

Urban realities and politics of *Owanbe* in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study has been motivated by the diverse and stimulating dimension of urban life, most especially by the unending flair for social festivities, popularly known as *Owanbe*. While giving its attention to Lagos City in Nigeria, this study strove to contribute to the existing discourse on urban life and its realities. It documents the pattern and dimension of social festivities, the socio-demographic characteristics of the conveners/organizers, the ideological motives behind the unending spate of lavish ceremonies, the factors sustaining these ceremonies, the sources of financing the ceremonies in the face of prevailing precarious economic condition, as well as the developmental implications and the emerging manifestations of these ceremonies. As a participatory research that took place in 5 randomly sampled Local Government Areas in Lagos State between March 2020 and January 2021, the study sourced data using the In-Depth Interview (IDI), Key Informant Interview (KII), and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). The participants were the stakeholders and opinion leaders within the study areas. The collected data were content analyzed and reported with humanistic approach. The study has discovered that urban dynamics created inequalities and harsh economic conditions. The reality of the inevitability of this situation gave prominence to unconventional leisure and recreation events called *Owanbe* gatherings. The pattern and dimension of such festivities ranged from birthdays, child naming, burial rites, to chieftaincy ceremonies, and so on. The study concludes that ostentatious spending involved in *Owanbe* ceremonies encourages disinvestment through the diversion of funds that would have stimulated sustainable economic growth.

Introduction

Urban centre generally constitutes the heart, the lifeblood of various civilizations and epicentre of economic, political, and artistic activities (Onibokun, 2004). Historically, urbanisation occurs due to unending attraction of the people to the cities with the hope of increasing their standard of living (African Development Bank, 2017). However, rapid growth of urban centres in developing countries has brought to the fore various problems that manifested not only in the physical forms of the city but also in the ways they function (Mabogunje, 1980). Urbanisation, therefore, remains one of the greatest socio-economic changes in contemporary era. In view of its peculiar nature, urban centre reveals cauldrons of excitement where human joy and terror often intermingle (Spates, Macionis, 1987). It constitutes an increasingly important stage on which all aspects of the human drama are performed. It equally encompasses the highest learning and the grossest ignorance, unimaginable levels of wealth with the most abject poverty existing side by side (Buker, Hewson, 2020).

In Africa, urbanisation shows one of the worst faces of the population problem.

The major cities of West Africa, including Accra, Lagos, Ibadan, and Conakry, thus remain a development and management nightmare (Sai, 1995; Olajide et al., 2018; Turok, Visagie, 2020). Moving along with this process at the same pace is the social change, which has been equated to urban development. The end result of this is the development of new behavioural patterns that affect the social arrangement and institutions like marriage, family, as well as virtually all aspects of social life of which leisure and entertainment are central (Collier, Venables, 2017; Kanbur, Norman, Stiglitz, 2019). What could not be taken away from the entire activities and processes is myriad of problems such as overcrowding and congestion, housing, water supply, transportation and traffic problem, crime, delinquency and its related problems. While these problems are assuming annoying dimensions in certain climes, the major cities in the country have never ceased to receive immigrants from the hinterlands almost on daily basis (World Bank, 2017; United Nations, 2018).

Urban life in Nigeria and, indeed, urban experience, like those of most of the urban centres in the world, provides a contrasting image (Ademiluyi, Solanke, 2007). The problems and challenges posed by the rapid urban growth in Nigeria, just like in any other of the world's developing countries, are immense. The characteristics feature of Nigerian urban scene thus is manifested in a host of environmental, economic, political, and social problems. Coupled with this is the explosive rate of growth, which has progressively complicated and aggravated the inter-related problems of human settlements and the environment. These have been responsible as well for the general problem of human and environmental poverty, the declining quality of life and the under-utilized as well as untapped wealth of human resources. Presently, more than 70 million Nigerians live in poverty (World Bank, 2017; United Nations, 2018). The demand for infrastructure, basic services and housing in expanding urban centres in the country is on the increase. Housing and associated facilities such as pipe borne water, electricity, waste disposal, etc. are grossly inadequate. Millions of the citizenry live in substandard environments called slums which are plagued by squalor and lack of basic amenities of life such as shortage of schools, poor health facilities, as well as lack of recreational facilities, among others (Ayedun et al., 2011).

In spite of these problems, Nigerians, mostly the urban dwellers, are always in the habit of throwing lavish social parties. This non-conventional mode of leisure and recreational activities of the urban dwellers (which usually come in the form of ceremonies and daily/weekly entertainments, popularly known as *Owanbe*) made the appreciation of gory picture of urban life in Nigeria a herculean task. *Owanbe* thus becomes a reflection of the dynamism of culture and of the telling manner in which economic conditions affect sociocultural expressions. It has become one of the established patterns of social life, particularly among the Yorùbá speaking people of Nigeria. Abati (2009) captured this situation with observation that numerous social occasions happen among Nigerians and people get invited according to the extent of their social networks. Nigerians are noted for organizing, arranging, and throwing parties (Abati, 2011) anywhere they find themselves.

Typical *Owanbe* parties are usually laced with magnificent display of wealth and opulence, at least for the rich, in order to make a statement that the conveners are people of means. *Owanbe*

parties are so frequent that the partakers often become vulnerable to armed robbery attacks, and high rate of vehicle accidents. Parties held during the daytime were just as robust and showy as those held in the night. The Yorùbá were the most notorious promoters of this culture. Very visible during these events are men's expansive, parachute-like *agbada*, and the women's headgears of different designs, shapes, and sizes – all creatively embroidered and worn with accustomed grace. On a typical weekend, an average couple could be invited to about five parties, with five different *aso ebis*, changing from one attire to the other, rushing from one end of the city to another (Nwafor, 2011). This culture of ostentation was traced to certain “madness” in society, an inversion of values where even the poor felt compelled to lavish borrowed money on such big parties just so they could meet public expectations. Funerals, in particular, provided special excuse for indebtedness or bankruptcy. Driven by folk's beliefs that it is compulsory to give one's parents a befitting burial, persons who could not afford to feed themselves are found taking loans to feed their guests. Among the local people, the cow and the drinks could be purchased on credit, with the understanding that the guests will donate money to the celebrant. After the party, careful accounting is done to settle all outstanding debts. Where the guests fail to be generous, the result could be the gnashing of teeth and embarrassment by creditors. In view of the foregoing, the following questions were generated to guide this study: What is the pattern and dimension of these ceremonies? What are the socio-demographic characteristics of the conveners/organizers? What are the ideological motives behind the unending spate of lavish ceremonies? What are the factors sustaining these ceremonies? How are these ceremonies financed in spite of the prevailing economic condition? Does this spate of ceremonies have implication on developmental processes? What are the emerging manifestations of these ceremonies in the urban centre like Lagos?

Methodology

Data for this research were gathered and obtained from both primary and secondary sources in Lagos. There are 20 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Lagos State out of which 6 LGAs were randomly sampled. The primary sources of data were drawn from 6 randomly sampled LGAs between March 2020 and January 2021. The sampled LGAs included Alimosho, Ifako-Ijaye, Kosofe, Ojo, Lagos Mainland and Lagos Island. The partakers in this study were grouped into two categories. The first category comprised people in formal setting of the economy, while the second category included those in the informal setting. The first category was composed of the elites that are working in the Lagos State Ministries of Finance, Home Affairs, Economic Planning and Budget, Housing, Finance, Physical Planning and Urban Development, scholars in Economics, Urban Studies from Lagos State University and University of Lagos. The second category comprised the stakeholders in social event activities (organizers, event service providers, patrons of most of the events), previous conveners/organizers of lavish ceremonies, the opinion leaders in the communities such as the clergies, retired civil servants, and community leaders. Instant interviews were sought and conducted where possible with people who possessed relevant information about the issue being studied but were “met by chance” away from

their place of abode. Where it was not possible to get immediate responses from the prospective respondents met in this instance, appointments were booked with them for interview in their respective places of residence. Participant observation method was also adopted to collect data at every available opportunity. Secondary sources for the research include the published and some unpublished materials that gave historical and background information. These includes books, journals, newspapers, magazines, and the Internet sources. The data collected were fully transcribed, analyzed, and interpreted for discussion.

Results and discussion

Urban economics and social menace of urbanisation in Lagos State

Nigeria continues to maintain her status as one of the countries with the lowest income levels. The country equally has an insufficient fiscal space for critical social and infrastructural spending that can cushion an economic downturn (Aisen et al., 2021). This further intensifies the need for migration to urban centres as the best option open for improved life chances among those that could not cope with attendant harsh economic situation. Using Lagos as an example, Morakinyo et al. (2012) and Ilesanmi (2010) were of the view that rapid population growth and urban expansion that usually exert heavy burden on urban facilities have made expected conducive life in the cities unattainable over time. In this situation, provisions of housing, serviced land, infrastructure and urban services, and livelihood opportunities remain incomparable to the pace of population growth. The consequence of this is constantly an acute poverty, proliferation of informal settlements, overcrowding, and inadequate physical and social infrastructure thereby creating challenges on the viability of many major urban areas (Mallach, Scorsone, 2011; Lall et al., 2017; Turok, 2017; Rodrik, 2018). Using this as a springboard for understanding the situation in urban centres of Lagos, this study explored the economics and the social menace of urban centres in Lagos.

In the words of one of the participants, Lagos State is composed of many cities and many settlements that could be classified as sub-urban. All of these have been transformed on a daily basis due to influx of people from all over the country. People from the neighbouring countries like the Benin Republic, Togo, Ghana, etc. are equally pouring into Lagos State. As a result of this, the city increasingly faces difficulties to find resources necessary to provide public services of adequate quality to the populace (In-Depth Interview/Female/Lecturer/Economics Department, Lagos State University, Nigeria). Stressing further on this, it was noted that several employable individuals could not secure employment in public service and the majority of those under private employment are not well paid. Many of them could be effectively classified as operating under disguised unemployment (In-Depth Interview/Male/Civil Servant/Lagos State Ministry of Home Affairs, Nigeria). Another submission revealed that loss of jobs, combined with the increasing poverty of vast majority of the populace and the declining value of their property base, have severely reduced the ability of the populace to find the needed revenues to pay for

services (like health, good education for children, and decent accommodation) that would make their life worthwhile (In-Depth Interview/Female/Lecturer/Urban and Regional Department, University of Lagos, Nigeria). Further exploration of urban sufferings was made from physical environmental perspective. According to one of the participants, dwindling economic base with ever-expanding population has made the maintenance of available infrastructure unattainable. Most of the infrastructure in the city has therefore deteriorated with potholed roads, missing street signs, neglected parks and playgrounds, and shuttered recreation centres (In-Depth Interview/Male/Lecturer/Economics Department, University of Lagos, Nigeria).

Many of the urban dwellers were noted to be living traumatic lifestyle as a result of unmet expectations. Several of them have met untimely death thereby leading to drastic reduction in number of people that could have meaningfully contributed to developmental process. By this, the government could not deliver adequate public services, could not maintain its infrastructure and physical plant nor offer its citizens a decent quality of life (In-Depth Interview/Female/Lecturer/Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Lagos State University, Nigeria). The quality of urban infrastructural services is deteriorating, thereby discouraging both domestic and foreign business investment (In-Depth Interview/Male/Civil Servant/Lagos State Ministry of Finance, Nigeria). Another submission revealed that people spend primarily on essential goods and services without room for savings and investment which results in low expectations of future income as well as erosion of existing wealth and expected wealth (In-Depth Interview/Male/Civil Servant/Lagos State Ministry of Housing, Nigeria). Economically, things are getting worse according to the participants: unabated job loss, impoverishment and declining property values as well as high tax burdens thus make healthful living almost impossible (In-Depth Interview/Female/Civil Servant/Lagos State Physical Planning and Urban Development, Nigeria). In the midst of the myriad of challenges, households and individuals in urban Lagos further bear the burden of a dysfunctional and inequitable health system. A participant noted that people delay or refuse to seek health care since they have to pay out of pocket for health care services that are not affordable. The quality of available health care services delivered remains poor and remains a huge source of concern (In-Depth Interview/Male/Civil Servant/Lagos State Ministry of Economic Planning and Budget, Nigeria). Despite all these challenges faced by the urban dwellers, especially in Lagos, they still engage in some forms of socialization, particularly in organizing and attending ceremonies. The next section presents more on this.

Issues and events in *Owanbe* gatherings

Ceremonies are very important for the West African societies, especially in Nigeria, as they strengthen social structures. From the observation of events across the social functions studied, it was noted that the conveners and organizers of these activities cut across male and female genders. Age structure could be fixed within 21 years of age and above. The elites as well as non-elites were involved in these events. In most of the events, both the elites and non-elites were found to be involved as conveners and organizers of *Owanbe* social parties. People across

religious divides (Christian, Islam and the Traditional religions) were found to be involved as either the conveners/organizers or patrons of these *Owanbe* events. *Owanbe* was noted as not limited to the Yorùbá ethnic group alone – virtually all ethnic groups from the southern part of Nigeria were equally involved. Ethnic composition of an area usually determines where such events hold or which ethnic groups are organizing and participating in them.

Owanbe events studied were held as naming ceremonies of a newborn child or birthday ceremonies for the old, underage or middle aged people. Other events that snowballed into *Owanbe* were burial ceremonies. Such burial ceremonies were held both as final burial rites for the departed aged persons, often referred to as "fresh deaths", and as remembrance ceremonies for those that departed years back, otherwise known as "stale deaths". The remaining events put into focus in this study included opening ceremonies of houses, also known as "house warming", graduation ceremonies for people that have completed vocational skills training, higher educational institutions graduation ceremonies, and the youth carnivals. The dimension of these events can be best appreciated through the extent of crowd being taken care of during the ceremonies.

Most of the participants of this study revealed that some events were "house parties", also referred to as "parlour ceremonies". Other events took place within the confines of the celebrants' dwellings. There were also "street parties", held in the neighbourhood streets. Some ceremonies took place at "event centres". Public schools were often colonized as the venues for such events. In virtually all these events it is common to see several siblings and members of extended families having their separate stands where their guests are hosted for entertainment. In some situations, food and drinks are prepared communally and served according to the needs of the guests of every sibling. In such cases the siblings and family members contribute apportioned amount of money for the joint preparation of food and drinks. These events usually require the supports of service providers such as the caterers, ushers, rental service providers that supply canopies, serve plates, cups and cutleries, tables and chairs, and other things that make social events functional and memorable. Events that are limited to the confines of the house or dwelling may not require the services of professionals, like caterers and ushers, but a sizeable number of canopies corresponding to the number of guests. Where professional caterers and ushers are not sourced, unpaid services of the wives of the siblings within the families are secured instead.

Where the conveners and organizers of *Owanbe* are hugely endowed financially, their own events are always unique. They organize the events in venues well-protected by the security operatives and specially trained social event security managers, popularly called in Nigeria "the bouncers". Through this, the miscreants and uninvited guests are usually not given opportunity to partake in the events because the guests are admitted strictly by invitation. On the other hand, the people of average economic status do not put up security barricade to prevent people from gracing their events. They usually prepare for uninvited guests that will partake in such events as a matter of circumstance. During the event, the celebrants or celebrating group dress to stand out. Music is provided by the invited band stand or the local music providers. Uninvited singers and drummers troop in to complement the entertainment of everybody. People wear uniforms (*aso ebi*) suited for the occasion. Eating, drinking, and dancing to the music become passionate

as event progresses. Spraying with money the dancers, as a mark of appreciating their dancing steps and entertainment, as well as people drunk to a state of stupor, became noticeable.

Motives behind the unending spate of lavish ceremonies

Spiritual reason was cited as one of the motives behind unending spate of the lavish ceremonies popularly referred to as *Owanbe*. This was made more explicit by Bello (2021, pers. comm.) who explained that people organized social parties in compliance with prescription of the spiritualists for spiritual breakthrough. According to him, spiritualists (who may be Christian clerics, Islamic clerics or Diviners) will ask them to feed many people for spiritual cleansing. Williams (2021, pers. comm.) corroborated this stating that people organize social events in order to prevent unnecessary interrogation that may occur where such feast is given without reasonable justification. But when it is done in the name of one ceremony or the other, people don't probe into it but accept it the way it is being presented. Ojengbede (2021, pers. comm.) revealed that economic recession and other social disappointments in Nigeria have created psychological disturbances that orthodox medicine cannot cure. Alternative therapies, like consultation of spiritualists, thus become the available option. Most of the time, voluntary alms given to the needy are common prescription from such spiritual option. The alms could be in the form of money, simple items like sugar, salt or feasting the multitude. People hardly accept food items especially when it is prepared for a large number of people for the sake of it.

Another perspective of rationale behind high spate of *Owanbe* events was traced to efforts at establishing and sustaining social networks. In the words of Abubakar (2021, pers. comm.), the expectation is that a typical lavish party organized in Nigeria will attract multiple acquaintances. One or two acquaintances thus invited may come along with their friends, thereby enlarging the crowd. From this process, connection is being created. Through this people get to know one another better. The network created this way often serves as a social capital, which people often fall upon when in need in the nearest future, especially where the networks are of high quality. Ajao (2021, pers. comm.) expatiated on this with assertion that throwing a party of this nature is not always the ultimate goal but having people of high pedigree in attendance is what really matters in order to shore up the image of the conveners. It is therefore a common scenario to see people organizing social events for this purpose. To Ajewole (2021, pers. comm.), people that have left the country for considerable number of years often need lavish ceremony in order to reestablish themselves upon returning back to the country. While such ceremony provides them the necessary social connections, it equally serves as an avenue to boost their social image.

People who have participated in other people's social events and have provided necessary assistance in one way or the other, usually organize their own event in order to recoup what was sown after a time (Bamidele, 2021, pers. comm.). While supporting this position, Akinkunmi (2021, pers. comm.) noted that female gender forms the bulk of people that organize lavish ceremonies in order to recoup what has been given to others in the past. In her words, the intention may go beyond monetary rewards attached to it. At times, it serves as an avenue for boosting

one's social standing. In a different situation, such events may be targeted as making financial gain as well as boosting one's social image.

It was equally noted that social events are organized by people just for the sake of them. People doing this were classified by Adebayo (2021, pers. comm.) as those without spectacular priority. Their sole aim is to gain social recognition. Commonly found in such situations are the fraudsters and people without social standing who made sudden financial breakthrough and were itching to have it burnt for people to look in their direction. *Owanbe* at times is equally organized by those who see it as an avenue to appreciate God for the goodies that have come their way or to appreciate people for social support received from them in the past (Adesoji, 2021, pers. comm.). The political class, according to Oparinde (2021, pers. comm.), use the occasion like this to bring their followers together. At this point, new loyalty is courted and differences are ironed out. A political leader who doesn't employ this avenue at least periodically, in the words of Akinkunmi (2021, pers. comm.), will lose relevance.

According to Bello (2021, pers. comm.) the practice of organizing and hosting people in lavish ceremonies has become a culture from which people cannot abstain. There is nothing they won't do to create an event. It is this category of people who organize birthday parties for their girlfriends, boyfriends or the underage kids of their family members. Adisa (2021, pers. comm.) pointed to the cultural expectation that not organizing a befitting burial ceremony for the deceased parents is a failure. To him, this reason equally motivates constant occurrence of *Owanbe*. Adebayo (2021, pers. comm.) corroborated this with his classification of street carnivals among the youth as another way of taking *Owanbe* to different level. In his words, every street has the youth that are eagerly waiting for an opportunity to organize the carnival.

Sustaining factors and sources of finance for *Owanbe* events

It is emphasized that these events are sustained by a series of factors, which include availability of finance and a sponsor. According to Okunola (2021, pers. comm.), these events are money gulping, its weekly occurrence is an affirmation of the existence of their sponsors in spite of the prevailing economic condition. As these parties come up on a weekly basis, it is undeniable that the source of finance is steady and that the sponsors are faithful to the sustenance of the events. The availability of partakers in these events is another factor sustaining them. There is hardly any event where people are not full to capacity. Nwagbara (2021, pers. comm.), however, revealed the rationale behind this. According to him, people who have lost their means of livelihood as a result of economic downturn in the cities have turned these events to avenue to at least one meal per day. Ajao (2021, pers. comm.) highlighted further that many people throng *Owanbe* events in order to keep their body and soul together. Most of the conveners and organizers have come to realize this and prepared in earnest for this. As a result of adequate food supply, *Owanbe* was never short of heavy patronage, thereby assisting in its sustenance in this peculiar way. An opportunity provided by the *Owanbe* events to interact with others, to enjoy free food and drinks,

as well as to listen or dance to the music from a bandstand makes possible regular heavy patronage every week (Adebayo, 2021, pers. comm.).

Using the Yorùbá dictum “a business that is not fruitful will not have patrons”, Bello (2021, pers. comm.) averred that the positive spiritual outcome of the previous *Owanbe* events, organized based on prescription of the spiritualists, is another veritable factor that is sustaining them. In another submission it was revealed that those unending chaotic situations that keep on traumatizing the populace encourage regular consultation of experts in spiritual therapy. These experts thus become a lender of last resort for people seeking emotional stability. Where their spiritual matters have been handled through spiritual means successfully, people organize social events for appreciating them. In another instance, people organize the events as a way out to solving their problems. With these constantly recurring, there is no way *Owanbe* events will not regularly come up (Adisa, 2021, pers. comm.). The existence of the event organizers, caterers, ushers, providers of rental services, etc. makes packaging of *Owanbe* easier, successful and cost-effective. This also serves as motivation for the would-be conveners of another spate of these social events (Oyerinde, 2021, pers. comm.). This also explains why the events are always organized with ease and dispensed with promptly.

The *Owanbe* events can be financed through borrowing, long time savings and pooling of resources together. The financially endowed, for instance, do not always have problem with financing *Owanbe* before and after the events. This, in the words of Okunola (2021, pers. comm.), is because the rich people always end up not recording financial deficit compared to what they realized through donation from friends and acquaintances at the end of the event. Raheem (2021, pers. comm.) highlighted that those barely above or under the average financial standing usually source money for social events from borrowings or from their siblings when the event has to do with the entire family. Oparinde (2021, pers. comm.) also spoke about sourcing money for social events through contribution. In his words, people source money from the contribution made by their peers. Talking from experience, Nwagbara (2021, pers. comm.) revealed the common practice of the organizer of social event shouldering the major financial responsibilities with different forms of assistance by the other members of the family who usually come in to lessen his burden. Sijuwola (2021, pers. comm.) also revealed that the youth, organizing the street carnivals as their own brand of *Owanbe*, mostly seek for donations from the financially well-to-do within their neighbourhood.

In another instance, availability of willing sponsors for these events was noted. These sponsors, according to Williams (2021, pers. comm.), could be divided into two groups, namely (a) those who do it by lending out money with or without interests, and (b) those that do that because of intimacy that existed between them and the person organizing social events. Adesoji (2021, pers. comm.) noted that some people sponsor social events for the persons they develop intimacy with. This, according to him, is highly noticeable among the youth, most especially those in tertiary educational institutions. Ajao (2021, pers. comm.) cited instances where undergraduate students used their school fees and money for the upkeep to organize birthday ceremony for their lovers. Economic dividend accrued from entrepreneurial strategy adopted into the preparation

for such events served as source of finance. What the conveners do, according to Oyerinde (2021, pers. comm.), is to purchase “ankara” fabric as *aso ebi*. The fabric is sold at a price slightly above the normal market price. It is from the sale of this fabric that the organizers make their profits and buy souvenirs to be given to those that purchase the fabric on the day the event is taking place.

General realities and developmental implications of *Owanbe* ceremonies

From experience, people have noted that exposure to chaotic situations obtainable in Nigeria translate into stress and depression, subsequent degeneration, and then to aggressive behaviour or victimization. Provision of avenue for social parties was devised as a way of escaping these traumatic social and economic situations. The fact that the effects of these difficulties have not made significant reduction in spite of social parties affirmed the perceived efficacy of this device. The parties continue to serve as ways of giving social respite to people. People also organize it for spiritual reasons. Such reasons were noted as not aimed at endangering the life of the participants, but as a modest way of providing foods and drinks to the horde of people without creating unnecessary attention and questioning.

It is people’s ingenuity that allows them to recognize the economic value of *Owanbe*, which shows dynamism in their problem solving approaches. It was observed that every partaker in these events has one or another economic benefit to gain. First, the organizers are likely to make financial gain from the guests who will give out some tokens as supports when they are leaving the events. In this situation, the quality of associates of the organizers will determine whether the events being organized will be economically rewarding or not. Second, on the list of the beneficiary of economic value of the social parties are the stakeholders, such as the event organizers, caterers, ushers, rental service providers or electrical technicians that handle power supply and public address system. Musicians/entertainers etc., who are regularly contracted to handle certain aspects of the parties, are not left out of this category. These classes of people have developed career paths from regular occurrence of these events and have staff members that are on their payroll. Reduction in the spate of social parties will inevitably translate to dwindling income and job loss for those under their payroll. The last category consists of beggars and the socioeconomically-created destitute that seek for financial assistance from the gathering. Where available, possible food and drinks are sought from the organizers of the events, to keep body and souls together. Very prominent within this category are the wandering entertainers who despite not being contracted for the occasion have their own unique ways of being significant, by adding pep to such events.

Political alignment and realignment is common in the gatherings of this nature. As such events cement relationships, they usually provide occasion for reunion of lost friends who may meet accidentally. Not only this, they provide occasions for the organizers to make new acquaintances, shore up their social base and recognition in the peculiar manner they want it to be. The event most often provide means to demonstrate how far people have gone in terms of material acquisition and ranking in society. *Owanbe* social events likewise serve as a means of uniting

people with common ancestral bases. Family members interact freely, settle conflicts among themselves and take impromptu or final solutions of looming crises within the family. In urban centres, however, family is not strictly limited to those who are related by blood but includes those who have like minds. This brand of family system often entails those who are united and being maintained as a result of their resolve to provide assistance to the needy among them. Therefore this explains the essence of family system as the best option for cushioning in every human gathering. The harsh effects of urban challenges and their centrality in social parties equally become obvious in this situation.

Conclusion

Urban reality is about difficulties occasioned by economic conditions. It was obvious that these difficulties have awakened the creative zeal in the urban dwellers. High spate of festivities was discovered to be a novelty for weathering the harsh socioeconomic conditions the people found themselves. Some of them equally make efforts to add to the existing ideas that are currently sustaining people living in urban harsh conditions. It is such creativity that led to transformation of social parties from simple “get-togethers” for merriment into what has currently become a career path. Similarly, the situation has motivated people to innovate on how to turn economic adversity into advantage. It is within this perspective that *Owanbe* as a social phenomenon becomes a subject academic attention could not resist. As a result of its advancing prominence, everybody begins to catch the bug of partaking in social occasions. Organization, arrangement and execution of these social ceremonies continue to assume different patterns and dimensions based on the social connections and imagination of the conveners/organizers. Such variation in patterns and dimensions of these ceremonies is a product of social networks of the stakeholders. The socio-demographic characteristics of the conveners/organizers of these ceremonies (such as gender status, educational attainment, income, affiliation of socio-cultural organizations) influence the magnitude of the events.

In most of the *Owanbe* parties, especially those organized by rich people, it is a common scenario to see some invitees trying to outshine one another. Individuals’ dressing determines how they are treated and given recognition at the events. As a result, all sorts of fabrics are put on by the invitees, ranging from *aso-oke* (traditional hand-woven material), cotton, damask, lace guinea brocade even to wax fabric (“ankara”). Those that could not afford this clothes competition usually ensure they bought the *aso-ebi* selected for the occasion by the organizers. For the ladies, the dress only becomes completed with face dressing by the professional makeup artist. This unending competition for relevance in another person’s social parties becomes a routine. Some guests do this by coming with their own entourage in order to command attention. To others, finding a strategic position in order to attract attention of the host and have a good view of every event, as well as to know where important dignitaries are seated, is their antics.

People have different motives for organizing and participating in these ceremonies. The motives behind these ceremonies and efforts put into attaining successful outcome are a product

of environmental peculiarities of the stakeholders. It was therefore established that these ceremonies are being convened for economic, spiritual and others reasons. Factors sustaining the regularities of these ceremonies also vary along environmental peculiarities of the organizers. Financial support from the significant others (such as family members, acquaintances, members of association/organization the conveners belong) play a prominent role in sustaining these ceremonies. Other factors include financial capability of the stakeholders and existence of certain cultural stands or norms that encourage these forms of social occasions. From the economic point of view, excess money that should have been invested in further production and sustainable development is being squandered on the *Owanbe* parties. The expectation is that Nigeria is not likely to attain sustainable development in the real sense of this term in view of this “culture of ostentatious living”. When considered from a positive angle, it cannot be ignored that *Owanbe* has become a social phenomenon and an industry through which several lives are being sustained, thereby suggesting that it has come to stay.

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Interviewees' personal communication

- Abubakar, A.O., Community Leader/Caterer, Female (2021).
- Adebayo, F.F., Community Leader, Female (2021).
- Adesoji, R.B., Retired Civil Servant/Community Leader, Male (2021).
- Adisa, M.O., Clergy/Islamic Faith, Male (2021).
- Ajao, A.A., Community Leader/Rental Service Provider, Male (2021).
- Ajewole, T.S., Clergy/Christianity, Male (2021).
- Akinkunmi, A.A.B., Logistic Service Provider/Ushering, Female (2021).
- Bamidele, W.O., Community Leader/Water Supplier, Male (2021).
- Bello, A.Y., Community Leader/Nurse, Female (2021).
- Nwagbara, C.B., Retired Immigration Officer/Community Leader, Male (2021).
- Ojengbede, D.C., Medical Practitioner/Community Leader, Male (2021).
- Okunola, R.A. Social Worker/Community Leader, Male (2021).
- Oparinde, Security Service Provider/Community Leader, Male (2021).
- Oyerinde, S.O., Healthcare Provider/Community Leader, Female (2021).
- Sijuwola, M.A., Social Security Service Provider, Male (2021).

Williams, H.A., Community Leader/Caterer, Female (2021).

Cytowanie

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