the city.

Inter-ethnic struggles and conflicts in Jos: the emergence, growth, and use of Nzem Berom

Jos, a city founded in the twentieth century, is home to different ethnic and religious groups including the "Afizere, Anaguta, Berom, Hausa, Fulani, Tiv, Nupe, Igbo and Yoruba

[11] We shall return to this discussion since it shades light on the current politics of belonging in the city.
[12] Interview with Baba Meta, a key leader of Eyo in Lagos, 20 March 2021.
[13] Interview with Alhaji Akinsemoyi,

among others. These groups migrated to the city at different historical periods, offering the city a complex pattern of cultural traditions" (Nnabuihe 2019: 278). In its development, the Afizere, Anaguta, and the Berom have been categorised as earlier settlers, with the Hausa and Fulani joining the trend much later.[14] This ethnic categorisation and migration histories have been sources of different levels of struggles and conflicts. With over a million population today, Jos is characterized by different dimensions of violence. From the beginning, the city had been partitioned to accommodate different groups with ethnic and religious orientations.[15] Jos has had a very turbulent past in such a way that the colonial period was characterised by several identity struggles over the control of tin mines, markets, residential settlements, political positions, educational and economic privileges, and cultural visibility (Nnabuihe and Onwuzuruigbo, 2021). Apart from the colonial-induced struggles for power among the different ethnic nationalities in the city, it was the local government creation of 1991 and the contests over political positions between 1994 and 2001 that brought the Jos conflict to light (Nnabuihe, 2020). Unlike Lagos, the Jos conflict is inter-ethnic in nature and has gained traction over the years between the Afizere, Anagatu, and Berom Christians against Hausa and Fulani Muslims. These ethnic struggles in the city have kept the conflict frozen.

In recent times, these orientations have continued to reinforce violent contestations and struggles for ownership of the city. As such, different groups in the city deployed the use of cultural rituals to demonstrate ownership of the city. Here I draw from the contours of festivals and rituals to explain the relationship between culture and politics, emphasising the growing questions of politics of belonging and ownership of cities.

Unlike the Eyo, the Nzem Berom is a cultural dance festival among the Berom of Jos Plateau. The festival is performed to 'usher in the wet season and pray to *Dagwi* -God – to give good harvest to the farming season in Beromland'.[16] The Berom is the largest ethnic group in Plateau State and is found in four local government areas (LGAs) including Riyom, Barkin-Ladi, Jos South, and Jos North. Beromland is made up of fifteen (15) districts in these LGAs.[17] Originally, there were four major festivals performed in these districts of Beromland – the Mandyeng, the Nshok, the Makundu, and the Kadung.[18] The Nzem Berom was a need to revisit

[14] Interview with Chief Choji Bature, Jos, 18 March 2021.
[15] See National Archives Kaduna (hereinafter NAK), NAK/JOSPROF/3169/1921-Administration of Plateau Provinces, Jos Division – 1921.
[16] Interview with Da Musa Bot Fang, in Jos, 8 March 2021.
[17] See NAK/JOSPROF/3169/1921/81- Native Administration, Jos Division, Reorganisation of, 1921
[18] Interview Da Musa Bot Fang, Jos, 8 March 2021.

and reconcile these various festivals after the realization that they mainly have one objective – a form of gratitude to God – *Dagwi* – for blessing the people with bountiful harvest and at the same time petitioning Him for a good rainfall for the next farming season. As such, the festivals were merged for the celebration of the wider Berom nation and named the Nzem Berom. Since the previous festivals were celebrated between March and April, the first Nzem Berom was celebrated at the Jos cultural centre on 18 April 1981.[19] The Nzem Berom, like the Eyo, has played a crucial role in preserving Jos as the domain of specific ethnic groups.

The Berom conceives the Nzem as a crucial negotiation moment where important issues concerning Beromland are discussed, reconciliations made between belligerent parties in conflict, and land matters addressed.[20] In this connection, Sen Luka Gwom suggested that "during such a time, marriages are contracted, horse racing, traditional dances, merrymaking, circumcisions are performed and land matters … resolved in all the areas occupied by the Berom" (Gwom, 1992:144). Apart from the belief that the Nzem Berom ensures a good farming season, it plays a vital role in the identification of the people and locates everyone within a specific community. This is evident in the circumcision rites where male children from seven years old are identified and brought within the community setting for the initiation.[21] What this implies is that the Nzem Berom not only plays the socio-cultural role of bonding and renewing the communities in Beromland, but it also plays the political role of identification and belonging. Moreover, the festival provides the basic social and political structures of belonging, dominating, and controlling a place (see Davou, 2018). Thus, Nzem Berom has been deployed as a tool to assert the ethnic ownership of the areas marked as Beromland but particularly the Jos area.

In Lagos and Jos, local people developed strategies for celebrating major cultural festivals that project the cities' identity and ownership as ways of governing the cities with their main industries. Thus, a tradition of the ritual was invented and developed among participants to encourage group members to ward off intending intruders into the politics, ownership and governance of the cities. These rituals are presented to capture the aesthetics of the festivals,[22] but also to make statements on who belongs and who does not. Consequently, both the Eyo and the Nzem Berom have not only recreated the past in ways that assert

[19] Interview with Da Joseph Chollom, Jos, 12 March 2021
[20] Interview with Da Musa Bot Fang, Jos, 8 March 2021.
[21] Da Musa Bot Fang.
[22] Phone interview with Pelu Awofeso, 25 March 2021

belonging in rapidly expanding cities, they have played out as instruments towards re-situating the politics of ownership of place, belonging and meaning making (Cornish 2016). This draws attention to the connections between rituals and politics of belonging.

FESTIVALS AND FUNERAL POLITICS IN THE CITY: RITUALS, BELONGING AND CLAIMS TO URBAN SPACE

Globally, cities like Lagos and Jos are homes to many events that focus on identity, culture and diversity, including cultural festivals and funeral rituals (see Geschiere, 2005; McGillivray, Colombo and Villanueva 2022). Yet, these events have also been the sites of struggles and contestation over ownership of urban spaces, especially, focused on who belongs, who does not and who owns the city. The performance of the Eyo and Nzem Berom in central areas of Lagos and Jos as well as funeral rituals in these areas reveal tensions over ownership of the cities. This tension feeds into the increasingly political nature of ethnic identity formation among the diverse population in the cities. Through the performance of festivals, and invention of tradition, urbanites – in this case, 'the indigenous peoples – display an objectified image of their cultural heritage' (Corr 2003: 40). For Hobsbawm (1983) invented traditions are means by which self-defined cultural groups and nations identify with reference to their constructed, collective past. The construction and performances of the Eyo, the Nzem Berom and funeral rituals not only attempt to define who belongs and who does not, but also, are strategies to express ownership of the city space.

Festivals, Rituals, and Ownership of the City in Lagos

While the Eyo is tied to death and dying, it is also tangled with the identity and ownership of Lagos, particularly *Isale Eko*. In recent history, but particularly since the eve of the 2015 general elections, the narratives of Lagos as merely a commercial city and a no-man's land has dominated discussions in the media space. Like Jos, cities like Lagos are often spaces for congregation of migrants from diverse cultural backgrounds. This diversity stimulates a form of competition for scarce resources. To compete and belong, city dwellers create soothing narratives which over time, forms part of city making. The Nigerian political environment is one that resource distribution is characterized by ethnic and religious identification with a place. 'Indigenes' exploit these narratives in the renewed importance of democratic elections. This has been the trend and pattern of politics in both Lagos and Jos. This implies that indigenes

will devise clear and unambiguous ways to define who is included and who is excluded.[23] In this connection, 'ambitious politicians, and the new politics of democratization have turned rapidly into the politics of belonging' (Geschiere 2005: 47). Yet, more recent migrants to the city have begun to seek forms of belonging as well as 'an enhanced social status through involvement in the Eyo festival' seen as the preserve of the indigenous '*Omo-Eko*' rather than the '*Atowun rin wa*' – the so-called native foreigners – or the '*Ara Okes*' – those who come from the hinterland and rural areas of Nigeria' (Kotun 2008: 165). In response, the indigenes of *Isale Eko* have deepened the performance of Eyo as an identity marker and further projected the festival to distinguish the 'real owners' of central Lagos from strangers.[24] This positions those who belong to largely benefit from the cultural political economy of the city.

During the commemoration of Lagos at fifty lectures in 2017, a discussant, Alhaji Femi Okunnu suggested that people indigenous to Lagos include the 'Idejo Chiefs, Awori, Egun, and Ijebu among others. Corroborating this position, another discussant, 'an elder statesman and first Town Clerk of the Lagos City Council, 98-year old Senator Habib Fasinro', demonstrated that there are clear 'owners of Lagos' and that the infiltration of intruders in the contest for ownership of the city as such positions presents the indigenous Lagosians 'as endangered species in their own state'… and that 'opportunities that are meant for indigenous Lagosians should not be made to elude them'.[25]

Consequently, the 2017 Eyo performance reinforced the question of belonging and ownership of central Lagos. This was done in such a way that performers were carefully chosen to identify their various families and linages and ensure that they truly belong'. In previous years, while there were forms of screening for participators, the 2017 edition witnessed the filling of forms, appending signatures, and carrying of a participation card (Awofeso, 2017).[26] Although many respondents suggested that such documentations were for security purposes, a closer examination reveals it is to identify who belongs to Lagos and can share from the huge resources that such identification confers. One respondent noted that:

> The Eyo is part of Isale Eko. To partake in the rituals of Eyo, you must be from *Isale Eko*. We try as much as possible to identify the *Iga* that all participants belong. If anyone tries to manipulate the

[23] Interview with Prince Kayode, 20 April 2021.
[24] Interview with Olusegun Dipo, Lagos Island, 18 April 2021.
[25] Davies Njoku, 'Lagos history lecture and no-man's land exponents',

[26] One third of interviewees who are of Lagos origin confirmed this trend but they suggested that documentation was to guarantee the security of the process.

> process and get in, we leave it to the ancestors. I am sure of our conclave… if anyone who doesn't belong to us wear our cap, it is headache that will kill that person…[27]

With the above, actors and performers of Eyo like the performers of the Nzem in Jos, explicitly and implicitly define indigenes of Isale Eko as the group deliberately employ cultural capital as a strategy to prevent the inclusion of 'others' in controlling the politics, economy and cultural resources of central Lagos as well as demonstrating the 'ownership of Lagos city'. Justifying the deployment of cultural capital to retake control of Lagos, another respondent noted:

> …It is good we identify who truly belong to us. This way, we would address the way and manner, non-Eko people are coming in and dominating the political space. It is true that Lagos is cosmopolitan and our people are receptive but we must not be taken for granted. I can tell you that since 1999, we have not had an Eko person as Governor. Those who served, I can tell you are not originally from Lagos. So, if our culture can help us address this exclusion of Isale Eko people, then so be it…[28]

The above position is challenged by the claims of Mr. Fouad Oki, who suggested that Babatunde Raji Fashola, who served as governor between 2007 and 2015, is a scion of the Suenu white cap chieftaincy in Isale Eko (Lanre Adewole, Tribune online, 2020). However, two-third of the interviewees suggest that there is no clear ancestry to affirm Mr Oki's claim. What is clear is that the idea of native foreigners who have held several political positions in Lagos are seen as threat by the so-called indigenous people of the state. To address the challenge, the Eyo is deployed to distinguish families established as originating from Isale Eko and those who do not. As such, the ways Eyo festival practice and performance is seen to produce attitudes and dispositions, helps us to understand the power dynamics embedded in Eyo and cultural festivals at large in the city.

Since the Eyo, is also about death and dying, it draws attention to the instrumentality of death and funerals in establishing belonging and ownership in Lagos. There is an amazing body of literature on the politics of funerals in Africa (Smith 2004; Geschiere 2005; Onwuzuruigbo 2014; Adebanwi 2021). This is because interring the dead is an important ritual in the continent. It requires the performance of certain rituals and transformation of the physical into the spiritual (Lee and Vaughan 2008). Part of the ritual is to bury the dead in their homestead which signifies and stands as a point of connection between the dead and the living

[27] Interview with Adeniji, April 2021

[28] Interview with David Adebowale K, Mainland, 26 February 2021.

and ensuring the continued presence of the dead.[29] Existing research have shown that been buried 'at home' is one of the most prevailing symbolic pointers to the continuing and to an extent, the growing strength of ties to the place of origin (Smith 2004; Geschiere 2005; Adebanwi 2021). Smith argues that established cases of elite funerals 'have brought into view the profound ways in which the political and symbolic dramas that unfold around burials capture many of the dynamics of social change in contemporary Africa' (Smith 2004: 569). To many Africans, it is an obligation to be buried at home. To many people, especially among the royalty, being buried outside the 'home' in the city or among commoners 'carries the stigma of social failure' or not tied to the land (Geschiere 2005: 46).

The link between funerals and belonging is not new. Geschiere (2005) suggested that 'a nearly universal aspect of funeral ritual is that it emphasizes the reaffirmation of social ties' (47). For Geschiere, this is particularly important if the dead person is a prominent figure, the individual not buried 'at home' risks creating a rupture in the network of relations. This is the case in many parts of Nigeria and Africa in general. For instance, Yoruba historians have suggested a tie between the Oba of Benin and Ile-Ife. The Oore of Ekitiland noted that 'prior to 1914, when any Oba died in Benin, they must bury such an Oba in Ile-Ife, since the time of Eweka'.[30] This is similar to the 'Xhosa tradition', in South Africa, where 'when somebody dies away from home, … rituals of a symbolic return of the soul to the ancestral home are performed. It is believed that one's soul needs to be at home and also be reunited at burial with the mortal remains for spiritual harmony to be attained'.[31] There is also the narrative that Lagos was subject to Benin and that this was manifest in the return of the remains of Oba Ologun Kutere from Lagos to Benin for burial, suggesting that Benin is 'the real home of the owners of Lagos (Adekoya 2016). This history has been strongly contested. In this connection, funerals are periods of continuing with the struggle for identification with and ownership of cities as well as acting out belonging.

[29] Interview with Da Chollom Alamba-Chomo, 14 March 2021, Barkin-Ladi.

[30] Davies Njoku, 'Lagos history lecture and no-man's land exponents', The Guardian online newspaper editorial 2017, https://guardian.ng/features/lagos-history-lecture-and-no-mans-land-exponents accessed 2 May 2022.

[31] British broadcasting service (BBC) Nelson Mandela death: how a Xhosa chief is buried. 14 December 2013. Accessed 25 April 2022 from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-25355245

Festivals, Funerals and Claims to Space in Jos.

In Jos, unlike the Eyo that is restricted to the Lagos Island and majorly a celebration of death, the Nzem Berom is the Berom annual festival that takes the form of a cultural dance and previously moved around the major areas in Berom land. The festival announces the arrival of the rains and new farming season, praying for a bountiful harvest and thanking *Dagwi* for the previous year.[32] In recent time, beginning from the 1980s, the festival has been re-modernized and now performed in the central Jos area.[33] During the performance, Berom men and women throng the city in 'their traditional costumes and attires, singing war songs, marching and brandishing ancient war weapons and posing symbolically as the 'true owners' of Jos' (Trovalla, Adetula and Trovalla 2014: 70).

Like the Eyo, the Nzem Berom is about belonging and performance of identity. Since the festival brings together the larger Berom nation into the Jos city space and a sense of shared heritage is very often expressed through relationships to particular locations, the Berom appear to demonstrate not only a collective identity, but also their ownership of the Jos city space. This is in response to a growing narrative projected by the Hausa in Jos who refer to themselves as Jassawa. 'Jos', they say, 'is a cosmopolitan city and not a traditional city like Ile-Ife, Kano, Katsina among others. So, you cannot associate Jos with any particular ethnic group. Anything contrary to this will be distortion of history'.[34] This position is the dominant narrative among the Hausa in Jos. The Berom appear to deploy the Nzem to counter this narrative. A key actor and an elder in the festival suggested that:

> The festival is performed in Jos, which is a central place in Beromland to bring the entire Berom nation together, connect with the ancestors and revive what they did… though we are spread in different places and… the festival, and our togetherness are the people's way to defend their land…[35]

The above draws attention to the ways the Nzem Berom is deployed in laying ownership claims to urban space. In the past, the festivals that summed up to Nzem Berom, not only adjudicated disputes involving different districts in Beromland, they were also deployed in addressing land issues, establishing seniority and hierarchy of political structure in the area.[36] The events

[32] Interview with Da Yohanna Chollom, Jos, 8 March 2021.
[33] Interview with Da Yohanna Chollom
[34] Interview with Sani Salihu, Jos, 10 October, 2008.
[35] Interview with Dara Musa Botwang
[36] Interview with Ngo Hanatu, Jos, March 10, 2021.

marking the festival indicate the centrality of the Nzem Berom not just to the Berom identity but also to the cultural identity of Jos city as well as the Berom's claim to the uniqueness of the city to Beromland. This suggest that the Nzem Berom festival shapes and is in turn shaped by other dynamics of power and forces of history.

While the Nzem festival have been replicated outside what performers tagged 'Beromland', the performance is significant in the sense that it helps reconnect with their ancestors and to show by that ritual, that Jos, belongs to the Berom. The performative ritual of Nzem festival, therefore, provides a fruitful approach to contribute to our understanding of the interplay between urban space and the totalizing experience of being, place and ownership. Although the Nzem is a cultural dance and not much about the dead like the Eyo, the animal skin costume worn by performers during the Nzem festival is the same costume used during hunting events and interment of the dead. Like the festivals, funerals have also taken political garbs and engaged in demonstrating not just belonging but also claims to urban space.

On July 14, 1969, His Royal Highness (HRH) Da Rwang Pam, the first Gbong Gwom Jos died. He had ascended the throne in 1947. After his death, he was interred in a public cemetery (Pam 2016). In 2003, thirty-four (34) years after, the remains of Da Rwang Pam was exhumed and reburied at the Gbong Gwom Jos palace, then situated at the heart of the Jos city centre, beside the Jos Local Government Council Secretariat, in the midst of Hausa Muslims and close to the Jos central mosque (Trovalla, Adetula and Trovalla 2014; Pam 2016).[37] Reasons advanced for this relocation of the remains was that the Berom wanted to give the late Gbong Gwom a royal burial space where he truly belongs.[38] It was also suggested that a form of internal rivalry and politics of who comes first in the order of Gbong Gwoms among Berom ruling families had motivated the movement of the remains from public cemetery to the Palace where his successor, Da Dr Fom Bot, who died early December 2002 was buried (Pam 2016).

The 'struggles to gain symbolically and materially from the death' of prominent persons (and particularly, in this case, from burying the dead) is not restricted to immediate family and extended families. It presents opportunities for communities to contest for not just space but also symbolically and materially lay claims to such spaces with 'implications for local, national and sometimes international social, political, and economic relations' (Adebanwi, 2021:49). In

[37] See also Funmi Peter-Omale, 'Monarch reburied 34 years after', 2003, < http://news.biafranigeriaworld.com/archive/2003/nov/03/0078.html > accessed 29 April 2022.

[38] Interview with Da Dachung Bot, 15 March 2021, Jos.

Jos, the processes of burials and particularly royal burials often (re)produces tensions.[39] Adebanwi (2021) suggests that such tensions have broader ramifications for and within the dead's family, ethnic group and immediate outgroups. This argument drew from Smith's study of the Igbo which contends that '…burials crystalize latent conflicts and make them worse' (Smith, 2004: 570). Drawing from Geertz, Smith points out a strong connection between ritual and society, showing how rituals can sometimes be events that express conflict as much as cohesion. He contends that burials are implicated in the processes of social change.

The idea of 'burial at home' resonates with 'people's growing obsession with the notions of belonging and autochthony, especially since the onset of democratization' (Geschiere 2005: 46). Jos and many other parts of Nigeria, like Geschiere's Cameroon, presents a scenario where 'political liberalization has had the paradoxical effect of triggering a growing preoccupation with the exclusion of allogenes'. While those often referred to as 'strangers' are also citizens of the Nigerian state, the so-called autochthones are increasingly getting scared of been outvoted in their 'own' land by the growing number of immigrants. This is particularly true of commercial cities that are of interest to many. In this connection, burial rituals are deployed to decide who belongs and who does not by career and non-career politicians. Geschiere (2005) argues that 'funerals are often cited …as an ultimate test of who belongs where'. Indigenes suggest that immigrants be buried in their own village implying that such 'people should vote in their own villages instead of competing with autochthones in their part of the country' (47).

The struggle for space and contest for recognition as 'owners of the land' among various ethno-cultural groups in Jos was deepened with the politicization and interpretation of funerals as political instruments. The traditional stool of the Berom in Jos, has been part and parcel of narrative making on the ownership of Jos. Both the Berom and the Hausa have grafted several narratives to establish their ownership of Jos city. Here, the burial and re-burial of dead paramount rulers – the Gbong Gwoms – in the Palace comes to the fore. The Hausa, mainly adherents of Islam, had frowned at that and did not approve of having 'burial places of non-Muslims close to their abodes and main worship places' (Trovalla, Adetula and Trovalla 2014: 70). The Hausa Muslims considered it a strategy by the Berom to get them off the city and dominate the land.[40]

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[39] Interview, Alhaji Mudi. Jos, 24 October 2014.

[40] Interview with Dantala Yaqub, Rikkos, Jos, 16 September 2014.

Funeral rites are important rituals in Berom cultural worldview. Burials had spiritual connotation, and Riyom, the provincial religious-political headquarter of the Berom, is relevant. While burials were often performed where someone's placenta and umbilical cord were buried, many villages 'buried their dead with the head pointing towards Riyom' (Mwadkwon 2010: 176). For the Berom, the *vwel* – land – is seen as source and every Berom is tied to this source – where they belong.[41] This question of belonging and funerals in Berom worldview is captured in the work of Mwadkwon (2010) which shows how the disruption of a man's burial in Kwogo Hoss in Riyom by some Berom from Zawan village can be interpreted as a process of linking belonging and funerals. The Kwogo Hoss people had carried their dead from a morgue in 1980. After the necessary rituals, he was interred. While the mourners were still there, a group of people came and suggested that the interred body was theirs and mistakenly given to the Hoss people by the morgue. After deliberations and resistance, the interred body was exhumed and reburied in Zawan. Mwadkwon suggested that one is buried where s/he truly belongs because through that way, 'each village proclaimed that their spirits and ancestors lived in the land and thereby declared the piece of land their own' (Mwadkwon 2010: 217). In this context, the burials and re-burials of Gbong Gwoms in the palace in Jos becomes potential ways to demonstrate ownership of Jos and a pointer that the Berom own the land and belong to Jos.

The link between funerals and belonging is not new. Geschiere (2005) suggested that 'a nearly universal aspect of funeral ritual is that it emphasizes the reaffirmation of social ties' (47). For Geschiere, this is particularly important if the dead person is a prominent figure, the individual not buried 'at home' risks creating a rupture in the network of relations.

As such, the Hausa Muslims, in the course of the conflict, lamented what they tagged denial of access to their traditional burial spaces in both Jos north and south LGAs. In a joint communique issued by the Muslim communities of Jos North, Jos South, Riyom, Barkin-Ladi and Bassa LGAs, they argued that the Muslims of Jos South at a point resorted to burying their dead inside their mosque which eventually got filled up. The Muslims also noted that their burial ground at Tudun Wada was invaded by mostly Christian communities who erected residential buildings and other properties on the facility, thereby denying the Muslim access to bury their dead.

[41] Interview with Da Chollom Alamba-Chomo, 14 March 2021, Barkin-Ladi.

On 18 April 2021, remains of 53 people were said to have been exhumed from a mass grave in Bukuru, after about twenty (20) years. Daily Trust Newspaper report of 3 May 2021, suggested that the Hausa community who were unable to access their burial ground at Gero Road, Bukuru in Jos South LGA, resorted to burying their dead in a mass grave around First Bank branch in the town (Musa 2021). While the claim of denial of access to burial spaces to Hausa Muslims by mostly the Berom Christains can be interpreted as a political strategy, the choice of the Muslim communities to exhume and rebury their dead is the continuation of the politics of belonging and claims to urban space in Jos. Thus, reburials and 'funerals at home' draw attention to the increasing global quest for return of objects and human remains to the places of origin (see Onoma 2018). These burials and reburials are not only crucial because the living cared for their loved ones and would want to now give them a befitting burial as well as specifically say where they were interred, but also because they represent an ancestral linkage to the city and also perceived as a process of claiming ownership and owning the city.

CONCLUSION

Largely, African and particularly Nigerian cultural events such as Eyo, Nzem Berom and funeral rituals provide excellent examples of cultural politics in action. The festivals, for instance, epitomises the resolute commitment and determination of the Awori sub-group of the Yoruba in Lagos and the Berom in Jos, to deepen and sustain the cultural celebrations for the values they have for generations in general and the cities in particular. Whereas rituals and festivals have been strategically deployed to promote a 'distinctive city, attract people and boost economies (Johansson and Kociatkiewicz 2011), this study suggested that rituals and festivals are deployed as movements that mobilize people politically and organized them to claim ownership of urban space. As such, rituals and festivals play vital roles in the spatial politics of cities. Most often, city politics is about appropriation and negotiation of space and rituals are used to express and contest ownership of cities. This article illustrates the essentially political nature of festivals and funerals, not only in the sense that traditional place identity benefits some groups more than others, but also in ways that expresses and claims ownership of cities.

Consequently, in the two cases and examples examined in this study, interment and festival performances constitute cultural politics and 'a high point for the reaffirmation of belonging'(Geschiere 2005: 59). Both cases draw attention to kinship and ownership of the city but in different ways. In Jos, the festivals, burials, re-burials and denial of burial spaces since

the beginning of violent conflicts attempts to demonstrate ownership of the city and emphasized forms of belonging that were bounded by networks of kinship and affinity between persons and local groups. In a study by Trovalla, Adetula and Trovalla (2014), funerals were deployed by both the Berom and the Hausa to narrate their mythological past, institutionalise chieftaincy, show affinity and contest ownership of the city. For the Berom, burial is a return to one's source – where they belong and efforts are made to protect such environment from intending intruders.

In Lagos, the Eyo's multidimensionality provides an important aspect of explaining belonging, identity, city ownership, and power dynamics. The relationship between local elite and the people, indigenes – owners of the land – and non-indigenes – strangers, 'the state and the chiefs, and national and local identities is staged and negotiated' in the field of action at the festival (Lentz 2001: 69). This plays out in the documentation and identification of performers, first by the local elite at Isale Eko and then the Lagos State Government. It is through this process that the actors identify those who are indigenes of central Lagos and those that are not. This politics of belonging also manifests in Eyo's Efe song, sang in Awori dialect of the Yoruba language and recognises Awori as the true owners of Lagos. This draws attention to inter and intra-group identity struggles to share in the socio-economic and political resources of Lagos. In this way, power relations are negotiated between the people of Isale Eko and other Yoruba ethnics, the Bini and other Nigeria ethnic groups that have now found home in Lagos. In this connection, explaining the relationships between funeral rituals, festivals and politics, raises the significance of a people's cultural capital which comes to shade light to the sources of conflicts in the city.

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