



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Frontiers of belonging and politics of identity: the materiality of funeral rituals and festivals in Nigeria's urban space

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Abstract

This article draws from funeral rituals and performative festivals to reflect on how and why burials, reburials and performances of Eyo and Nzem Berom festivals provide excellent examples of cultural politics and represent occasions for the (re)production of kinship, belonging and claims to ownership in the cities of Lagos and Jos. 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 in relation to city ownership, not only in the sense that traditional place identity benefits some groups more than others but also in that it defines who belongs and who does not while inducing conflicts.

Résumé

Cet article s'appuie sur les rituels funéraires et les festivals d'arts vivants pour comprendre en quoi les enterrements, les ré-enterrements et les spectacles des festivals d'Eyo et de Nzem Berom fournissent d'excellents exemples de politique culturelle et représentent des occasions de (re)production de parenté, d'appartenance et de revendication de propriété des villes de Lagos et de Jos. Il soutient que la littérature existante sur la politique d'appartenance en Afrique minimise ou néglige l'importance du rôle des funérailles et des festivals dans l'expression et la contestation de la propriété de la ville. S'appuyant sur l'ethnographie institutionnelle, cet article illustre la nature essentiellement politique des festivals et des funérailles autour de la propriété de la ville, non seulement en ce que l'identité de lieu traditionnelle avantage certains groupes plus que d'autres, mais également en ce qu'elle définit qui appartient et qui n'appartient pas tout en provoquant des conflits.

Resumo

Este artigo baseia-se nos rituais funerários e nos festejos performativos para reflectir sobre como e porquê os enterros, os reenterros e os espectáculos dos festivais Eyo e Nzem Berom constituem excelentes exemplos de política cultural e representam ocasiões para a

(re)produção do parentesco, da pertença e das reivindicações de posse das cidades de Lagos e Jos. Assim se defende que a literatura existente sobre a política de pertença em África subestima ou ignora os papéis dos funerais e dos festivais na expressão e contestação da posse da cidade. Apoiando-se na etnografia institucional, este artigo ilustra a natureza essencialmente política das festividades e funerais na apropriação da cidade, não só no sentido em que a identidade tradicional do lugar beneficia alguns grupos mais do que outros, mas também no sentido em que define quem pertence e quem não pertence, induzindo conflitos.

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 way to repeatedly express the 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, while 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 those who are not – and tracing the evolution of such communities and identities, festivals also guarantee the physical survival of communities, including their political and security needs. 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, while ‘politically and socially marginalised groups can express discontent and challenge established order’ in society (*ibid.*: 641).

Identity politics and struggles for urban space have transformed the ways in which rituals and festivals represent collective and individual religious or communal experiences. Such practices have reinforced the competition for city ownership. The arts are meant to capture creative innovations and aesthetics, but they may also ‘conjure the artifice that may be entailed in innovative forms of governing’ (Diouf and Fredericks 2014: ix) and in group interactions. Yet, the 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; Adebaniwi 2021). Although there is a burgeoning literature engaging festivals as

forms of performative and power politics, pursuing and preserving collective identity (Xiao and Ogunode 2021), as instruments for negotiating 'ownership' of local culture, performing ethnic identities and conflicts, and as tools for responding to the 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 the ownership and control of cities (Onwuzuruigbo 2014). In recent years, there have 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, which has in turn led to questions of ethnic ownership. Similarly, ownership claims have sustained the conflicts for many decades (Nnabuihe and Onwuzuruigbo 2021; Trovalla *et al.* 2014). Consequently, ethno-religious 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 on Nzem Berom and cases of burial and reburial 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 their 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 over the two cities? How have funerals and festivals been used as political instruments to express and claim ownership of Lagos and Jos?

To address these 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 their 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 ethno-religious groups – Bini and Yoruba, and particularly the Awori sub-ethnic group, against other Yoruba groups in Lagos; and predominantly Christian Afizere, Anaguta and Berom against Muslim Hausa and Fulani in Jos. The sources of data analysed in this study include personal observation, twenty in-depth interviews (ten each in Lagos Island and Jos), archival materials from Ibadan and Kaduna, and newspapers. Respondents were drawn from adults who have lived in these areas for at least thirty years and were heads of Eyo/Nzem Berom cults as well as other participants in 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 benefited from narrative and interpretive styles.

Following the introduction, the study is divided into four parts. The first draws from Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital to explain the interaction between culture and politics, showing that the 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, before the fourth section sets out a 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. The notion of ‘cultural politics’ does not imply two separate categories, with culture separated from politics; rather, it is the way in which 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 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, mannerisms and material belongings, among others – that one acquires through being part of a particular social class (see also Wu *et al.* 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.

Bourdieu adds that cultural capital can be a major source of social inequality. He divides cultural capital into three categories: embodied, objectified and institutionalized forms. The three forms can be acquired, accumulated, invested and converted into economic and political capital. Using these categorizations of cultural capital, Bourdieu defines the state of power relations between social agents in a society.¹ Under these conditions, cultural capital – whether institutionalized, objectified or embodied – is a form of power or stake that determines the position of a group – cultural, ethnic, political or 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 the 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

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 possession 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).

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 mean 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 so entrenched that people repeatedly misidentify the feel of the festivals as natural rather than culturally developed.

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 – Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba – there are also competitions and struggles between these three largest groups and hundreds of minorities littered around the country, as well as 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 a role in struggles for resources.

Ethnic conflicts have dominated the political space in Nigeria since the 1950s, while Kirk-Greene (1976) has traced their origins to 1914 or even 1900. Ethnic competitions and perceptions of horizontal inequality appear to engender such 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 first group (Nnabuihe 2019). This inter-ethnic variant has been the dominant character of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. However, Barth (1969) suggests that such conflicts can also occur within ethnic groups at the sub-ethnic category: the intra-ethnic variant of ethnic conflicts (see Onwuzuruigbo 2011). While the character of conflicts and competitions in Lagos tends to be intra-ethnic, in Jos it is inter-ethnic. I now turn to the case studies and how festivals are implicated in conflicts and political struggles in these two Nigerian cities.

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 a 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 subgroups. This gives the metropole a cosmopolitan nature, with English, Pidgin and Yoruba predominantly spoken in the city. This cosmopolitan nature has led some to regard the city as a 'no-man's land', resulting in different forms of identity struggle.

Early traditions of the larger Lagos area ascribe the settlement to a specific set of people (Folami 1983; Kotun 2008).² Prominent among these were the Idejo chiefs (regarded as the landowning families) who settled with their families and followers in different parts of Lagos in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Okunnu 2017). They also ruled Lagos from the earliest times and were later incorporated into the monarchy as white cap chiefs – in the monarchy's interaction with Benin – and retained control of the land (Animashaun 2016). The Awori subgroup of the Yoruba are the largest group of early settlers in present-day Lagos.³ The Aworis have a distinct dialect and constitute the bulk of indigenes 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 settled in the location first recognized as Lagos – Isale Eko or central Lagos and the Ebute Ero areas (Folami 1983), as well as other areas on the mainland such as 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' (*ibid.*: 114). There were also the Nupe, the liberated slaves from Freetown, Portugal and Brazil who returned and settled in Lagos Island,⁴ and 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 retain their distinctive features in Lagos, although mainly in Isale Eko.⁶ Describing the Awori, Fouad Oki, a prominent Lagos indigene, suggested that they:

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.⁷

² National Archives Ibadan (NAI), File G78, Lagos History, 29 March 1939. This file documents the original settlers, landowning families and chiefs in the areas that comprise present-day Lagos.

³ See NAI, 'Intelligence report on Awori central group of Ikeja and Badagry districts', CSO 26/29979, CSO 26/30030/S.1 and S2 Maps 1-111.

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.

⁷ 'Indigeneship crisis: only 3 of our governors have clear Lagos ancestry – Oki, APC chieftain' [interview with Lanre Adewole], *Tribune Online*, 25 July 2020 <<https://tribuneonlineng.com/indigeneship-crisis-only-3-of-our-governors-have-clear-lagos-ancestry-oki-apc-chieftain/>> (accessed 20 December 2022).

The above suggests the presence of very powerful migrant groups that share similarities with the indigenous groups who contend that they are distinct from the dominant settler groups in Lagos. With its location at the heart of the area referred to as Yorubaland, the Yoruba language is spoken widely and promoted officially. 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 have been of Yoruba origin.

While Cheeseman and de Gramont 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’ (2017: 461), recent trends suggest an attempt by the Awori subgroup to completely take over the politics of Lagos. In 2016, the governor at the time, Akinwumi Ambode of Lagos State, chose Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka to be chair of Lagos at 50, an event held in 2017 to commemorate the official creation of Lagos State in 1967. Although Soyinka is a global citizen, a Nigerian and of Yoruba descent, of Ogun State extraction, the announcement of his nomination as chair heightened the already existing tensions relating to indigeneity and intra-ethnic struggles in Lagos. The indigenous people were offended by the choice and wondered whether there was ‘no real Omo Eko ... considered credible and capable enough to lead the planning of the golden jubilee’.⁸ To appease the vociferous indigenous and native groups and to address this challenge, the governor (whose Lagos identity was contested by the indigenous people at the time) appointed the late Rasheed Gbadamosi as co-chair.⁹

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 making any 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 subgroups, 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’.¹⁰ 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, sung in Awori dialect, they affirm that ‘Omo Eko’ has roots and traceable origins that are different from those of the migrant aliens. Through the song, they argue that:

We, the free-born indigenes of Isale Eko, recognise ourselves through our ancestry, fishing activity, culture, peculiar rituals, i.e. Eyo ventriloquistry [*sic*], Efe poetry and songs, Adamuorisa, Igbe drums, and the likes [*sic*]. 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)

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Interview with Niyi Adeniji, Lagos Island, 11 December 2022.

It is this Efe song that marks 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 the city.

Lagos is characterized by several festivals, with the Eyo – also known as the *Adamu Orisha* – as one of its most important, picturesque and exciting traditional examples (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, participants 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.¹¹

The origins of the Eyo have been the subject of controversy (Folami 1983; Kotun 2008; Awofeso 2017). There is rarely 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 Ibe funland. Among these versions of the Eyo's origin story, one appears to have gained currency among the people of Isale Eko – that the masquerade 'came from Ibe fun, a locale north of Lagos – as part of interment rites for the king at the time' (Awofeso 2017: 1). One respondent suggested that 'Eyo arrived from Ijebu-Ibe fun after the death of a prominent Lagos personality with links to Ijebu-Ibe fun. The death attracted Ibe fun people to come along with the Eyo costume and performed the same [role] as an interment rite for their in-laws.'¹² It was believed that the Eyo remained in Lagos and never returned to Ibe fun. As far as its link to Benin is concerned, 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.¹³ This draws attention to the conflicting narratives regarding the ownership of Lagos between the Awori, wider Yoruba elements, the Bini and other ethnic groups.¹⁴

The Eyo is one of several festivals in Lagos that is designed to celebrate the uniqueness of the city. However, it differs significantly from the others since it is staged to celebrate the death of prominent Lagos people – people from Isale Eko – and marks the final rites of such people. Some respondents suggest that the Eyo has been performed infrequently, with the first event occurring around 1750.¹⁵ 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 the festival, the newly chosen oba would not have been crowned king (Awofeso 2017: 25). Sometimes, the honorary version of the Eyo is staged for important guests to the city as well as being performed for deceased individuals who contributed to the growth of Lagos. The festival has become synonymous with Lagos to such an extent that the indigenous people of Isale Eko relish and prepare for the performance.

Thus, the Eyo's festive space is structured around the concepts of death, royalty and belonging. Apart from providing spiritual relief for its adherents, as they believe

¹¹ Interview with Mosopeoluwa Martins, Lagos, 20 April 2021.

¹² Interview with Baba Tajudeen, Lagos, 18 April 2021.

¹³ Interview with Alhaji Akinsemo, Lagos, 24 April 2021.

¹⁴ We shall return to this discussion since it sheds light on the current politics of belonging in the city.

¹⁵ Interview with Baba Meta, a key leader of the Eyo in Lagos, 20 March 2021.

that the performance of the festival ushers in good tidings by addressing an individual's private problems and enabling the barren to conceive,¹⁶ the Eyo has successfully created a culture of homogeneity in central Lagos, thereby acting as an instrument of inclusion and exclusion. In terms of royalty, it is seen as Lagos's most important festival, since it is tied to the celebration of the death of one king and the emergence of another in Isale Eko; as such, it cannot die. In terms of belonging, the Eyo brings back home the sons and daughters of central Lagos from far and near to identify with the festival and to be included in the pattern of life and politics in the city. Awofeso suggests that 'many talk of Lagos as merely a commercial city, [a] "no-man's land" without a culture of its own' (2017: 32), whereas the Eyo is projected as a stunning cultural asset that embodies 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 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 the city's development, the Afizere, Anaguta and Berom have been categorized as early settlers, with the Hausa and Fulani appearing much later.¹⁷ These ethnic categories and migration histories have been the source of different levels of struggle and conflict. With a population of over a million in 2023, Jos is characterized by different dimensions of violence. From its beginning, the city was partitioned to accommodate different groups with different ethnic and religious orientations.¹⁸ Jos has had a very turbulent past, with the colonial period marked by identity struggles over the control of tin mines, markets, residential settlements, political positions, educational and economic privileges, and cultural visibility (Nnabuihe and Onwuzuruigbo 2021). In addition to colonial-era struggles for power among the different ethnic nationalities in the city, the creation of a local government in 1991 and the contests over political positions between 1994 and 2001 brought the city's conflicts to public attention (Nnabuihe 2020). Unlike in Lagos, the Jos conflicts are inter-ethnic and inter-religious in nature and have gained traction over the years between the Afizere, Anagatu and Berom Christians and the Hausa and Fulani Muslims. These ethnic struggles in the city have kept the conflict at a stalemate.

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

¹⁶ Interview with Alhaji Akinsemo, Lagos, 24 April 2021.

¹⁷ Interview with Chief Choji Bature, Jos, 18 March 2021.

¹⁸ See National Archives Kaduna (NAK), 'Administration of Plateau Provinces, Jos Division - 1921', NAK/JOSPROF/3169/1921.

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 a good harvest during the farming season in Beromland'.¹⁹ The Berom is the largest ethnic group in Plateau State and is found in four local government areas (LGAs): Riyom, Barkin-Ladi, Jos South and Jos North. Beromland is made up of fifteen districts in these LGAs.²⁰ Originally, there were four major festivals performed in these districts – the Mandyeng, the Nshok, the Makundu and the Kadung.²¹ The Nzem Berom fulfilled the need to revisit and reconcile these various festivals after the realization that they mainly had just one objective: to give thanks to God – *Dagwi* – for blessing the people with bountiful harvests and at the same time to petition him for good rainfall for the next farming season. As such, the festivals were merged to celebrate the wider Berom nation and the result was named the Nzem Berom. Since the previous festivals had been celebrated between March and April, the first Nzem Berom was celebrated at the Jos cultural centre on 18 April 1981.²² The Nzem Berom, like the Eyo, has played a crucial role in preserving Jos as the domain of specific ethnic groups.

The Berom conceive the Nzem as a crucial negotiation moment when important issues concerning Beromland are discussed, reconciliations made between belligerent parties to conflicts, and land matters addressed.²³ In this connection, Sen Luka Gwom suggests 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, the festival 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 initiation.²⁴ What this implies is that the Nzem Berom not only plays a socio-cultural role, bonding and renewing communities in Beromland, but it also takes on the political role of identification and belonging. Moreover, the festival provides the basic social and political structures of belonging to, dominating and controlling a place (see Davou 2018). Thus, the Nzem Berom has been deployed as a tool to assert ethnic ownership of the areas identified 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 those cities and their main industries. Thus, a ritual tradition was invented and developed among participants to encourage group members to ward off potential intruders into the politics, ownership and governance of the cities. These rituals are presented to capture the aesthetics of the festivals,²⁵ but also to make statements about who belongs and who does not. Consequently, not only have both the Eyo and the Nzem Berom recreated the past in ways that assert belonging in rapidly expanding cities,

¹⁹ Interview with Da Musa Bot Fang, Jos, 8 March 2021.

²⁰ See 'Native Administration, Jos Division, reorganisation of, 1921', NAK/JOSPROF/3169/1921/81.

²¹ Interview with Da Musa Bot Fang, Jos, 8 March 2021.

²² Interview with Da Joseph Chollom, Jos, 12 March 2021.

²³ Interview with Da Musa Bot Fang, Jos, 8 March 2021.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Telephone interview with Pelu Awofeso, 25 March 2021.

but they have also played out as instruments that re-situate the politics of ownership of place, belonging and meaning-making (Cornish 2016). This draws attention to the connections between rituals and the politics of belonging.

Festivals and funeral politics in the city: rituals, belonging and claims to urban space

Globally, cities such as Lagos and Jos are home to many events that focus on identity, culture and diversity, including cultural festivals and funeral rituals (see Geschiere 2005; McGillivray *et al.* 2022). Yet, these events have also been the sites of struggles and contestation over ownership of urban spaces, focused in particular on who belongs, who does not and who owns the city. The performance of the Eyo and Nzem Berom in the central areas of Lagos and Jos, as well as funeral rituals in these areas, reveals tensions over ownership of the cities. This tension feeds into the increasingly political nature of ethnic identity formation among the cities' diverse populations. Through the performance of festivals and the 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 performance 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 entangled with the identity and ownership of Lagos, particularly Isale Eko. In recent history, but particularly since the eve of the 2015 general elections, the narrative of Lagos being merely a commercial city and a no-man's land has dominated discussions in the media. Cities such as Lagos (and Jos) are often spaces where migrants from diverse cultural backgrounds congregate. This diversity stimulates a form of competition for scarce resources. To compete and belong, city dwellers create soothing narratives which, over time, form part of city making. The Nigerian political environment is one in which resource distribution is characterized by ethnic and religious identification with a place. 'Indigenes' exploit these narratives through 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.²⁶ In this regard, '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', which is 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 heightened the performance of the Eyo as an identity

²⁶ Interview with Prince Kayode, Lagos, 20 April 2021.

marker and have further projected the festival to distinguish the 'real owners' of central Lagos from strangers.²⁷ This positions those who belong as beneficiaries of the cultural political economy of the city.

During the lectures held as part of the Lagos at 50 commemoration in 2017, a participant, Alhaji Femi Okunnu, suggested that people indigenous to Lagos include the 'Idejo Chiefs, Awori, Egun, and Ijebu among others'. Corroborating this position, another speaker, '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', that the infiltration of outsiders in the contest for ownership of the city in 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' (Njoku 2017).

Consequently, the 2017 Eyo performance reinforced the question of belonging and ownership in central Lagos. Performers were carefully chosen to represent their various families and lineages and to ensure that they truly belonged. In previous years there had been some screening for participants, but in 2017 forms had to be filled in and signed and participation cards carried (Awofeso 2017).²⁸ Although many respondents suggested that such documentation was for security purposes, a closer examination reveals that it was to identify who belongs to Lagos and thus can share in the huge resources that such identification confers. One respondent noted:

The Eyo is part of Isale Eko. To partake in the rituals of the Eyo, you must be from Isale Eko. We try as much as possible to identify the *Iga* [lineage] to which all participants belong. If anyone tries to manipulate the process and get in, we leave it to the ancestors. I am sure of our conclave . . . if anyone who doesn't belong to us wears our cap, it is [a] headache that will kill that person.²⁹

Through the means set out above, Eyo actors and performers, like the performers of the Nzem in Jos, explicitly and implicitly define the indigenes of Isale Eko and the group deliberately employs 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 their '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 belongs to us. This way, we would address the way and manner [in which] 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.³⁰

²⁷ Interview with Olusegun Dipo, Lagos Island, 18 April 2021.

²⁸ A third of the interviewees with origins in Lagos confirmed this trend, but they suggested that the documentation was to guarantee the security of the process.

²⁹ *Iga* can be loosely translated as 'lineage' or 'royal lineage'. In this context, it refers to the Eyo lineage of the Awori in Isale Eko. Interview with Adeniji, Lagos, April 2021.

³⁰ Interview with David Adebawale K, Mainland, 26 February 2021.

The above position is challenged by the claims of 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.³¹ However, two-thirds of the interviewees suggested that there is no clear ancestry to affirm Oki's claim. What is clear is that native foreigners who have held several political positions in Lagos are seen as a threat by the so-called indigenous people of the state. To address this challenge, the Eyo is deployed to distinguish families established as originating from Isale Eko and those who do not. As such, the ways in which Eyo festival practice and performance are seen to produce attitudes and dispositions help us to understand the power dynamics embedded in the Eyo and cultural festivals more widely 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 a body of literature on the politics of funerals in Africa (Smith 2004; Geschiere 2005; Onwuzuruigbo 2014; Adebaniwi 2021). This is because interring the dead is an important ritual on the continent. It requires the performance of certain rituals and the 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, thereby ensuring the continued presence of the dead.³² Existing research has shown that being buried 'at home' is one of the most common symbolic pointers to the continuation and – to a certain extent – strengthening of ties to the place of origin (Smith 2004; Geschiere 2005; Adebaniwi 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' (2004: 569). For many Africans, it is an obligation to be buried at home. For many people, especially among royalty, being buried outside the 'home' in the city or among commoners 'carries the stigma of social failure' or indicates that one is not tied to the land (Geschiere 2005: 46).

The link between funerals and belonging is not new. Geschiere suggested that 'a nearly universal aspect of funeral ritual is that it emphasizes the reaffirmation of social ties' (2005: 47). For Geschiere, this is particularly important if the dead person is a prominent figure; in this case, the individual not being buried 'at home' risks creating a rupture in the network of relations. This is the case in many parts of Nigeria and in 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' (Njoku 2017). 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

³¹ 'Indigeneship crisis: only 3 of our governors have clear Lagos ancestry – Oki, APC chieftain' [interview with Lanre Adewole], *Tribune Online*, 25 July 2020 <<https://tribuneonline.ng.com/indigeneship-crisis-only-3-of-our-governors-have-clear-lagos-ancestry-oki-apc-chieftain/>> (accessed 20 December 2022).

³² Interview with Da Chollom Alamba-Chomo, 14 March 2021, Barkin-Ladi.

and also be reunited at burial with the mortal remains for spiritual harmony to be attained.³³ 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 struggle for identification with and ownership of cities as well as acting out belonging.

Festivals, funerals and claims to space in Jos

While the Eyo is restricted to Lagos Island and is mainly a celebration of death, the annual Nzem Berom in Jos takes the form of a cultural dance and previously moved around the major areas of Beromland. The festival announces the arrival of the rains and the new farming season, with prayers for a bountiful harvest and thanks given to *Dagwi* for the previous year.³⁴ In recent times, from the 1980s onwards, the festival has been modernized and is now performed in the central Jos area.³⁵ During the performance, Berom men and women throng through 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’ (Trovala *et al.* 2014: 70).

Like the Eyo, the Nzem Berom is about belonging and the performance of identity. Since the festival brings together the larger Berom nation within 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 Jos City. 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 and Katsina, among others. So, you cannot associate Jos with any particular ethnic group. Anything contrary to this will be a distortion of history.’³⁶ 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:

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 . . . [T]he festival and our togetherness are the people’s way to defend their land.³⁷

This draws attention to the ways in which the Nzem Berom is deployed in making ownership claims to urban space. In the past, the festivals that became the Nzem Berom not only adjudicated disputes involving different districts in Beromland but were also deployed in addressing land issues, establishing seniority and the political

³³ ‘Nelson Mandela death: how a Xhosa chief is buried’, BBC News, 14 December 2013 <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-25355245>> (accessed 25 April 2022).

³⁴ Interview with Da Yohanna Chollom, Jos, 8 March 2021.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Interview with Sani Salihu, Jos, 10 October 2008.

³⁷ Interview with Dara Musa Botwang, Jos, 8 March 2021.

hierarchy of the area.³⁸ The events 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 and to the Berom's claim regarding the uniqueness of the city in Beromland. This suggests that the Nzem Berom festival shapes and is in turn shaped by other dynamics of power and the forces of history.

While the Nzem festival has been replicated outside what performers call 'Beromland', its performance is significant in that it helps people reconnect with their ancestors and it shows, through ritual, that Jos belongs to the Berom. The performative ritual of the 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 has little relation to the dead, unlike the Eyo, the animal skin costume worn by performers during the festival is the same costume used during hunting events and the interment of the dead. Like the festivals, funerals have also taken on a political aspect and are engaged in demonstrating not just belonging but also claims to urban space.

On 14 July 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 (Rwang Pam 2016). In 2003, thirty-four years later, the remains of Da Rwang Pam were exhumed and reburied at the Gbong Gwom Jos palace, then situated in 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 (Trovala *et al.* 2014; Rwang Pam 2016; see also Peter-Omale 2018). Reasons advanced for this relocation included that the Berom wanted to give the late Gbong Gwom a royal burial space where he truly belongs.³⁹ It was also suggested that a form of internal rivalry and politics regarding who comes first in the order of Gbong Gwoms among Berom ruling families had motivated the move of the remains from a public cemetery to the palace, where his successor, Da Dr Fom Bot, who died in early December 2002, was buried (Rwang Pam 2016).

The 'struggles to gain symbolically and materially from the death' of prominent persons (and particularly, in this case, from burying the dead) are not restricted to immediate and extended family. These struggles present opportunities for communities not just to compete for space but also symbolically and materially to lay claim to such spaces, with 'implications for local, national and sometimes international social, political, and economic relations' (Adebanwi 2021: 49). In Jos, the process of burials and particularly royal burials often (re)produces tensions.⁴⁰ Adebanwi (*ibid.*) suggests that such tensions have broader ramifications for and within the dead person's family, ethnic group and immediate outgroups. This argument draws from Smith's study of the Igbo, in which he argues that 'burials crystalize latent conflicts and make them worse' (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 processes of social change.

³⁸ Interview with Ngo Hanatu, Jos, 10 March 2021.

³⁹ Interview with Da Dachung Bot, Jos, 15 March 2021.

⁴⁰ Interview with Alhaji Mudi, Jos, 24 October 2014.

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, present 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 becoming increasingly scared of being 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 argues that ‘funerals are often cited ... as an ultimate test of who belongs where’. Indigenous groups suggest that immigrants be buried in their own villages, implying that such ‘people should vote in their own villages instead of competing with autochthones in their part of the country’ (*ibid.*: 47).

The struggle for space and the contest for recognition as ‘owners of the land’ among various ethno-cultural groups in Jos were 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 narratives relating to their claim to the ownership of Jos. Both the Berom and the Hausa have crafted several narratives to establish their ownership of the city. Here, the burial and reburial of dead paramount rulers – the Gbong Gwoms – in the palace come to the fore. The Hausa, mainly adherents of Islam, did not approve of having ‘burial places of non-Muslims close to their abodes and main worship places’ (Trovalla *et al.* 2014: 70). The Hausa Muslims considered it a strategy by the Berom to get them out of the city and to dominate the land.⁴¹

Funeral rites are important rituals in the Berom cultural worldview and burials have a spiritual connotation. While burials were often performed in which a person’s placenta and umbilical cord were buried, many villages ‘buried their dead with the head pointing towards Riyom’, the provincial religious-political headquarters of the Berom (Mwadkwon 2010: 176). For the Berom, the *vwel* – land – is seen as a source to which every Berom is tied; it is where they belong.⁴² This question of belonging and funerals in the Berom worldview is captured in the work of Mwadkwon (*ibid.*), 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. In 1980, the Kwogo Hoss people had carried the dead man from a morgue. 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 she or he truly belongs, because, in that way, ‘each village proclaimed that their spirits and ancestors lived in the land and thereby declared the piece of land their own’ (*ibid.*: 217). In this context, the burials and reburials of Gbong Gwoms in the palace in Jos become potential ways to demonstrate ownership of Jos and a pointer that the Berom own the land and belong to the city.

⁴¹ Interview with Dantala Yaqub, Rikkos, Jos, 16 September 2014.

⁴² Interview with Da Chollom Alamba-Chomo, Barkin-Ladi, 14 March 2021.

As such, the Hausa Muslims, in the course of the conflict, lamented what they claimed was denial of access to their traditional burial spaces in both Jos North and South LGAs. In a joint communiqué 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 one point resorted to burying their dead inside their mosque, which eventually filled up.⁴³ The Muslims also noted that their burial ground at Tudun Wada had been invaded by mostly Christian communities who had erected residential buildings and other properties in the area, thereby denying the Muslims access to bury their dead.⁴⁴

On 18 April 2021, the remains of fifty-three people were said to have been exhumed from a mass grave in Bukuru, after about twenty years. A *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, had buried their dead in a mass grave near the First Bank branch in the town (Musa 2021). While the claim that mostly Berom Christians had denied access to Hausa Muslims to burial spaces can be interpreted as a political strategy, the Muslim communities' choice to exhume and rebury their dead is a 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 the return of objects and human remains to their places of origin (see Onoma 2018). These burials and reburials are crucial not only because the living care for their loved ones and want to give them a befitting burial and have a say in where they are interred, but also because they represent an ancestral link to the city and are also perceived as a process of claiming ownership and owning the city.

Conclusion

In general, African – and particularly Nigerian – cultural events such as the Eyo, Nzem Berom and funeral rituals provide excellent examples of cultural politics in action. The festivals, for instance, epitomize the resolute commitment and determination of the Awori subgroup of the Yoruba in Lagos and the Berom in Jos to deepen and sustain the cultural celebrations that embody the values they have upheld 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 has suggested that rituals and festivals are deployed as movements that mobilize people politically and organize them to claim ownership of urban space. As such, rituals and festivals play vital roles in the spatial politics of cities. Often, city politics is about appropriation and negotiation of space and rituals are used to express and contest ownership of the city. This article illustrates the essentially political nature of festivals and funerals, not only in the sense that traditional identification with a particular place benefits some groups more than others, but also in ways that express and claim ownership of cities.

⁴³ Undated 'Position statement' from the Hausa Community of Jos North, Jos South, Barikin-Ladi, Riyom and Bassa. Available at <<https://www.peaceagreements.org/viewmasterdocument/1897>> (accessed 25 April 2022).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Consequently, in the two examples examined in this article, 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, ever since the beginning of violent conflicts, the festivals, burials, reburials and denial of burial spaces have attempted to demonstrate ownership of the city and have emphasized forms of belonging that are bounded by networks of kinship and affinity between persons and local groups. In a study by Trovalla *et al.* (2014), funerals were deployed by both the Berom and the Hausa to narrate their mythological past, institutionalize 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 environments from potential intruders.

In Lagos, the Eyo’s multidimensionality provides an important aspect of explanations of belonging, identity, city ownership and power dynamics. The relationship between local elites and the people, indigenes – owners of the land – and non-indigenes or 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 by the Lagos State government. It is through this process that the actors identify those who are indigenes of central Lagos and those who are not. This politics of belonging also manifests in the Eyo’s Efe song, sung in the Awori dialect of the Yoruba language, which recognizes 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 ethnic groups, between the Bini and other Nigerian ethnic groups, who have now found a home in Lagos. In this connection, explaining the relationships between funeral rituals, festivals and politics raises the significance of a people’s cultural capital and sheds light on the sources of conflicts in the city.

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