

# Flâneuse

Envisioning a City for All









## Project Partners

### About Heinrich Böll Stiftung

Heinrich Böll Stiftung (HBS) is a German organisation affiliated with the German Green Party working with activists, thinkers and networkers in civil society, business and politics to stimulate public debate and action for a socially just and sustainable Nigeria.

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### About Lagos Urban Development Initiative

Lagos Urban Development Initiative is a non-governmental organization that brings organizations and people together to advocate for a more inclusive, livable, and sustainable Lagos through collaboration, research and dialogue.

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# Contributors

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**Tobiloba Akibo** (she/her) has a first degree in architecture from Covenant University, and a master of science in landscape architecture from University of Lagos. She has extensive experience in private residential landscaping and garden design. She is committed to landscape ecology and conservation, with specific interest in exploring historic landscape preservation and the evolution of landscape architecture styles within open spaces in post-colonial Nigeria. A registered member of the Society of Landscape Architects in Nigeria, she currently practices in Lagos, Nigeria, where she runs a landscaping firm, Foliage by Tobiloba.

**Ebunoluwa Akinbo** (she/her) is a documentary photographer, photojournalist and filmmaker based in Lagos, Nigeria. With her background in sociology, she is interested in exploring societal narratives around culture, identity and migration. Ebunoluwa believes that photography is not just about creating visually interesting images, it is about storytelling. Ebunoluwa has worked on assignments with both international and local organizations in Nigeria. She was commissioned by the New York Times to document the #ThisIs18 project in Lagos, Nigeria. Her work 'The passing of time' was exhibited at the Lagos Photo Festival in 2018. In 2019, she was nominated for the annual Canon Storytelling Master Class in West Africa, and earned a scholarship to attend the annual Foundry Photojournalism Workshop in Kigali, Rwanda. She exhibited alongside other photographers at the 25th Bamako Encounters - OFF exhibition under the Nlele Institute in 2019. In 2020, Ebunoluwa was nominated for the World Press Photo Foundation's annual Joop Swart Masterclass. In the same year, she exhibited her work, 'Rethinking Roots' at the Lagos: Ownership and Identity conference, University of Lagos, Nigeria and Bayreuth University, Germany. She is a mentee at the Nlele Institute, a member of the African Photojournalism Database and a member of the 1884 collective.

**Salimat Yewande Bakare** (she/her) is a graduate architect, and a strong advocate for sustainable and gender-inclusive designs. She is passionate about things that spark her creativity. This has led her to venture in various fields like architecture, urban design, creative writing and journalism. Her research interests revolve around exploring creative strategies to design and plan sustainable and inclusive communities. Driven by an ambition to make indelible impacts on humanity, she intends to build her career in journalism to use her skills to spotlight placemaking strategies that provide high-quality, emotive and safe spaces. Salimat is currently building a community of female architects who provide groundbreaking solutions to community development. In her spare time, she documents the stories of African women in Architecture and Design, showcasing their achievements and nurturing beliefs rooted in Agency for <https://www.african-femalearchitects.work/>.

**Chidinma Chinke** (she/her) is a visual artist and photographer based in Lagos, Nigeria. She studied Graphics Design at Yaba College of Technology. Her work explores the dynamics of identity through inner conversations revolving around the architecture of spaces and people, and investigating the systems that govern them. She was a participant of the Invisible Borders project in 2010 and 2011, the Center for Contemporary Art Lagos' Asiko Art Program in 2011 and 2012, the Nlele Institute & Goethe Institute photo project in 2014, and the Flâneuse photography workshop in 2020. She was a two-time finalist in the National Art Competition organized by the African Artists Foundation and Nigerian Breweries in 2011 and 2013. She was a recipient of the 'How Long is Now' Architecture Photography grant by the African Artist Foundation in 2015 and a recipient of a project grant by Heinrich Böll Foundation Nigeria in 2020 for the project 'Female Artists' Perspective to Urban Planning in Lagos. Chidinma is currently an online Artist-in-Residence at the Belgrade Art Studio Residency, 2021.

**Obioma Chukwuike** (they/them) is a human rights and intersex activist. They are the founder and executive director of Intersex-Nigeria (Center for Healthcare Development and Youth Empowerment). Their passion for change on various issues and challenges faced by intersex persons drives their mission with Intersex-Nigeria. Obioma has a masters degree in environmental management and is a practicing environmental consultant. They are using their activism and advocacy to create visibility, acceptance and recognition of rights of intersex people in Nigeria and globally. Their hobbies are travelling, playing board games and reading.



**Olayinka Dosekun** (she/her) is an architectural and urban designer with experience in residential and commercial sectors as well as cultural and public space. She holds a BA from the University of Oxford and an MArch from Harvard University, where she studied as a Kennedy Scholar, and has worked as a financial analyst in London as well as at leading architectural practices around the world such as Barkow Leibinger - Berlin, Sheppard Robson - London and MASS Design - Boston.

**Nengi Nelson** (she/her) is a visual artist who uses photography and film as a means to relate her observations. Recurring themes in her work are identity, choice, vulnerability and social issues. For her, identity serves a means to introspect and question "being", beyond social norms, especially in African Spaces. She explores choice and how humans decide on who they become, exploring the factors that permit identity in individuals. To further understand the notion of the self, she explores the role of the community as either an oppressor or liberator of one's identity. She draws inspiration from personal and external experiences. Her project Underbridge explores sexual harassment and questions what happens when the space meant to foster social commonality and civil interaction becomes a site for violence and oppression.

Her works have shown at Lagos Photo festival, Alliance Francaise, Dance Gathering, BBC, ATLAS ETIHAD, ART X, Teen Vogue, etc.

**Eve Nnaji** (she/her) is an architectural designer. She received a bachelor of environmental Design from the University of Texas A&M (2011-15), and a masters in advanced architecture at Institute for Advanced Architecture of Catalonia (2019-21). She is the founder of Even Designed and ADD.apr, with a focus on architecture, design, and data. Research interests include urban flood mitigation strategies, appropriate design solutions for developing communities, biological methods for sustainable fabrication, and material development and explorations. She worked with MOE Art Architecture, in Lagos, Nigeria in 2016, and A Whitespace Creative Agency from 2018 to 2019.

**Orinayo Odubawo** (she/her) is a graduate architect from the University of Lagos. She works as a research assistant at The Institute of African and Diaspora Studies (IADS) at the University of Lagos, and recently presented a paper at University of Cambridge. She has won several local and international design competitions. She seeks to express her creativity through different mediums, as an art and experience curator, photographer and writer. She wrote an article for Irin Journal, an African travel magazine, and contributed creatively to the creation and curation of the magazine. Her research interests include: architecture and urbanism of precolonial African cities, the preservation of Nigerian history and culture, the role of women in the development of Africa, placemaking in African cities and development of local African building materials for construction in West Africa. She loves to travel and experience new cultures through design, music and food.

**Uchechukwuka Ojeh** (she/her) is a graduate student of architecture, in the final year of her masters' program at the University of Lagos. She is from Delta State and has been living in Lagos since 2015. She believes in the theory of an architecture of place, an architecture that conforms to its environment, solving all necessary problems through the materials used, space allocation or form development. She is a Christian, a feminist and a bibliophile, and believes gender perspective in urban design and architecture needs to be addressed, and that women need to feel safe, represented, empowered and included in all forms of the built environment.

**Victoria Ogoegbunam Okoye** (she/her) is a PhD candidate in urban studies and planning at the University of Sheffield. She has worked on community and youth projects in Accra and Lagos centering residents' creative and everyday understandings of space and spatial practices to inform design and planning.

**Oladinni Olubunmi** (she/her) is an honours graduate of urban and regional planning from Osun State University. Post graduation, she has gained industry experience as an urban designer and estate manager. After successfully working on projects to create a pleasing environment and managing properties for high profile clients in Lagos State, she now specializes in connecting people to value using technology. She is currently a digital marketing specialist helping brands scale their business and build online presence.

**Oluwatamilore Oni** (she/her) is an urbanist heavily influenced by citizen-centric planning ideologies with 6 years of experience in the social impact and innovation space, managing a variety of projects including Open City Lagos and Open House Lagos. She used to run Black & Yellow Urbanism, a blog that creates urban-centred content in text and video formats. Her fascination with cities continues to expand but is no match for the rapid development occurring in her home city, Lagos. She started out with degrees in architecture and urban design and currently manages the Sub-Saharan Africa philanthropic portfolio in a corporate multinational.



**Mariam Tewogbade** (she/her) is an urban planner with experience in urban design, who specializes in recreational planning. She holds a BSc. from Osun State University where she studied urban and regional planning and has overseen several urban designs while working as an intern, and graduate planner at the department of urban and regional planning, Osun State University, Nigeria.

**Chidubem Ude** (she/her) as a student; pursuing a master's degree in environmental design from the University of Lagos, Chidubem does more than design. She has studied painting under the master painter Wallace Ejorh (at Simple Plan Studios) and has been a junior researcher at the African Contemporary Institute of Design since 2017. These experiences have shown her that storytelling can take many forms, and the process of creating and making can be a form of research. She believes these experiences will help shape the way she chooses to practice architecture after graduation.

**Monika Umunna** (she/her) is a German born sociologist. She has been living in Lagos, Nigeria since 1997. She joined the local Heinrich Böll Foundation office in 1999. Since 2011, she is the program manager of the "Inclusive Megacity Lagos" program (<https://ng.boell.org/en/megacity-lagos>), which aims to bring together members of marginalised communities, academics, civil society, artists and government representatives to develop inclusive urban planning and municipal service solutions.

**Venessa Williams** (she/her) is an architect and urban designer passionate about people-centred design and implementing solutions to social and urban challenges. She has a masters in architecture from University of Lincoln, England, as well as a masters in city and technology from Institute of Advanced Architecture of Catalonia. She has 4 years of experience working with architecture firms in Nigeria, including cmDesign Atelier, Lagos. One of her projects, 'Veus', an app used to enhance the participation of communities in decision making, was featured in the Dubai Grad Show in 2018.

# Introduction

*By Monika Umunna and Allyn Gaestel*

*The city* is a wonderfully dizzying reminder of how infinite are our ways of being, of the incredible multiplicity of ways to live. This is how and why cities have long been spaces of liberation, agitation, the avant-garde. And how to flâneur - the French word meaning to stroll, meander, wander, saunter - is a particular embodied, kaleidoscopic experience where we feel our selves in the city as we fill the city, as we are filled by the fullness of our experience, as we watch from a state of immersion. We are part of what we see.

The gaze goes both ways. We walk to see and to be seen; or, whether we want it or not; our presence is registered. We see and are seen.

*The city* exists in layers. Layers of architecture, layers of streets laid down on the terrain, layers of society, beliefs, dreams, that float above and intermingle with the physicality of the space. So too do beliefs and normativities lay upon people, impressed through glances, sneers, comments, violence, aggression, harassment, and also the internalized voices of repression. Voices, whether they come from neighbors, pedestrians, parents, or our own mind, tell us what it means to be a woman, to be a heroine, who we ought to be. When this is misaligned with our own experience, we exist in a constant state of battle--conscious or not. We press against these ideas that negate us. We are here, but not here. How to be here, then, just as our selves? How to fill the city with our presence, with our fullness?

This publication is an attempt to do that. It is situated at the intersection of what we experience and what we imagine. It is grounded in multiplicity, and multiple modalities of being and expressing. Writers, artists, scholars and activists envision a city for everyone, and they do so in their own voices and modes.

The publication is commissioned by the Heinrich Böll Stiftung Abuja office (HBS), a German organisation affiliated to the German Green Party working with activists, thinkers and networkers in civil society, business and politics to stimulate public debate and action for a socially just and sustainable Nigeria, and actualized by the Lagos Urban Development Initiative (LUDI), an organisation that advocates for a more inclusive, livable, and sustainable Lagos. Deconstructing gendered power structures to achieve gender equality and gender democracy is a pillar of both HBS and LUDI's work.

We open with Oluwatamilore Oni's essay, which situates us in the present moment with a wide ranging overview of the state of gender discrimination, particularly against women, in Nigeria and Lagos today. Artists Chidinma Chinke and Nengi Nelson illustrate this with their works interrogating and exposing the travails many women face moving through the city. Writer Alithnayn Abdulkareem contextualizes their artistic projects in the wider context of violence against women in public transport in Nigeria.

With Salimat Bakare we slide between dreamscapes and reality for a future-tense reverie of what the city might become; her woven narrative highlights architectural projects commissioned by HBS and LUDI for the Gender Perspective in Urban Planning and Design Labs in 2020 and 2021.

Victoria Okoye, a PhD researcher at Sheffield University and Nigerian Diasporic writer working in Ghana, shares reflections from her own journey toward recognizing the contemporary coloniality that infuses much current scholarship and the evolution of her articulation of other ways of being, learning, sharing, and researching, grounded in Black, African and Diasporic theory. Her essay includes a reading list for anyone interested to go further, and her piece reminds us to continually reflect and question how we can disrupt imperialism and center alterity in every moment, and as we ponder urban spaces.

Ebunoluwa Akinbo probes normativities of heroism and centers her own definitions of nobility and strong character in her self-portrait series *Ode to Heroines*; an essay by Abdulkareem probes the radicalism embedded in this revolutionary self-assertion.

Portraits and stories from the intersex community posit Lagos as a space of relative freedom, in comparison to the tighter communities in rural villages. The series both celebrates and calls for broader acceptance of gender fluidity in our societies.

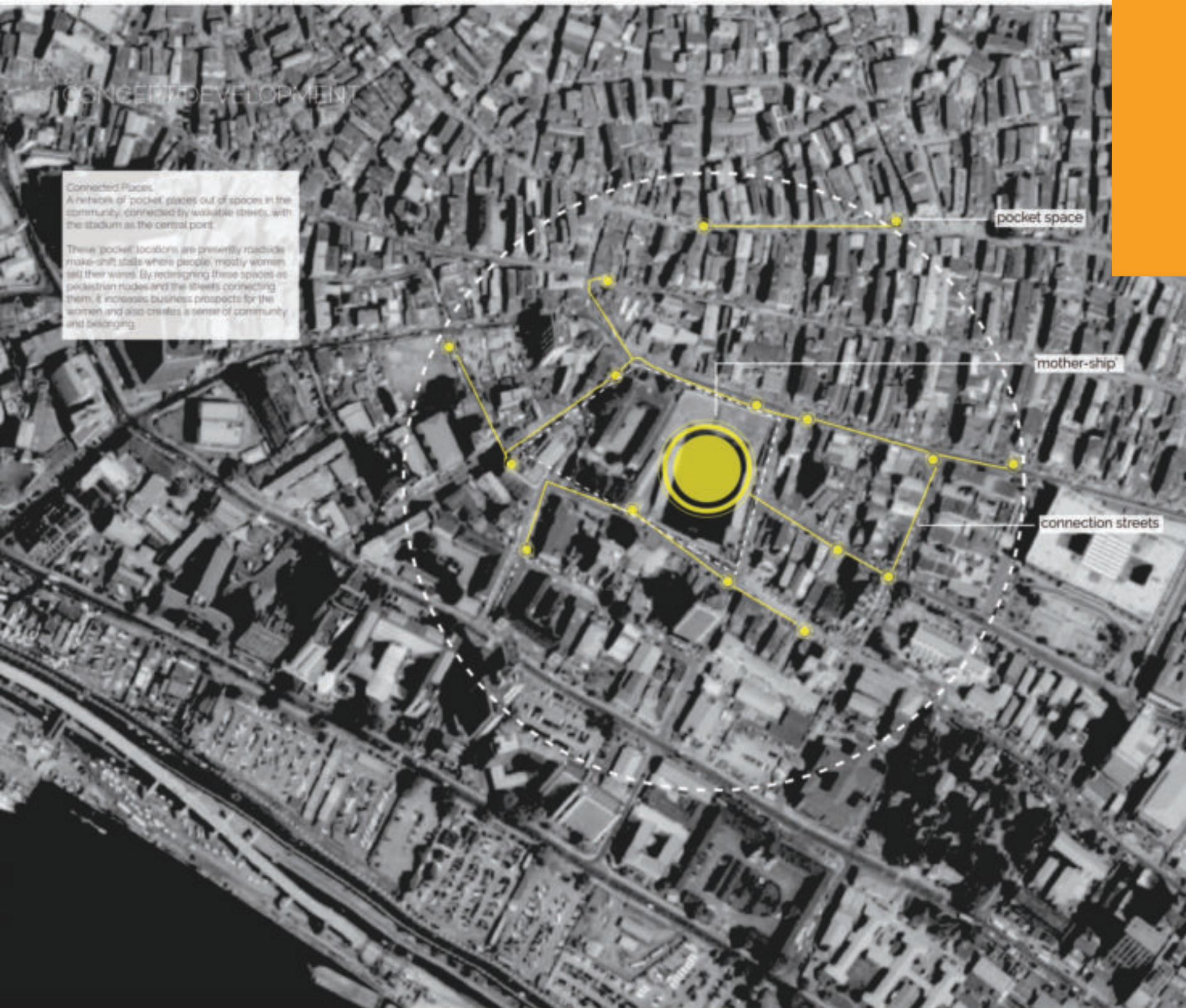
We hope that this publication will encourage readers to drive a public conversation about the potential of ignored citizens from all spheres to re-imagine their city and to effect changes that will be for the benefit of all. It complements the efforts of an all-female community research team, supported by the HBS Abuja office under its "Inclusive Megacity Lagos" program, who identified sustainable and inclusive solutions for their challenges, and enthusiastic young girls on Lagos Island who were eager to learn how to ride bicycles to enable them to change the power relations in the streets of their neighborhood.

We hope you wander freely through our offerings and share your own dreams and inspirations for a Lagos where everyone thrives.



# Where Are We Now, Lagos?

By Oluwatamilore Oni



## CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

### Connected Places

A network of 'pocket' places out of spaces in the community, connected by walkable streets, with the stadium as the central point.

These 'pocket' locations are primarily roadside make-shift stalls where people, mostly women, sell their wares. By redesigning these spaces as pedestrian nodes and the streets connecting them, it increases business prospects for the women and also creates a sense of community and belonging.

pocket space

mother-ship

connection streets

Venessa Williams

## The Other Room

"I don't know which party my wife belongs to, but she belongs to my kitchen and my living room and the other room."

-Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari, 2016



**“  
I began to  
associate  
cooking with  
femininity,  
power and  
strength.  
Because in my  
house that’s  
where all the  
power was.**

Standing beside Chancellor Angela Merkel during a press conference in Germany in 2016, Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari said these words, prompting a #TheOtherRoom tweetstorm and flurry of social media parodies.

Everyone was asking, “Where is this other room? What happens there?”

These questions might never be answered by way of an explicit explanation from the President, but we can safely assume that the other room is not the room where power is exercised and decisions are made. “The Other Room” is somewhere far removed from the locus of power. Why? The statement was made in response to reporters’ questions about First Lady Aisha Buhari’s criticisms of her husband’s handling of government affairs, as an assertion of his superior political proficiency.

The Senior Special Assistant to the Presidency on Media and Publicity, Mallam Garba Shehu, immediately suggested it was nothing but witty rhetoric from a president with a sense of humour who unwittingly created one of the more popular Nigerian urban slangs of the last few years. However, we can venture to say that there is much more to unpack both in the words themselves and beneath their surface. Uttered right next to one of the most powerful people in the world, who also happens to be a woman, it is especially significant in the ideology that it unashamedly presents and represents.

#### Why the Fuss?

*“I began to associate cooking with femininity, power and strength. Because in my house that’s where all the power was. All the women were always in the kitchen. That’s where the big decisions got made. That’s where the hierarchy of the house was decided.”*

Padma Lakshmi, Executive Producer, *Top Chef*, 2021

Perhaps being situated in the kitchen and its associated ‘other room’ is not so bad after all. Maybe it is a good thing. At least it was for international chef Padma Lakshmi, who found her power in the domestic creative space as host of the Emmy award-winning show *Top Chef* and author of numerous cookbooks. Unfortunately, the statistics say otherwise and Lakshmi’s reality is atypical. These “other rooms” host domestic work and unpaid labour and perpetually place women in disadvantaged positions where their contributions to societal stability and prosperity are systematically disregarded and undervalued.







Chidinma Chinke

The facts are: women's inclusion across all spheres -- 'rooms,' if you will, for the purpose of this article -- is critical to the quality of life of the entire populace. For one, it directly affects the quality of life of half of the population. So there is, in essence, no development if half of the population is not participating or benefitting from said development.

Secondly, equity gains can be seen as a pulse check for societal development. Promoting gender equality is now widely accepted as a development strategy for reducing poverty levels among both women and men, improving health and living standards and enhancing efficiency of public investments. One study calls women an 'emerging market' that could impact the global economy as significantly as China and India over the next decade if the inequality gap is bridged.

The attainment of gender equality is not only an end in itself or simply a human rights issue. It is a prerequisite to achieving sustainable development.

#### Mind the Gap

*"The gender gap is the difference between women and men as reflected in social, political, intellectual, cultural, or economic attainments or attitudes."*

Briony Harris, Author, Formative Content, 2017

Equity conversations are premised on a gap or an imbalance. But what exactly are the lags?

1975 was named International Women's Year. The first World Conference on the Status of Women launched global efforts to eliminate gender discrimination; integrate women in development; and increase contributions by women towards strengthening world peace. As a followup to the Conference, the UN General Assembly proclaimed the following years the "United Nations Decade for Women" (1976-1985).

Forty-six years later and across the 156 countries covered by the The Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI), women represent only 26.1% of some 35,500 parliament seats and just 22.6% of over 3,400 ministers worldwide. Women currently bear the burden of 75% of unpaid care and domestic work - a portion conservatively estimated to be between 10% to 39% of the world's GDP.

The GGGI annually measures the distance to parity (the percentage of the gender gap that has been closed) in four key areas: Health and Survival, Educational Attainment, Economic Participation and Opportunity and Political Empowerment. As of 2021, gender gaps in education and health are nearly closed at 95% and 96% respectively at the global scale, with Nigeria at 81% and 97%. However, on the economic and political fronts there is more work to be done at 58% and 22% respectively across the globe.

These figures paint a telling picture. While more women are being educated, not as many of them are growing in their careers at the same pace as their male counterparts, resulting in only 27% of women in managerial positions and women persistently earning less with a gender pay gap still lagging at about half the amount needed to reach parity. Neither are women taking up commensurate positions of authority and decision-making.

This picture becomes a backdrop to feminised poverty, a persistent gap in gendered considerations in policy making, inadequate and unimplemented policies and limited accountability as they continue to play starring roles on the development stage.

Considering the enormous socio-economic gains of eliminating the gender gap, it should be a no-brainer to make concerted efforts to close it, right? As the International Finance Corporation puts it, “empowering women is simply smart economics.” For instance, increased spending on care services, predominantly carried out by women, could help take countries closer to reaching the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, including health care for all (SDG 3) gender equality (SDG 5) and decent work and economic growth (SDG 8).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or Global Goals are a collection of 17 interlinked global targets designed by the UN to be a “blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all,” according to the UN SDG website.

In spite of this, the majority of the world seems to be struggling to close the gender gap. The 2021 Global Gender Gap Report published by the World Economic Forum states that, “it will now take 135.6 years to close the gender gap worldwide.”

### **No Inclusion Without Representation**

*“Women will notice instinctively, for example, lack of a primary school, or dead space that can potentially be converted to criminal hangouts, or lack of complementarity between certain uses. You then discover gaps in those kinds of areas.”*

*Professor Taibat Lawanson, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Lagos, 2021*

On one hand, we have the hard figures that quantify the gender gap, making it tangible for anyone who cares to know, but underneath this is a layer of the gendered experience that is not immediately apparent. Here, while the data may exist, it is not as easily interpreted and its implications are hidden behind a fog of good intentions, misplaced priorities and/or sheer ignorance. What bearing does education for girls have on their use, or lack thereof, of public space? How is a lack of representation of women in government related to women constantly reporting that they do not feel safe in their cities? What do crackdowns on informal commerce have to do with higher rates of poverty among women?

To begin to answer these questions, here are two case studies. In the town of Karlskoga, Sweden (Population 27,562: 2018), officials were doing a gender audit. The year was 2011 and they were re-evaluating all their policies through a gendered lens.

When they got to the issue of snow-clearing, they imagined that gender could not play a role. Yet, in Karlskoga at the time, snow-clearing prioritised motorised traffic over pedestrian and bicycle paths. Considering that women were more likely than men to walk or use public transport, while men were more likely to drive, something as seemingly un-gendered as the weather is actually experienced differently by various members of society.

The city officials decided to switch to prioritising pedestrians and public transport users. They saw that this would not increase costs and they noted that navigating a wheelchair, child buggy or bike through snow is much harder than with a car. The implications were that prioritising pedestrians, the majority of which were women, led to fewer injuries and healthcare expenditures. Conservatively, it is estimated that the cost of pedestrian accidents in icy conditions was about twice the cost of winter road maintenance--not to mention the human toll of such injuries.

The second case study takes us to Vienna (Population 1.9M, 2019), the capital of Austria, where city planners realised that teenage girls were not using the public parks as much as their male counterparts. Over six pilot projects in 1999 and 2000, their investigation culminated in a series of small changes. Larger areas dedicated to football were divided into smaller spaces so that multiple groups could play. Public toilets and additional seating areas, such as hammocks, were added. Pathways were lit and bushes were spaced more widely to increase visibility.





Chidinma Chinke

The results? "More girls were using the parks and they were taking up a larger amount of space in them," said Eva Kail, an urban planning and gender mainstreaming expert who has been instrumental to the gender inclusive efforts in the city of Vienna over the last few years.

Caroline Criado-Perez, an award-winning author and feminist campaigner, argued in her ground-breaking investigation into the effects of gender bias, *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias, In A World Designed For Men* that these issues are fundamentally a function of a gap in perspective and not necessarily deliberate attempts to make life more difficult for women. Perspective is inherently a product of position. Why would a man choose to clear the sidewalks of snow when he hardly ever walks in the winter or any time of the year? Why would he think to space out hedges when he has never walked through a park and felt endangered? By default, people will design based on their interests and everyday life experiences, meaning they will, by default, neglect the perspectives of other population groups if those groups are not included in decision-making and design activities. Beyond the statistics, women will continue to suffer the experiential fatigue and instability caused by their exclusion if we are unable to bridge the gender gap and attain equity across all aspects of the index. A lack of representation precludes women thriving in their cities.

Therefore, to achieve equitable development, women must be actively involved in the decision-making rooms and conversations.

### Let's Talk Nigeria(n)

*"I've always wanted to run for elective office. In 2017, I decided to run in the next election cycle starting in 2018. It dawned on me: 'You must be joking, where do you start?'"*

Abosede George-Ogan, Co-Founder ELectionHER, 2021

The National Gender Policy, a 150-page document, was created in 2006 to replace the National Policy on Women which "failed to challenge the structure, which continues to reproduce gender inequality and the overall disempowerment of women" as the authors of the new framework describe it. Very little progress has been made on all proposed outcomes - one of which is 50% female representation in government by 2011. Nigeria ranks 139 of 156 countries in the 2021 GGGI. Only 5.8% of parliamentarians and 10.3% of ministers are women and Nigeria has one of the eight largest Political Empowerment gender gaps in the world. It is one of 81 countries that has never had a female head of state. At federal courts, only one third of Judges were female between 2011 and 2016.

Looking at inclusion from an economic standpoint, for every 1 Naira a Nigerian man makes, a Nigerian woman makes 0.58 Naira. Further, women are rare in senior positions: only 13.9% of firms have female top managers. And in education, women make up a third of lecturers in federal colleges of education, while the percentage of female professors in Nigerian Universities was 15.43% for 2017.

Taking a step back to chart the typical pathways to positions of leadership, certain trends can be observed. Just 58.1% of the girls in Nigeria are enrolled in primary education. And this percentage decreases as they progress through the educational journey to tertiary. This further removes them from access to the relevant qualifications. And for those who are qualified, they eventually face the tradeoffs that arise when unpaid care work clashes with career progression. In a study shared by Professor Taibat Lawanson, Urban Planning professor at the University of Lagos, approximately 40% of women planners had left the profession.

As it turned out, a similar number of men had done the same, but the majority left for related fields like Estate Surveying and Project Management, all still within the formal sector. In contrast, the women went on to informal catering, clothes-making or similar businesses. As she put it, "It is a Catch 22. You find these people go into entrepreneurship for convenience because they also have to fulfill their other very strong, demanding roles of caregiving in a patriarchal system."

In addition to these discouraging statistics, there are the cultural barriers that women also have to scale even when they do get into positions of power. Director of the Lagos State Archives Bureau, Bilikiss Adebisi-Abiola said that from her experience (she has also served as the General Manager of the Lagos State Parks and Gardens Agency for four years) it doesn't matter who sits in the office, respect is given to the office.

However, this is, by all indications, not exactly typical. Here are a couple of reference points where women in positions of expertise or power still seem to be unable to fully express their empowerment. Pauline Tallen, Minister for Women Affairs, allegedly knelt before the Speaker of the House of Representatives to request for more female representation in political office appointments. It would seem this subservient expectation from women is not an isolated scenario. Members of the Nigerian women's football reportedly team also knelt before the Sports Minister to collect their financial entitlements.

Adebisi-Abiola also acknowledged this, "for me to even get to be in that role where I was even known and was on anybody's radar was because I had to go against some societal norms. I wonder how many women are going to have the opportunity to do that?"

The cultural barriers include: a preference for a male child, discrimination against the girl child in matters relating to survival, protection, and development; child marriage and lack of access to critical resources, including land, labour, capital, and entrepreneurial skills; and other religious beliefs and practices that discriminate against women.

### Lagos, Centre of Excellence?

*"In Lagos State, there is a lot of great work being done in terms of women's inclusiveness."*  
Bilikiss Adebisi-Abiola, Director-General, Lagos State Record and Archives Bureau, 2021

In some ways, Lagos State is an anomaly, as it is with many Nigerian experiences. Lagos is far ahead of the rest of the country, generating more internal revenue than 28 of Nigeria's 36 states combined, with N419 Billion in 2020.

Zooming in on gender inclusion, it would seem Lagos is also a few steps ahead of the rest of Nigeria. Eleven of the 42 members of the current state government executive council are women, coming in at 26%, roughly 5 times that of the national representation average.

However, cracks begin to emerge on closer examination of the lived experience in the city. In something as innocuous as street naming, these unconscious biases come to bear once more. In a yet-to-be published study of mapping spatial representation in Lekki Phase 1 led by Professor Lawanson, some interesting insights can be gleaned. The study takes into account streetscapes: street naming and street art created within the last 30 years. Of 119 streets analysed, 77 were named after men, 22 after entities and families and 20 named after women. As for street art, apart from depictions of women under Falomo Bridge, where the women are named specifically, women are represented generically as caregivers, showing them either carrying children or breastfeeding.

Caroline Criado-Perez, an award-winning author and feminist campaigner, argued in her ground-breaking investigation into the effects of gender bias *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias In A World Designed For Men* that these issues are fundamentally a function of a gap in perspective and not necessarily deliberate attempts to make life more difficult for women. Perspective is inherently a product of position. Why would a man choose to clear the sidewalks of snow when he hardly ever walks in the winter or any time of the year? Why would he think to space out hedges when he has never walked through a park and felt endangered? By default, people will design based on their interests and everyday life experiences, meaning they will, by default, neglect the perspectives of other population groups if those groups are not included in decision-making and design activities.

In reference to the manifestations of feminised poverty, it is further interesting to note that Lagos' ministry to advance women's prospects is called the Ministry of Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation (WAPA). It would seem the policymakers themselves see the clear links between the two issues. In the words of the 2006 National Gender Policy "poverty seems to wear a woman's face."

In 2016, The Thomson Reuters Foundation asked experts how females fare in the rising number of cities with over 10 million people. Nineteen megacities were examined. Lagos came in 8th in the list described as 'most dangerous megacities for women'.

In *Bus Stop Chronicles* and *Underbridge*, artists Chidinma Chinke and Nengi Nelson depict, in stark audiovisual representations, the constant unease and discomfort the female body endures in Lagos. Their series were produced as part of the *Flaneuse* - a project curated by the Heinrich Boll Foundation to unpack the realities of women navigating the city.



This is very similar to the findings of a team of urban researchers, coordinated by Professor Lawanson, who studied communal water taps and discovered that although these taps relieve women and girls of the burden of going long distances to get potable water, some mothers are still wary of letting their girls visit the taps without supervision because of reports of sexual assault by boys who gathered in the areas around the taps.

All of these point to a city making strides that are just not long enough to catch up with the urgent and necessary changes that we need to enable our women and, by extension, our cities and communities to flourish.

### Women-Streaming

*"Women's policy is repair work, whereas gender mainstreaming is prevention,"*  
*Ursula Bauer, Head of the Department for Gender Mainstreaming, City of Vienna, 2021*

After taking 4 semesters of architectural history while pursuing an Architecture degree, I was stumped by how no single woman was mentioned as having played a part in the evolution of architecture since the beginning of time. Back then, I was nowhere near as gender aware as I am today, but by the time I was in final year, I simply had to know - was it that there were no women design icons or did they just somehow skip the minds of the authors of the textbooks my lecturers were using? My thesis, a Study of the Nigerian Female Architect, took a look at the women who played a part in the evolution of modern architecture and then zoomed into the experience of female Nigerian architects.

From Marion Mahony Griffin, to Zaha Hadid, Jumoke Adenowo and my fellow female architecture students who made up a third of our class, there were women who were impacting the architecture world. We just were not told much, if anything, about them. And to be honest, these women are few and far between. There is a double-edged harm in this. On one hand, we have established the pitfalls of not having women actively involved in designing our spaces. Additionally, and probably the more damaging consequence, is that this lack of visibility insinuates an incompatibility with women's capabilities and discourages them from attempting to make inroads into these seemingly elusive disciplines - perpetuating the exclusion-participation cycle. Here is where gender mainstreaming comes in.

The United Nations defines gender mainstreaming as, "A globally accepted strategy for promoting gender equality. Mainstreaming involves ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities - policy development, research, advocacy/ dialogue, legislation, resource allocation, and planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects."

Bridging gender gaps requires identifying and implementing programs and policies that target the specific constraints that women face. To get women in those seats, gender parity and equity need to be culturally normalised - an activity and outcome of gender mainstreaming.

It is also important to note that gender mainstreaming is highly contextual. While it might mean wide pavements and wheelchair accessibility for mothers navigating the city with prams or children in Vienna, in a city like Lagos where mothers often strap their babies to their backs, this might mean an entirely different set of design considerations. Some argue that gender mainstreaming in light of domestic work and unpaid labour continues to perpetuate the constructs of gender roles in society. But the reality is that all members of society have specific needs, and it is the responsibility of society and government to care for all of us, with all of our beautiful specificity, interests and gifts.

### More Than Words - Wetin We Fit Do?

*"You call a meeting at 4:30 pm when [that is the time] for school runs and you don't even choose to make these things dynamic or flexible... These social impediments must be removed and then there must be the advocacy, the push, to get the qualified women into the space."*

*Professor Taibat Lawanson, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Lagos, 2021*

Quantify, quantify, quantify. There is a desperate need to depart from rhetoric and sentiment where diversity and inclusion are concerned. These sorts of narratives make gender representation a 'nice-to-have'. Humanity cannot afford to have these gaps continue to persist at the rate they currently are, or any rate for that matter. So, we need to enumerate the costs - financial, physical, social, emotional and whichever else.



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THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN





The Association of Women in Town Planning, Lagos State Wing, recently held its inaugural meeting at The Nigerian Institute of Town Planners, Lagos. Speaking at the occasion, Chairman of the Interim Committee of the association, Lagos State Chapter, Mrs Gertrude Adenekan said, the idea of setting up a Women's Group of Town Planners was first raised in the mid 1990s, "in hindsight, I was naively against it. I didn't see any difference between females and males in professional life. Maybe because I had then never suffered discrimination in the Lagos State Civil Service where I worked." At the time there were no numbers indicating female participation in urban planning, how it might be affecting the practice and resultant urban planning policies and activities in the State. If those numbers were available and publicised, she might not have had her reservations against advocating for solidarity that she had those decades ago.

Since 2018, The United Nations published 80 indicators to track the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Why are these indicators important? What is measured is more likely to be prioritised. Evidence gathered against indicators can help make the case for gender issues to be taken seriously. They can be used to hold institutions accountable for their commitments on gender equality. Let us use them.

Speak and repeat. It is important to continuously put these costs and their associated economic, social and cultural impacts on the front burner. There needs to be urgency around discussions pertaining to gender parity. Women themselves are largely unaware of the unequal burdens they are facing. For example, women are often unaware of the fact that they earn less than men. While interviewing various stakeholders for the piece, there was a common thread of these issues being routinely dismissed, swept under the rug or just flat out ignored. In 2016, some Nigerian lawmakers reportedly rejected a proposed gender equity bill because "the Nigerian Constitution was supposedly clear on the rights of all citizens whether male or female." This attitude will never solve the challenges of the gender gap and the harm it inflicts on society. And to reverse this requires constant, repeated "airtime" being lent to making sure the relevant information is at the forefront of the minds of lawmakers, law enforcers and everyday citizens.

Let the legislators legislate, please. With the constitution and policies in place, how can we continue moving the needle? Legislation. Policies need to become enforceable, and consequences need to be put in place. For instance, the Gender and Equal Opportunity Bill championed by the Nigerian House of Representatives Member, Honorable Nkeiruka Onyejeocha, advocates for an additional 111 seats to be reserved for women in the Federal and State Houses of Assembly.

This would bring the total number of seats to 434 which would mean that women would represent at least one quarter of Nigeria's legislative arm of government. The bill passed its second reading in April 2021 - a milestone considering a similar bill was rejected twice in 2016 and 2019.

Funding First, gathering sex-disaggregated data through surveys, research projects and so on needs funding to be planned and executed. However, applying a gender lens is not only about collecting this data. Implementing the solutions that the data helps to precipitate also requires funding. This is definitely a case of needing to put our money where our mouths, constitutions and policies are.

## Conclusions

By all accounts, President Buhari is far out of touch with current societal trends like the #MeToo movement. As a retired Nigerian Army Major General who served as military head of state from 1983 to 1985, after taking power in a military coup d'état, President Buhari is decidedly from an era that contrasts sharply with the ideals and visions that young Nigerians hold for the country.

Do his words simply reflect dated beliefs quickly running out their course, or are they telling of a much deeper disorder, a fundamental misconception about women and their place in societal advancement? Perhaps they are more personal sentiment than national ideology. Then I remember how an okada rider once shouted at me to return the car I was driving to my husband or father. If that does not tell you something about the perspective of a woman's place in society that is ingrained into the lens of the Nigerian gaze, nothing probably will.

2020 marked the 25th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), which remains the most visionary and comprehensive roadmap for advancing women's rights globally. Despite decades of work to achieve gender equality, the exclusion of women persists.

To add to all this, the COVID-19 pandemic has further emphasised the need to pay concerted and sustained attention to making up whatever gaps remain in our cities and societies. Women in Africa, the majority of which are self-employed within the informal sector, have had to close down businesses affected by limitations to social interaction. It is also estimated that as a result of the pandemic, 47 million women and girls will be pushed into extreme poverty in 2021, bringing the total to 435 million.

The theory of change presented in this article is this: in order to achieve equitable development and prosperity for all, women must be proportionally included in decision-making. For women to be adequately included, gender mainstreaming needs to be a deliberate, intentional strategy that all arms of government champion. Gender mainstreaming will only happen when we have the facts and figures, understand why it is important and commit to making it happen.

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 Indicators are criteria or measures against which changes can be assessed (Imp-Act 2005). They may be pointers, facts, numbers, opinions or perceptions – used to signify changes in specific conditions or progress towards particular objectives (CIDA, 1997)  
<https://guardian.ng/news/senator-olujimi-reintroduces-gender-equality-bill/>  
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# Navigating Womanhood in Public Transportation

*By Alithnayn Abdulkareem*

**M**uch has been written about the frictions that characterize the megacity of Lagos. It is the most populated city in Nigeria, the second largest in Africa and one of the fastest growing in the world. Despite producing some of the world's wealthiest, the country also contains the second highest number of poor people in the world. Yet little time and ink seems to have been devoted to one of the most prevalent conflicts the city encounters: despite women making up almost half of the state demographic, violence towards them remains prevalent, in private and public.

According to Danish architect Jan Gehl, public spaces are essential to democracy and the fullness of life, and treating people gently is ultimately good for the economy. When positioning this ideal against the realities of Lagos, a clear dissonance emerges. In particular, when the scope of public space is condensed into public transportation, and filtered by gender, the consensus is that Lagosian public transportation is chronically unsafe for women.

With their respective works, artists Nengi Nelson in her series *Underbridge* and Chidinma Chinke in her Video and Photographic work *Bus Stop Chronicles*, examine the simultaneously unique yet universal challenges to safety and autonomy that women face when in public, using the avenue of transportation infrastructure in Lagos.

By definition, public spaces should carry some measure of safety. For public spaces to function effectively, Jane Jacobs, the theorist and land preservation activist, provides three benchmarks: a clear demarcation between private and public spaces, continuous usage, and a constant audience, all of which make them equipped to handle strangers. A final essential quality is given by Hannah Arendt, the political scientist whose book *The Human Condition* espouses that collaboration between community and law enforcement must exist so that public safety is practiced in public spaces. Unfortunately, Lagos belies these rules.

For every 107 men in Lagos, there are 100 women. Among these women, one in four have experienced sexual abuse with approximately 70% of survivors having suffered from abuse on more than one occasion. Many women will suffer abuse in the places they least expect. Abuse in public spaces in particular is a notorious facet of public life for women in Lagos.

Public infrastructure that does not have considerations for gender can have consequences ranging from limiting access to resources and stagnating the economic development of women to worsening the impact of crises. According to the United Nations Office for Project Services, it will require an estimated \$97 trillion in global infrastructure investments to make infrastructure more gender inclusive in order to support sustainable development. Two thirds of these infrastructure needs are in developing countries.

Where public transportation is concerned, the prospects for women are terrible. Despite representing the largest share of public transport users in the world, about 80% of women express being afraid of being harassed in public transport according to the International Transport Forum. In emerging economies, this fear has economic costs. According to the World Bank, safety concerns and limited access to transport reduce the probability of women participating in the labor market by 16.5%. The global GDP cost of this is \$5.8 trillion. Yet, transport policies for most countries remain unrelentingly gender-blind.

In *Underbridge*, Nengi Nelson approaches the embodied conflict women face when they express their freedom of movement using public transportation. She asks what happens when a space meant to foster social commonality and civil interaction becomes a site for violence and oppression. What happens to women when the public reneges on its promise of safety within relative anonymity, and instead turns to devour its own? What happens when a seemingly harmless journey becomes another avenue for abuse?

Nelson's work, *Underbridge* is animated through re-enactment. The scene is no less horrific for its familiarity. The video is set in a danfo bus, the ubiquitous yellow vans that in many ways symbolize Lagos: alarmingly bright, crowded with a fascinating medley of humanity, and never in full working condition. The camera sits unmoving, positioning the film maker and audience as passive observers. We watch as awareness increases but our capacity to aid continues to be curtailed.

Nelson's motivation is framed as a public service announcement to the women of Lagos, a way to lend an active voice to the widening dialogue on the ways that sexual harassment towards women manifest.

*Underbridge* was inspired by the lockdown deluge of internet content that exposed incessant levels of sexual harassment towards women using public transportation. The subject is a deeply personal one to the artist who has experienced sexual harassment herself. *Underbridge* is as relevant as it is timely. Across the world, studies from Columbia to the Philippines and the United States show a pattern of significant sexual harassment towards women. The internet is rife with viral videos of men in trains and buses publicly exposing themselves to women or rubbing up against them. This type of crime is appealing to offenders because they can evade detection; offenders can claim the incident was accidental, or rely on women's trapped and embarrassed silence to avoid retribution. *Underbridge* takes on this persistent hush and breaks the cycle by empowering the victims with voice. In this world, the oppressed is not silent, and the public fulfills its responsibility of protecting a stranger.

By projecting the event on a danfo, the artist creates a physical and mental monument. A seemingly harmless bus is suddenly transformed from a simple means of getting around into a moving crime scene. The audience is changed, having been witness to such an experience. The bus becomes a site for violence, a way to commemorate the collective experience of assault that women all over the world face. A danfo is no longer just a bus taking a woman from one place to another, it is another public space where she needs to be on guard all the time and develop the proverbial eyes at the back of her head.

Chidinme Chinke's work deals with binaries. Combining diptych photography and video, her primary fascination stems from exploring the ideologies that govern spaces where women's safety is threatened. She draws heavy inspiration from Alimotu Pelewura, an entrepreneur and activist who led the Lagos Market Women's Association during the colonial era to advocate for voting rights and against imposed taxation and price controls that would negatively affect women.







Chidinma Chinke

Pelewura's command of the public space that a marketplace is, and her calculated efforts to protect the agency of women within that space gives a helpful frame of reference. Chidinma's work contributes to the largely ignored female perspective to urban planning and the work documents movement and reaction. The chosen site is one of the most unsafe bus stops in Lagos, Ikeja Along. At the base level we find that there are two bus stops, formal and informal. The formal carries some measure of state security, but the informal is run by *area boys* who display aggression.

Stylistically, *Bus Stop Chronicles* is direct, didactic, thorough and clear. It says to women: "I see you." Nothing is left to nuance. Chinke's work features voiceover, talking heads of women, performance art, self-portraiture and candid photography in an immersive, cacophonous panoply. There is footage of women recounting the universal threats to their safety and agency simply by existing and exercising their right to mobility. The men are not left out, and the camera captures the aggression succinctly. Given the scope of *Bus Stop Chronicles*, it is a wise artistic choice that the threat is mentioned, not necessarily depicted. The closest the footage gets to aggression happens when the artist is repeatedly told by the area boys to turn off the camera. It is revealed that their eventual approval was bought with money and charm.

The photographs are vivid. There are shots of pedestrians packed into a bus stop and the audience unwittingly imagines the many opportunities for abuse that lie within such a packed environment. Also crucially, Chinke photographs activity, but also inserts herself into the narrative. She may be the documenter, but she is also a woman in Lagos, subject to the same possibilities of violence on her personhood. From situating herself in both bus stops, to wearing a blank cardboard and prompting the engagement of pedestrians of all genders to write what they want on her, we get some sense of what society thinks of women. Coherent with their normative privileged position to act without question, men are the first ones to engage her.

Despite seemingly opposing approaches, *Underbridge* and *Bus Stop Chronicles* are implicitly concerned with the persistent tensions between the bodies of women in Lagos and the spaces where they are allowed to exist. Both artists are explicit about harm. Where *Underbridge* relies on a layer of fiction to emphasize the truth, *Bus Stop Chronicles* situates us in the real time of it all. The experiences of the women depicted are universal to uncomfortable degrees. An internet search brings up too many occasions where women have reported harassment in public. For research, Chike ran social media polls on transport safety. The findings revealed that more women than not are afraid of harassment in bus stops, do not believe infrastructure is inclusive, or find Lagos to be safe.



Nengi Nelson

Both artists also delineate a strong use of voice. In a country where young people, and women in particular, face institutional censorship, the use of voice becomes inherently political. For most young women, it is the only source of power and these artists wield it powerfully and with coherence. It remains to be seen how the state chooses to respond, given the historical tendency to ignore or mis-prioritize issues concerning women.

Overall the subject of safety feels especially prescient in a country like Nigeria. The country's Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development finds at least 28% of women to have experienced violence from the age of 15. The most common manifestations are sexual harassment and physical violence. Beyond physical safety, insecurity is recorded to be rising and given the prevalent gender gap in the country, women will likely bear the brunt of the consequences. Studies conducted by the Mineta Institute for Surface Transportation Policy Studies see women voice uniform concerns where public transportation is concerned. Women worry about functioning street lights, about what clothing to wear (loose can easily be gripped, too tight may tempt offenders even more) and they ponder what choice of precautions, tasers, pepper spray or verbal protest to employ.

Historically the Nigerian government's response to any violence towards women have been weak at best and silent at worst, with the latter being more prevalent. Despite repeated calls from humanitarian organizations, women are often left alone to bear the consequence of violence. In 2020, Lagos saw a 40% increase in violence towards women.

As part of its efforts, a state of emergency was declared by the Nigerian President Muhammad Buhari that year. The country's Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development is the government outfit responsible for coordinating the country's response to women's violence. They claim to have a national response team, however, this has not included public transportation. The Mineta study outlines a few proposed solutions to reducing incidences of harm to women in public transportation. They include setting up transport stops in less desolate areas which had been deemed by respondents to a survey as essential to achieving safety in numbers. It also recommended that transport administrators ensure good lighting across all aspects of the transportation network. Finally, general maintenance and upkeep of transit facilities and the regular cleaning of graffiti and litter was found to provide comfort to riders because keeping an environment clean not only encourages positive behavior therefore discouraging potential perpetrators; it also reduces fear and anxiety.

Public safety for women is important for social and economic development. In examining the gender limitations in public spaces via transportation, the limits to women's freedom of movement carries resounding consequences. For far too long, infrastructure has carried a gender blind approach in Nigeria. Through *Underbridge and Bus Stop Chronicles*, we gain access to women's experiences and may be inspired to reflect and respond to problems that have been accepted for too long as part of the norm. If these approaches can be implemented by the state and federal government, the country can reap significant socioeconomic benefits. When women feel and are safer, the only consequences are positive gains.

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# Lagosian Reverie

By Salimat Bakare

**A**s a young architect, I spend my days awash in designs, ideas, and fabrications for what our city may be. My evenings, I spend in the city itself, battling traffic as I traverse the vast neighborhoods of this vibrant, sprawling metropolis. In a gendered city like Lagos, I find myself wandering in circles choked with frustration, constantly fighting for my space in the city.

One day, after reviewing proposals from a Gender-Perspective Design Lab, I rushed through the chaotic Obalende Bus Stop, pressing through crowds, trying to find a bus back home. There is a popular saying that all roads lead through Obalende; it is possible to find transportation to almost anywhere in Lagos and many parts of Nigeria from this buzzing neighbourhood in the Eti-Osa Local Government Area. Vehicles coming from Eko bridge, Marina and Ikoyi road converge at this point.

As I maneuvered through the crowded bus stop, I marveled at the disorder. Pedestrians and commuters swirled around me, chasing or dropping off the motorcycles, taxis, and kekes passing by. Buses – locally referred to as *danfo* -- were ragged contraptions; hanging off the space of the usually absent doors, conductors added their own lyrics to the cacophony. *'Ikeja! Ikeja! Ikeja! Wole pelu change e o. Ti o ba ni change ma wo le o. (If you don't have change, don't enter o).'* Like a lion's roar, his baritone voice echoed across the crowded intersection.

The scene reflected the distinct bustle of an African city, the frantic pace of Lagos. I struggled to reach the front seat of an empty *danfo*, hoping to have even a little space to myself as I rode back home. As the *danfo* took off, I drifted off, and found myself half-asleep, between worlds, in a Lagosian reverie...

\*

*The scorching July sun shone on my skin, my melanin popping, as my dream-self walked through the streets of Obalende.*

Around me shops abutted homes, which crammed between imposing government buildings, a dance of scales, textures and uses. The name Obalende comes from the Yoruba saying, "Ibi ti Oba le wa de," which means, "where the king chased us to." Historically, the neighborhood was established as a resettlement area for the first Royal West African Frontier Force; a multi battalion field force formed by the British colonial officers in 1990. Its original occupants were retired officers, and there are still barracks in the neighborhood -- the space has a markedly masculine history.

Now it is a bustling crossroads, housing one of the busiest thoroughfares in the city and bursting with businesses, many of which are owned and run by women.

Walking through my dream-streets of Obalende as a young Muslim woman, I felt empowered to take up space. Perhaps this world wasn't created for me, but it had been amended, expanded with people like me in mind. I felt like I had the world at my feet, and maybe, just maybe I could become the starchitect I always dreamed. It was as though the spaces around me were embracing every bit of the woman I was becoming.

I have lived in cities designed through the lens of the white male gaze (a residual effect of colonialism), cities that don't cater for the needs of Black men, and are not meant for Black women. I have lived in fear, negotiating my way through spaces that aren't meant for my gender - fighting the dangers of violence, assault and narrowly escaping the threat of death. Societies in many contexts throughout the world assign the private space of home to women and the public space to men. Like many women, I have lived in a shell for years, an invisible barrier I created to protect myself from the dangers in public spaces. As a young architect, my life mission is to create spaces attached to existential depth, spaces that are gender inclusive, livable and sustainable, spaces that create a sense of belonging.

The role and status of women in Nigeria has evolved from Pre-Colonial times to the present. The stereotypical image of Nigerian women as helpless, oppressed, and marginalized has (in some ways) undermined her. Women have always played major roles in social and economic activities and in most cultures in Nigeria, they were and remain central to trade and commerce. A look through history shows that before colonization, among the Yoruba people, women were major figures in long distance trade, accumulating wealth and acquiring titles. With the introduction of Western systems and ideologies through colonization, economic, social and political power grew to be associated with being a man. Communities became plagued with the patriarchal system. Women were excluded from public spaces and stripped of their basic human rights. Suddenly, women, despite being major users of public spaces, became '*vulnerable*' groups. Public space became hellish for women.

As a young teenage girl, I fervently searched for Odes to Heroines, poetry that celebrated women who rose to apex ranks in their societies regardless of gender-based discrimination and stereotypes.

I sought (s)heroes to look up to, women who went against age-old traditions and customs to chart a path towards greatness for themselves, their societies and other women, their deeds echoing through ages with significant impact. As I wandered through different cities in Nigeria, a target in public spaces, I drew my strength from the scars of these heroines. Like a phoenix, I was determined to rise from the ashes of the women who challenged the status quo.

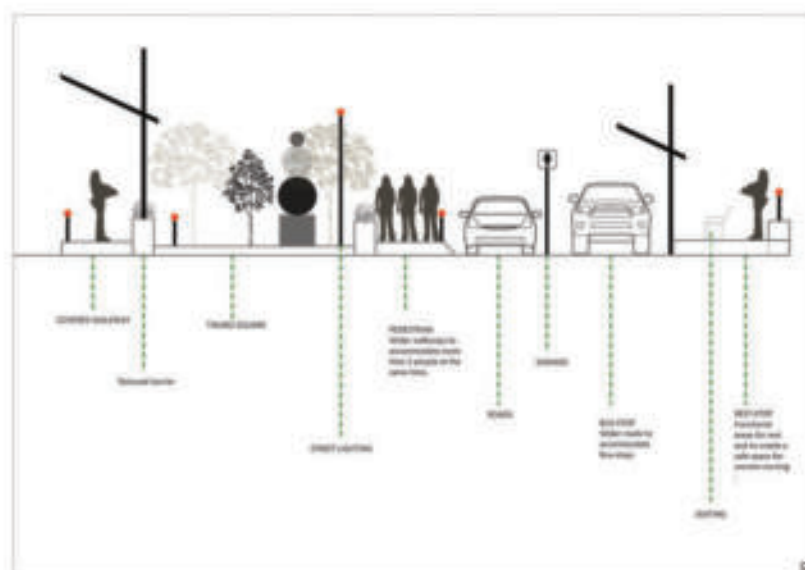
In my Lagosian dreamscape, Obalende had been reclaimed by its women leaders. It was now a safe haven for women to thrive, a resilient neighbourhood redesigned by the people, for the people - a true democratic urban space reclaimed by the women traders.

The vehicular traffic on Lewis Street, a two-way street separated by a green median strip, was fairly low. It was almost 12pm, the time when everyone was fervently working to make ends meet, a perfect time to walk around the neighbourhood, observing the lives of its inhabitants.

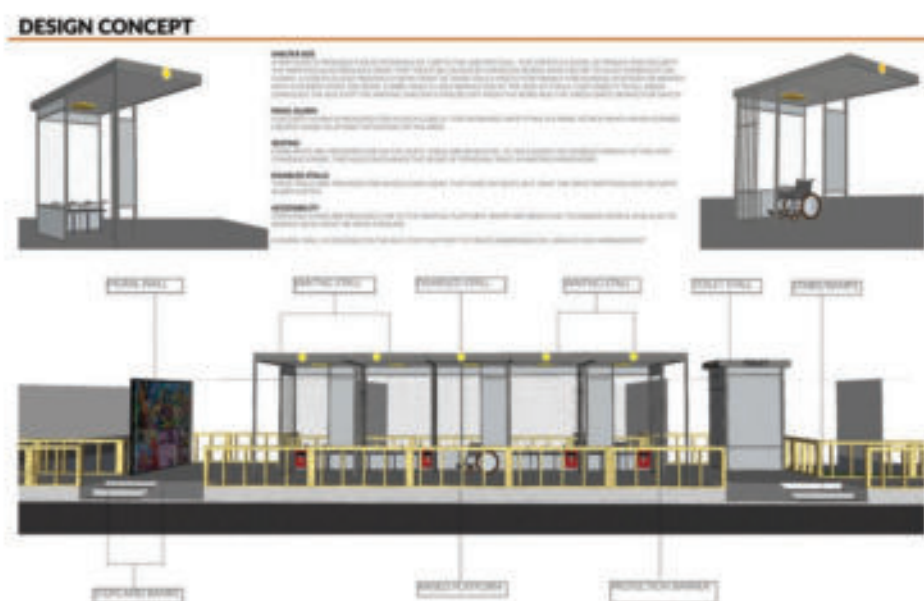
I caught a glimpse of some female street artists, retracing the faded murals on the bus stop walls, art pieces of women who contributed to the city's development. I hopped on the elevated pedestrian pavement, watching my steps as I skipped over the pink coloured interlocking tiles, landing only on the grey ones. I set my inner child loose, as I danced along to the sound of women traders chanting along the street.

As time went by, I needed to get a bottle of water. The weather was a bit harsh and I was beginning to feel dehydrated. Thankfully, the giant Umbrella trees shaded me from the scorching heat. *"Come and buy pure water"* chanted a woman from behind me. I turned around to locate where the sound was coming from. The streets of Obalende are known for their various commercial activities especially close to the bus stops. Food stalls were aligned 2 metres apart from each other to allow good visibility. *"Come and buy pure water,"* I heard again. This time I saw the woman calling to me. She wore brightly coloured, exquisitely detailed *adire*; a traditional Yoruba resist-dyed cloth. She smiled effortlessly, showing no sign of exhaustion from the frenzy of the city, or the trade. The large umbrella on her stall kept her cool, preventing sweat from dripping off her spotless melanin rich black skin. Below her stall's counter, there was another mini fan cooling her legs. She sat at her allotted station, like a queen in her kingdom, beaming as people rushed to buy water.

I needed to take a break from my two-hour walk. I was ten minutes away from Obalende roundabout park, a green space for people to relax, one of my favourite spots in the neighbourhood. I walked over to the next stall owned by a young man renting out a few bikes. As much as I enjoyed walking, today's weather wasn't walk-friendly. Besides, I wanted to join the pool of kids biking at the park.



Tobiloba Akibo



Uchechukwuka Ojeh

I jumped on the bike, riding through the bike lanes shaded by lightweight tensile structures for shading. I felt the euphoria gushing through my blood. I rode under the ring road, through the BRT bus terminals, down to the Danfo bus stops.

I came off my Bike to walk on the graffiti floor, climbing up the ramp to get to the elevated urban seating area. ( I stared at a video projection by artist Ebunoluwa Akinbo of Lagos (s)heroes - Alimotu Pelewura, Bisi Silva, Adunni Oluwale, Oyinkansola Abayomi, Stella Adadevoh, Vivian Olatokunbo Joseph, Dr Tolani Oyerinde, Eddidiong Michael, Otoi-jamun Adenike, Justina Oboh – an ode to brave women whose heroism defined their eras and challenged aspects of patriarchy in Lagos past and present. These women were and are astute, formidable, ferocious, assertive pacesetters who became role models for other women in their community and Nigeria at large. Seeing the projection on the wall was the highlight of my day, watching the portraits illustrating these notable women, sung and unsung.





Odubawo Orinayo



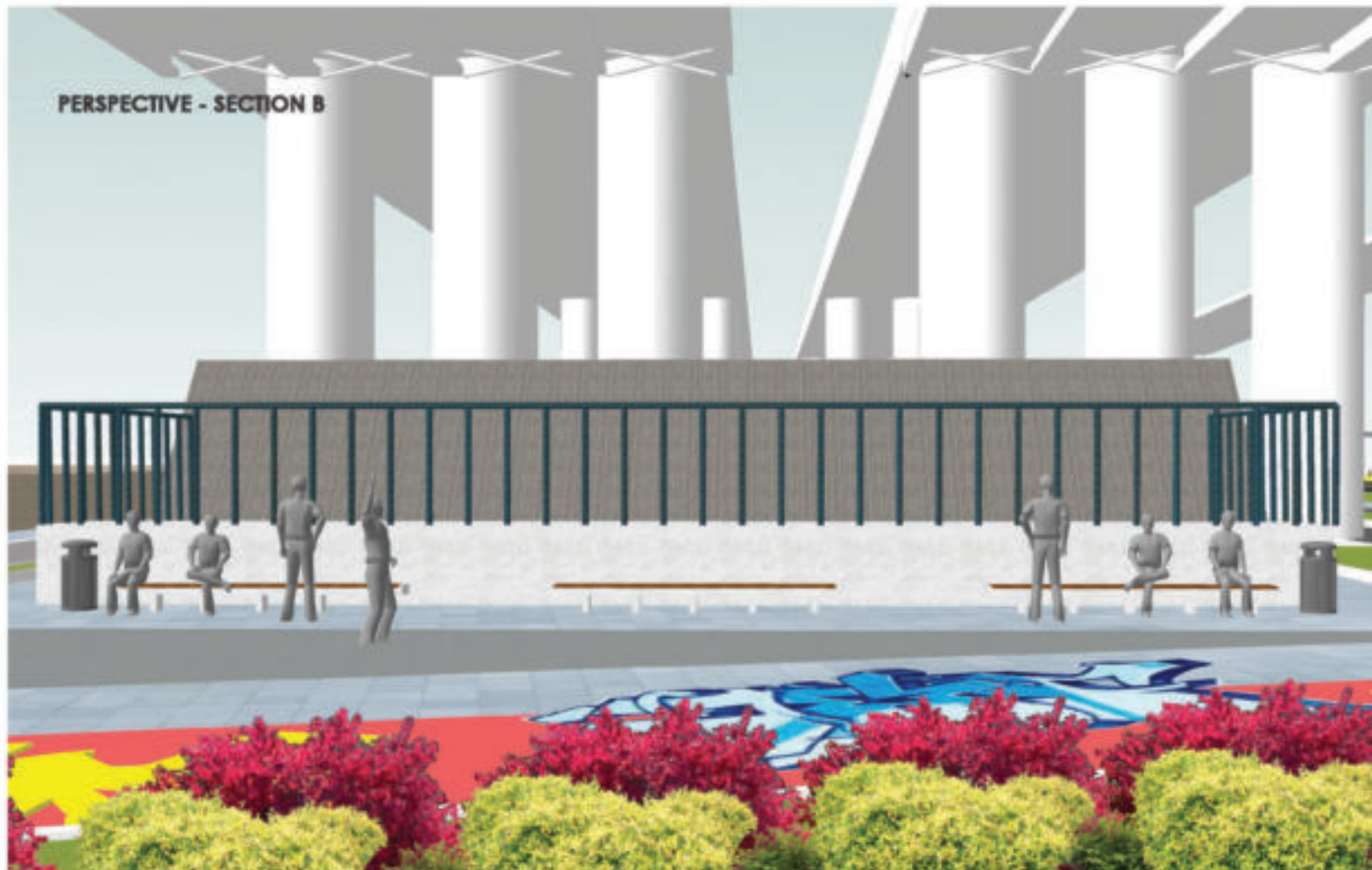
Studio Contra

I made a quick stop at the Obalende Danfo bus stop, a minimalist metal-framed structure topped by a flat roof to effectively shed rainwater and prevent runoff from spilling onto the heads of transit riders. I loved the simplicity of the design, a poetry that proves that urban infrastructures can be functional, beautiful, and innovative as well. As a modular structure, it was easy for users to adapt it to fit their immediate needs. A seating for four people can be transformed to a seating space for two wheel-chair users. Equipped with Alarm buttons and CCTV cameras, mounted on the structures in case of emergencies, the structure serves as a safe space for all users. Movable partition walls, also used as notice boards, divide the waiting area from the adaptable bike rack spaces provided for bikers to take shelter in case of rainy days. The spaces can also be changed to a baby changing space for nursing mothers. Public toilets for men and women are an extension of some modules of the bus stop.

I locked my bike to one of the racks to make use of the toilet. This was my first time in a while using a public toilet. For years now, I have battled with recurring vaginal candidiasis, a vaginal infection sometimes caused by use of poorly maintained toilets. I have avoided any public toilet because of this. I opened the WC door, to check if it was conducive enough for me to use. I stopped in my tracks at the sight of the squeaky-clean space that welcomed me. I was even more surprised to find a pad, tampon and pampers dispenser in it. To top it all, the shelf had a collection of sanitary products for women's convenience. Just what I needed. I picked up my bike, riding between the busses parked to get to the park. Gosh - this might just be my heaven on earth, a lit urban space with a good balance of soft (green) and hard (paved) spaces. Resting pavilions were stationed on the soft carpet grass, a secluded space to be isolated yet together. I kept biking round the park, playing along with the little girls who seemed excited to be on summer break. Just next to my favourite pavilion spot, there was a group of teenage girls painting the city landscape. I watched silently as their brushes stroked their canvases, colours mixed, recreating the image that beholds their sights.

Every time I visit the park, I am struck by the depth of everyone around me. Everyone has a story. I pulled my phone from my pocket, captured the moment and saved it to my drive. This would probably end up in my junk files along with the thousands 'moment photos' I have hoarded. I keep waiting for the right moment to showcase these photos - a street exhibition, perhaps, an interactive installation art for the people to build on as they walk past the street. Or maybe, just maybe, I could set up a mini storytelling squad amidst the hub for teenage girls; a circle of women pouring into each other, sharing our stories, owning our narratives, preserving the oral tradition of Alo tales by moonlight. It would fit well here.





Chidubem Ude

The Obalende central park is well known for its nightlife. Dangling above the site are systems of LED cable lights, illuminating the space and transforming it into a perfect romantic hangout spot. This might just be the moonlight I need - tales told under the LED lights.

Through the mesh of the resting pavilion, I watched as the city moved. Everything was so fast paced; cars rushing, people sprinting, kids racing. The Park, by contrast, was the perfect slow space, a transitional space to breathe, relax, reflect, and dream and then move on. I had no final destination, I walked to feel the liveliness of the city, to define what the city means to me - as an anxious, young, striving, Muslim woman... to define the city for women.

"Oga, why you dey shout, I hear you jare!" I was jolted awake from my reverie by the harsh shout of the angry conductor. The bus screeched to a stop in thick congestion. I looked out the window, watching as the hawkers hurried between the moving vehicles. "Madam I get biscuit o. Abi na water you want? See as you dey sweat madam, make you buy my water now" Convinced by the persuasive tone of the tired young girl, I took out some change to buy a bottle of water. I watched as she ran to the next danfo, hustling to make ends meet.

I couldn't imagine the numerous dangers she's exposed to: theft, sexual harassment, and a possible hit and run... My mind drifted, remembering the female traders in my dreamscape, lush women sitting in their well-designed spaces, safe and secure. As the bus approached a traffic free zone, I couldn't control my drowsiness. I laid my head on the front door of the danfo, dozing off...

\*

I dreamed away to an alternate realm of Lagos. Puzzled by the unfamiliarity, I stared intensely at the road signage ahead of me trying to make sense of the raised bump and dots on it. I couldn't help but wonder how a blind person would decipher this. Curiously, I walked towards it, closed my eyes and let my hands read the texture. Allen Avenue. As I opened my eyes slowly, I walked on the tactile pavement leading to Allen Bus Stop. The road was bustling with a network of traders in their stalls, displaying their products in novel ways. The area had a distinct something - a soul, if one were to be prosaic. A few meters ahead, I made a turn to Allen roundabout, home to the Nigerian Statue of Liberty, a symbol of women's power. I climbed up the ramp to access the bus stop waiting stall, a lightweight structure designed with partitions to create privacy for certain users.



I looked through the wire mesh behind, watching a circle of women in a nearby park. The Park is famously known as the women's community network space, where women traders, professionals and locals, headed by the community leader, Iyalode, met to discuss the maintenance of the city. The stall resounded with the squeaky cry of a baby. Two metres away, there was a mother behind the screen, breastfeeding. As the mother stepped out of her breastfeeding stall, I peeped to see her baby. Beside her was an old woman, holding onto the handrails at the disabled stall. (Images 12) I walked up to her, and helped her walk to a seat. The disabled stall had no seat, an empty stall designed with rails to fit wheelchairs of different sizes. All stalls had the same monochromatic colour, different shades of grey, except the disabled stall which had touches of red for more visibility.

*Beep! Beep! Beep!* The danfo buses arrived. I walked to the bus loading area, joining the queue of people who were waiting for the Agbero – a gentleman dressed in a classic grey two piece accentuated with a heavy-duty utility kit belt filled with different security equipment and a pair of gloves – to scan their Bus ID Card. Beside him stood a smiling woman dressed similarly. Standing in front of the disabled access door, she scanned the ID of elderly people, disabled users, pregnant women and any user with anxiety, especially those diagnosed with Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD). The bus ride was exhilarating. Inhaling the smell of the city as the wind blew through the openings, I brought out my phone from my bag, hurriedly taking photos of the cityscape

*'My water has broken'* a woman suddenly shouted from the back of the bus. The conductors – agberos – rushed to her. I pressed the emergency button on the bus whilst trying to log in to the city app to report the situation. I was connected with a hospital close by. Upon receiving my request, the doctor on duty called to ask for more details. I handed the phone over to one of the agberos while the other helped calm the woman down. I pulled out the back massager from the emergency kit on the bus, slowly rubbing it on her back as instructed. The bus driver announced the emergency situation and apologized to the passengers for the slight delay. Before we got to the hospital, the ambulance caught up with us. A feeling of relief, as undeniable as it was ephemeral, washed over me.

The convulsion of the bus jolted me out of my dream. I was almost at my stop. In this largely residential area, the roads are older. The tarred surface is always at odds with the dirt path that would have – as in my dreamscape – been a sidewalk. Erosion caused by high rainfall, inadequate drainage system, and an endemic lack of a maintenance culture made it a losing fight.

The dissonance between my dream and reality was both upsetting and inspiring.

My dream lasted past my waking. The vision was so clear. As I arrived home, and blinked awake, I set about designing it.



Oladinni Olubunmi and Mariam Tewogbade



Venessa Williams





# A Decolonial Feminist Approach to Architecture, Design and Planning Research

By Victoria Ogoegbunam Okoye

**T**he centering of Western theory and methods in architecture, design, and planning research in urban African contexts is part of a long tradition of Western privilege in academic knowledge traditions. Both in practice and in academia, architecture, design, and planning are deeply entangled with Western colonial and imperial histories, including slavery, colonial occupation, the subjugation of traditions and cultures, and interruptions to the transmission of local knowledges.

Architecture, planning, and urban design, disciplines through which I research and practice, have been critical components to this colonial project. Colonial practitioners positioned African societies in a unilinear development trajectory, with the expectation for us to leave behind our Indigenous spatialities and embrace modern (Western) ones. Through architecture, design, and planning practice, this idea of modernity was implemented spatially: through territorial disposessions; colonial land controls; the imposition of spatial hierarchies; and through the creation of town and country planning agencies modelled after European institutions and their regulations for designing cities, neighborhoods, buildings, and streets. Hamza Moshood's writing on Ghanaian chop bars and the coloniality of food discerns the persistence of colonial spatial hierarchies, which elevate westernized foods, architectural design, aesthetics, and spatial experiences over Indigenous ones in contemporary urban space. Katherine McKittrick's geographic writing from the settler colonial contexts of Canada and the United States demonstrate how modern city-making processes reproduce colonial logics that continually mark Black people as out of place. In Ibadan, Grace Adeniyi Ogunyankin's urban geographic writing reveals how westernized planning and design exclude and displace the city's numerous street vendors, many of whom are women, in the pursuit of a modern, world-class city. These and other scholars and thinkers show how colonialism is continually reproduced through contemporary architecture, design, and planning processes, interventions, and imaginations.

Drawing on the work of decolonial scholars like Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, I use the concept of coloniality to understand how, even after independence, this pattern of imbalanced global power relations continues to privilege the West in culture, relations, and knowledge production in Nigeria and Ghana, the place where I am from and the place where I research. This framework also demands that I recognize how I, a Nigerian diasporan planner-researcher, and local, diasporan and foreign planners, architects, and urban designers can often continue to employ these assumptions and thinking as we design, build, and research our cities.

In my previous studies and now as a doctoral researcher in the UK, I learned to interpret our African worlds through a Western lens, to take Western-derived conceptual categories and understandings as objective and local concepts as particular, and to homogenize across the vast differences between African cultures, histories, and institutions in my readings of African theories. I was taught that I, the researcher, am separate from the "field" of my research, that I drive the research, and that those I interview are "participants" or "informants," and that the knowledge I encountered were "data" and "findings" that I can abstract and analyze to produce my own intellectual contributions to knowledge. In learning how to design a research project, I was taught to privilege Western and written scholarship on Africa over our own local knowledge systems and oral histories, thus reproducing and continuing the ways in which our local knowledge systems and cosmologies are discounted. Academia was teaching me to read, see, sense, and know the places and people with whom I research through the West and to see myself as a distanced, unbiased researcher separate from my research context.

Feminist thinkers theorize our bodies as situated sites from which we know the world, experience marginalization, and also produce knowledge. I turned to Black (African and African diasporan) feminist scholars on gender, the body, and space to enable me to understand my own experiences of embodiment and place. As Oyèrónkẹ Oyěwùmí demonstrates, gender itself is a Western organizing concept imposed on many African cultures through colonialism.

I learned from Patricia Hill Collins and her writings on Black feminist thought that it is from my own lived experience of Black womanhood that I can critically re-think the world.

Saidiya Hartman traces the wayward practices of Black women living in the afterlife of slavery. From her, I learned to look for the small and inventive spaces and practices performed by those who are made Other by everyday exclusions and oppressions of urban designs and processes.

As Fikile Nxumalo's work with children in settler colonial Canada demonstrates, I can think with both Black feminist and Indigenous conceptualizations of the world to theorize everyday relations to place, to situate myself and my research in relation with colonial histories and presents, and to narrate other futures.

For girls and women, the body is the first site of political struggle. Azeezat Johnson's scholarship with Black British Muslim women shows how this extends from clothing practices to everyday movements within and between spaces. Our gendered experiences are shaped by cultural, colonial and post-independent politics, which girls and women navigate and negotiate every day in material spaces of the city. I turn to these Black feminist scholars' framings of embodiment and body politics to think through our struggles over the degree of individual or social control over our body, as well as the everyday societal practices, policies, and relations that regulate our bodies in space. These politics are at play in multiple scales, including in our homes, in community spaces, in neighborhoods, as well as in other arenas, such as in land tenure negotiations and in the experience of our material conditions. In addition, feminist scholarship points me to engaging research as a fundamentally relational process, in which I as a researcher operate in relation with others and the world in which the research takes place.

As a practitioner-researcher, I am shaping my own decolonial feminist theorizing and research as a practice of liberating ways of knowing African urban contexts. For me, it is in building deeper understandings of how our present is knotted with colonial urban practices, in re-establishing bonds with Indigenous history and culture to theorize with local modes of knowledge and understanding of the world, and in operating through embodied and creative practice, that I reconfigure my understandings of space and design possibilities within the city.

This means unlearning the colonially informed, distanced researcher approach, to instead acknowledge the multiple ways in which I am situated in and entangled with coloniality, patriarchy, my research context, and the individuals I research with.

It also means in extricating myself from the path-determined futures of colonialism and its centering of Western modernity, opening up to other possibilities that I imagine and, bringing into my academic practice approaches and methods that affirm our humanity.

Art-based methods and artistic and creative practice are critical methods I have learned from observing and collaborating with creatives, artists, and urbanists over several years in Accra and Lagos. In pursuing this trajectory, I am learning to relocate my learning from the abstract approaches I have been taught, to embrace situated knowledge, to center the body, somatic experience, the role of practice, and "doing otherwise," all deeply central to feminist and decolonial approaches. Rather than beginning from Western concepts, theories, and frames and applying them in my investigations of urban life and practice in urban African contexts, I foreground local understandings of space and spatial practice as meaningful forms of knowledge equally significant to academic scholarly knowledge. In a sense, I am learning other ways of operating, seeing, and understanding as a researcher: an emplaced, grounded, situated approach in which I seek to understand the world in which I am embedded, recognizing that the research and the learnings I encounter are inextricably linked to the social world in which I exist and this research takes place. Through arts-based methods workshops, 17 children illustrate their own experiences through photography, body mapping, group mapping, storytelling, and a collectively produced site-specific intervention in the street. Our workshops are drawn from the NGO's existing artistic practices engaging youth to articulate their understandings of their neighborhood from their own situated positions as young girls and boys. Our research intention is to investigate beyond a material exploration of community space to demonstrate children's memories, feelings and emotions, imaginations, and embodied practices within space.



Children's practices of play -- of finding and claiming spaces to hang out, of adapting football games to fit inside tight leftover spaces, of taking over a street space to dance, play sports, laugh, yell, and socialize -- become means of learning how to see possibilities in space through our bodies' practices and movements, and imagining possibilities for space that don't need to adhere to the Westernized orientations of maps and designs. Then in conceptualizing these learnings, we center the NGO's porch space and our conversations there. The porch is a regular space for our research planning, discussions, and reflections. It is a critical site of knowledge production from which we, together, develop conceptual tools and frame our research project, unfolding from the lineages of such spaces as sites for Indigenous African communal discourse and in Black feminist activism and theorizing. This place -- a location for sitting, talking, and coming to know our research within the context of the neighborhood -- is part of an approach where we discuss, negotiate, and settle on concepts which take shape from our situated relations, reflections, and understandings. These methods are practices in collectively exploring, reflecting, and producing new knowledge with residents, the children, the NGO team members. In my research this knowledge is valued on par with relevant academic literature.

Artists' embodied spatial practices also point me toward new ways of understanding our histories and the entanglements of our gendered bodies with these histories and space. Here I want to focus on the work of documentary photographer Ebunoluwa Akinbo, who performs an artistic practice of re-presenting a variety of Nigerian heroines in public space as part of the *Flâneuse Photography Workshop*. She selects market leaders, community leaders, activists, educators, artists, and health professionals whom she embodies by staging her own "self-portraits." She scouts popular images of these individuals and re-enacts each photographed moment by dressing and styling herself in the woman's image, and capturing her own self-portraits with the image of each woman. In producing these works, she says she continually returns to two questions: "What does it mean to point the camera at myself?" And, "What does it mean to embody these women?"

Akinbo's questions and practice assert critical aspects of both decoloniality and feminism that I continually return to in my work: that decolonizing and feminizing research practice starts with oneself, that these practices are spatially grounded, and that our subjectivity shapes our knowledge and engagement with the world. Her practice is situated; Akinbo begins from her own identity and background as a Yoruba woman born and raised in Lagos, one who navigates everyday public space. She begins from her training as a photographer, and she acknowledges her own received knowledges of popularly celebrated women in Lagos history.

By staging these self portraits in meaningful spatial locations -- the women's places of work, their homes, streets, market places, urban spaces named for these women -- Akinbo instantiates their presence in place, she performs and locates these women in contemporary urban space in Lagos. Her embodied practice also starts with herself, as she employs her own corporeal body as an artistic medium, site of knowledge, and reflection. By styling herself in the aesthetics of the women captured in these images, and re-presenting herself as these individuals, she evokes a temporary, corporeal reminder of their actions, contributions, and values to the city. Using her body to intervene in urban space, she elicits a relational connection between herself and each of these women, a shared beingness, across decades and centuries. Through this situated re-enactment and embodiment of these women through self-portraiture, Akinbo folds together the past and present in urban space, displacing any (colonial) linear progressive narrative of time (which reads time as passing from a completed past to a current present to a future to come) through the ways she renders these women's past presences and contributions as continually significant in the contemporary moment, and therefore continually impacting urban space in Lagos.

Akinbo's practice also demonstrates alternative ways of knowing history and womanhood, diverging from the Western-centric paradigms that dominate in academic scholarship. She disrupts gendered and historical narratives of (heroic) womanhood through a critical practice of selecting and reflecting on different women who have existed and impacted with the city. In her process of selecting women for her series, which she describes as "filtering," she sifts through her own knowledge, conversations with friends, the individual's family and associates, online resources and other knowledge sources. Her process encompasses a reflexive practice of questioning our society's veneration of particular individuals, and in these reflections, she identifies the tendency to reinforce patriarchal aspirations whereby women are celebrated for patriarchal and capitalist achievements -- being the first to drive a car, being a successful businesswoman. She resists and subverts these normativities as she constructs her own conception of "the heroine" through her own criteria.

Here, those Akinbo includes in her self-portrait series is equally as important as who she decides to exclude as a result of her own reflective practice. In describing this process, she mentions widely celebrated individuals, such as Madame Efunroye Tinubu, whom she decided not to include in her series. “I stumbled on Madame Tinubu, who I’ve always seen as a heroine prior to my project. When I did my research, I realized that society just ascribed her as a heroine because she was a successful businesswoman who did slave trading...I also realized that when slave trade was going to be abolished, she was still trading slaves, even when society was doing all its best to stop the slave trade...Why would society say this person is a heroine and build spaces after this person?” Through her interrogation of Madame Tinubu, Akinbo recognizes the widespread celebration of this figure, including through the naming of Tinubu Square in Lagos Island. She also problematizes these dominant narratives, and by retelling particular visual narratives, she produces alternative mappings of Lagos’ gendered histories.

My commitment to decolonizing and feminizing my research and practice requires me to acknowledge the histories of colonialism, my own entanglement with coloniality, and to continually and conscientiously work to disentangle myself from coloniality by drawing on Indigenous knowledge, critical and creative practices, learning in relation with others, and self-reflection. Decolonizing and feminizing my research has necessarily required me to read, watch, and listen beyond my conventional academic discipline, learning from scholars in Black Studies, African Studies, Decolonial Thought, and Feminist Thought, as well as from artists and their artistic practices. It is from this position that I interrogate decolonizing and feminizing architecture, design, and planning as a spatial project and knowledge project, and I learn from Akinbo’s embodied spatial practice, where she employs self-portraiture and critical reflections to work through and unsettle gender, histories, and space in Lagos. Through her body, she shows us means of knowing, relating, questioning, and intervening in the world, a process of questioning our inherited structures, and making our worlds anew from our situated positions and critical and full engagement with everything around us.

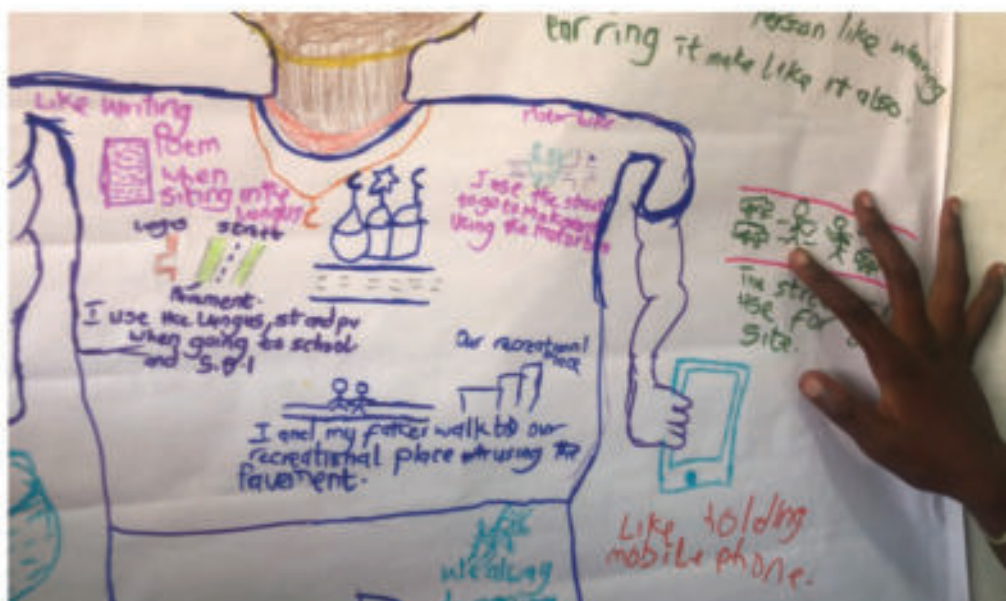
Victoria Ogoegbunam Okoye



Through drawings and text, a young girl produces a “body map” of her embodied community space experiences, and in her own words, she describes her feelings, memories, fears, and hopes associated with moving through these sites. (Photo: Victoria Ogoegbunam Okoye)



Young girls and boys draw in their own meaningful spaces and activities in their neighborhood, collectively producing a group map representing their lived experiences of community space. (Photo: Victoria Ogoegbunam Okoye)



A teenage boy uses drawings and text to show his everyday movements and spatial practices in community space through his “body map,” an arts-based method that privileges embodied experience (Photo: Victoria Ogoegbunam Okoye)



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# Ode to Heroines

By Alithnayn Abdulkareem

**F**or creatives straddling minority identities, the battle against erasure and misrepresentation can be constant. Creating work that passes through the filter of existing institutional, (and by proxy, popular) values that collide with the artists' views and experience, has been fodder for much great art. Artists must negotiate the tension that arises when work is received and critiqued through existing oppressive structures that have a demonstrated history of blindness and brushing over context. For instance, the 1970s in America produced the literary movement christened The Black Women's Literary Renaissance. It spawned works from cultural producers like Alice Walker and Toni Morrison. Interpreted as a direct response to the erasure of women from the Harlem Renaissance, it was seen as seeking to establish and uplift women whose artistic modes of expression had been ignored or submerged by racist and patriarchal structures.

But what if none of those were the concerns of the women? What if they were simply seeking to cast themselves and affirm their existence, regardless of whatever dominant power structures existed? At what point can the artist de-center the prevailing norms and create within the rules of their own experiences? How radical does one have to be to cement themselves as the master of their universe and thrive as a consequence? In one of her most famous interviews, the late great Toni Morrison remarked, that she stood at the border, at the edge, claimed it as central and let the rest of the world move over to where she was. Is this selfishness even permitted in the first place? And if it is not, how do artists navigate the challenges that come with establishing such a strong sense of self?

That type of radical self-acceptance and centering can be found at the heart of Ebunoluwa Akinbo's *Ode To Heroines*. Her work is a young heroine's quest to affirm herself through the lens of heroines past and present. The work triggers many important questions. What does it mean to create and to reflect self? What kind of validation comes from seeking self through the pursuit of community? How does representation enrich the artist's sense of kinship? It is an examination of the parameters of value, a celebration of representation, and an assessment of what it means to dictate your own story. Although *Ode to Heroines* can be interpreted as a challenge to the patriarchy, the work is concerned with something more nuanced and personal.

On a base level, the work functions like a catalogue of women's accomplishments in Lagos, Nigeria. The series highlights women with historical and modern significance who have played vaunted roles in their communities across economic and social points of relevance. They are *heroines* driving impact through their organizations or embarking on solo but no less impressive endeavors.

They work on issues ranging from insecurity to sexual assault, infectious diseases and mental health. On display are deceased radicals like human rights activist Adunni Oluwole who paid the salaries of rail workers while they were on strike against low wages. Alimotu Pelewura, Lagos' *Iyaloja* -- *the Mother of the Market*, an esteemed Yoruba chieftaincy title -- led the economically powerful Lagos Women's Market Association through an era of organized movement against colonial era exploitation via unfair taxation. And the brave Doctor Stella Adeboh, whose decision to quarantine the undiagnosed patient zero prevented the spread of Ebola in Nigeria, although the price was her life. Present day heroines include Vivian Olatokunbo who does the often-thankless work at the grassroots: minimizing local conflict by making sure that grievances are reported and handled by the relevant authorities. And Justina Oboh, a woman so committed to improving her commune, that she redefines what it means to have your hand in every pie.

In embarking on this project, Akinbo seeks to clarify what embodiment represents. She does this in the most literal sense, by transforming her physical form to the closest approximation of her selected heroines. This proves an effective starting point that nudges the viewer into richer reflections of self and society. The importance of these heroines is never contested, what we are curious about is why some of them received pedestals and some did not. Akinbo's affirmations go beyond visual interpretations. With voiceover, she praises, she muses, and she questions. She gushes over the women labelling them as "answered prayers" who "sashay" and "slay" and "exalt womanhood." Phrases like "she who brings forth beyond the fruitfulness of her body" amplify the notion of expanding beyond fixed values. All the heroines straddle multiple identities as business owners, mothers, friends, comrades, wives.



The work can be additionally viewed as a tour of Lagos. In more hegemonic descriptions of Lagos, there is an addiction to limiting narratives. They are not fully wrong, but they are often woven through outsider lenses and perceptions. But here, Akinbo is a woman of Lagos moving through Lagos, embodying other Lagosian women, which layers the work with a frankness and complexity that echoes the confidence of an author telling their own story. Structurally, *Ode to Heroines* is ambitious, taking on multiple formats: interview, monologue, photography, and reconstruction. It is unabashed about drawing one's gaze and unbothered by limiting notions of power. The work prioritizes the celebration of these women's shared and distinctive attributes, from their strength and resilience to their gentleness and empathy. Often, Akinbo uses voiceover to redirect us back to her consciousness, sharing platitudes as if to remind the viewer to never forget that these are extraordinary women.

Moving beyond the internal search for self, *Ode to Heroines* looks outward to question the tensions that spark from such audacity rubbing against the fabric of the larger community. How do personal standards navigate against societal ones? How much collusion do their genders trigger? As power structures collide to uplift some and erase others, what are the specific ways that Lagos becomes a culprit? How does a city treat its heroines? The real-life narratives of Akinbo's subjects provide a history of sanctioned resistance against the efforts of these women. Alimotu Pelewura endured multiple arrests in her quest to resist the colonial administration's unfair tax policy. Bisi Silva's research interest during her time at the Royal College of Art explored institutional marginalization of minorities in art. She summed up one of her findings as "tolerated but not integrated." That sentiment also works within the context of heroism in Lagos. Justina Oboh perhaps embodies this tension more than all the others and exposes the limits of society's grace.

Justina is elderly and unlike many of the other heroines, possesses no significant socioeconomic privilege. She holds no formal leadership titles, and her visibility is highly localized even within Lagos. Her approach to changemaking takes on a strong individuality, though her work is no less impactful and her methods no less inspiring. For decades, Justina has resided in what she calls "the jungle," where things like car theft, and sexual assault are considered parts of daily life. Her interventions are too many to document. From lobbying the police to allocate officers to her areas, to creating a microfinance group for women to hone skills in arts and crafts. Oboh embodies a kind of do it yourself, grass roots level impact making that has a tendency to go unnoticed in the face of more photogenic acts of heroism. From the small to the large perspective, the heroines are often defined by an opposition to something.



Ebunoluwa Akinbo



Confronting this opposition are shared values among the heroines, with community being the center of it. Although the medium celebrates individual achievement, the women are centered within and committed to groups. Edidiong Ishola, who leads an organization that provides mental health support to mothers, speaks on the negative consequences for the collective when childbearers are not supported. Women's lack of support compromises their ability to care for their children which feeds into the larger community especially when placed within the framing of the collective disregard for mental health more generally. There is also a memorable celebration of Bisi Silva, the late curator whose devotion to improving discourse and appreciation for the visual arts is especially pertinent to Akinbo.

Ms Silva's establishment of the Center for Contemporary Art has directly nurtured and opened opportunities for women like Akinbo, among many others in Lagos and the wider country. The CCA's documentation capacities also provided a useful repository for Akinbo's research.

The heroines celebrated for their creative contributions are an especially sharp example of how community anchors heroic achievements. Describing them as conquistadors, there is a moment that aptly captures the revolution that heroines have brought to the creative arts in Lagos and by proxy, Nigeria and the world. Joke Silva, one of the country's foremost actors and a friend of Bisi Silva, chuckles and remarks that within this space "we're good." It is especially telling that the women of Lagos have exerted uncharacteristic dominance in a field that rewards the ability to know your audience.

Navigating Lagos as a woman is hard enough, and for Akinbo and the audience, there is a strength to be admired and drawn upon from these women, as we face the questionable standards we rub up against everyday.

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When pondering the layers of Ode to Heroines, it also helps to consider what can come of a world where women and creators are frequently at the center of their narratives. The aforementioned Black Women's Literary Renaissance forced the world to engage with Morrison's brilliant deconstruction of morality and Walker's explorations of what it means to be spiritual. Like the Black Women's Renaissance, African cultural producers find themselves contending against the uncanny Western gaze. There is wide discourse on the extent to which power dynamics extract a toll on the ability of African artists to find the fullest expression of self. Over the years, practitioners have explored the search for self in brilliant forms. Samuel Fosso, the revered photographer is known for a lifetime of work that is both an engagement with the form of photography, and a means to understand his intersecting identities better



Ebunoluwa Akinbo

The result is half history lesson, half anthropological education, and a full visual banquet. Omar Viktor Diop's Project Diaspora series is another powerful evocation of self-seeking. Like Akinbo, Diop journeys through history (although his scope is not restricted to a city). Using embodiment, he "awakens the nonexistent" through an acknowledgement of his place, and by extension his people. For all of these works, there is no question of who the main character is.

Early in Akinbo's documentary, veteran screen star Joke Silva remarks that "when the performing arts thrive, your humanity thrives as well." *Ode to Heroines* is a journey into the humanity of these revered figures. As her camera explores the markers of city life we are accustomed to, Akinbo reflects aloud: she walks in these spaces as head, leader, pace setter and team member. Remember her, so that she may never exit the sands of time.

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A portrait of a Black woman with short, curly hair, wearing blue-rimmed glasses and a red polo shirt with a dark collar. She has her arms crossed and is looking directly at the camera. The background is a yellow fabric with a large purple circular logo featuring a yellow triangle. A quote is overlaid on the right side of the image.

**“The Surgery Was To Reassign  
And Silence My Existence,  
It Violated Me Instead Of Repair.”**

**-BONGO**



# Anyone Can Be Born Intersex:

A Photo-Portrait Story by Intersex-Nigeria.

Intersex-Nigeria was founded in November 2019 by Obioma Chukwuike to create public awareness and understanding of intersex people and to encourage community building among intersex persons. The advocacy is centered on the rights to bodily integrity, ending stigma and discrimination, creating visibility, ending medical intervention surgeries and other discriminatory practices perpetuated on intersex babies and persons. Intersex-Nigeria was created for intersex people to share their stories, to push for their acceptance and to engage the government on their social inclusion and the respect of their rights.

The people portrayed in the photo story are all members of Intersex-Nigeria. Some found it easy to participate, others were hesitant. Ultimately, all agree that there is a need to amplify intersex voices and increase their visibility so that society sees intersex people as people and not as anything else. Representation is important, seeing people who are like you, coming forward to boldly identify with your group is empowering for others. The photo story is an opportunity to remind the Nigerian society of the fact that sex is not binary and that government regulations, service and infrastructure provision need to take this into account. Above all, the government needs to ensure social inclusion.

Intersex persons all live different kinds of lives but all of them are strongly shaped by everyday discriminatory experiences, which do not allow them to pursue the professional or family life they dreaming of. Some are in school, others have used their vocational skills to earn their livelihood but they all have been prevented from fully expressing their potential. One of the people featured in this project was a professional footballer but was dropped from her team because of her physical variation. Communal living in the training camp meant that her physical features were apparent to other female teammates. Rumors spread in the camp, this led to their training coach interrogating her and subsequently asking her to leave the team. This experience had a huge impact on her life and career because she was subsequently stigmatized and discriminated against by the football community in Nigeria. This led her to withdraw completely from public spaces.

Intersex people in Nigeria are aware of their bodily variation but many do not know what it means. Often, parents think surgical mutilation in childhood is the best option for their intersex child to raise them as either a male or female.

However, as the children grow older, they notice other body variations and start suffering complications and lose confidence in themselves. Growing up, especially during the boarding school days and youth service boot camps, hostel assignments and other communal living can be deeply traumatic. Throughout their life, intersex people in Nigeria do not get adequate psychological support and face mental health issues, social, and economic difficulties all alone, often leading them to withdraw from the public.

Generally, the experience of intersex persons in Nigeria shows that living in one of the cosmopolitan cities like Lagos, Abuja or Port Harcourt is socio-economically preferred. Living in villages with people who knew intersex people as children, can lead to ongoing stigma throughout their lives. Living in Lagos, on the other hand, can provide relief from repressive communities and the possible trauma of adolescence. Intersex people can find more fulfilment because of the diversity of people, cultures, and beliefs. Lagos State is generally thought to be more open to providing support in situations of gender-related rights violations and often serves not only as an engine for growth but also for social change.

Intersex people growing up and living in Northern Nigeria face a different reality. Earlier in the year, the Kano state government performed forced surgeries on intersex persons and the governor went further to state that they would still “fish out” more intersex persons to perform these invasive surgeries. For the activists, it is disheartening for a government to state that they want to give “corrective” surgeries because there is nothing to correct about being intersex.

Nigeria has criminalized LGBT relationships, however, there is no record of arrests of intersex persons. But like LGBT people, intersex people have been taken to churches for prayers to remove the curse of being an intersex person. They are ultimately forced to choose between one of the sex binaries. Although intersex persons have similar experiences to LGBT subgroups, their struggles are different.

Navigating social spaces is different for intersex persons, even in cosmopolitan cities like Lagos. For an intersex person who has physical variations, mixing up in such spaces is not easy and so far, they have been left alone with their traumas. Going to public places like banks, schools, toilets or using public transport is difficult because people treat them in a de-humanizing manner.

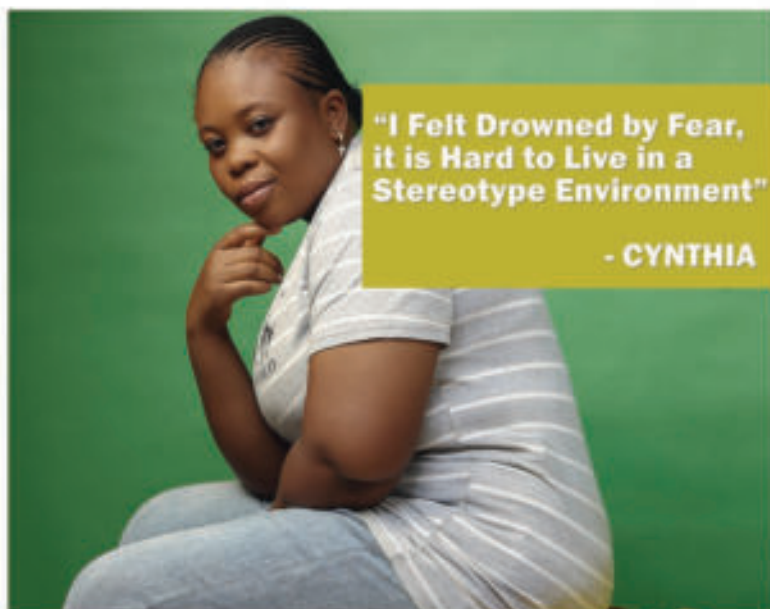
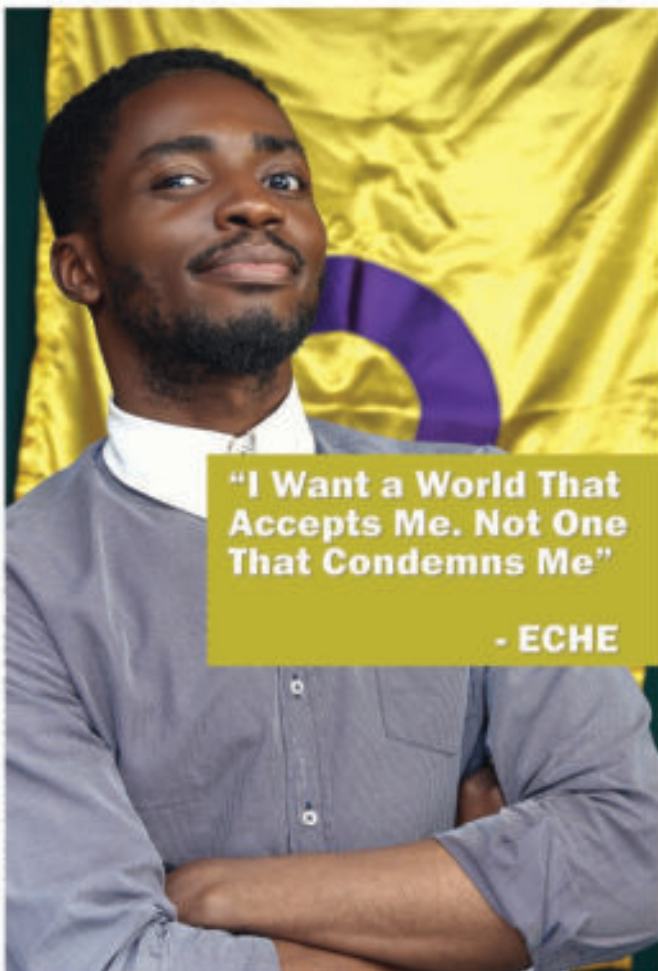


Some intersex persons do not go out because of how the public receives them, facing embarrassing questions like, "what exactly are you" or staring openly at them.

Intersex people do not have many allies. However, children and women's rights groups have provided support in the past. Medical practitioners, on the other hand, complicate the problems intersex persons face. During medical examinations, intersex persons face a lot of discrimination. Medical practitioners need to be told that the surgeries they perform on intersex people are wrong. Unfortunately, even the medical associations, mostly based in Lagos, are not supportive to their cause here in Nigeria, although many of their members were raised and educated in Western countries, where the problems intersex children face are better addressed.

These photo portraits intend to encourage public education, conversations and awareness campaigns on intersex persons and their rights against discrimination, stigmatization and bullying. They are a call to the government to wake up and to embark on public discourse about the need to embrace people who are rejected by the society due to ignorance and stigmatization. People need to be educated on why it is not okay to dehumanize another person because they are different. The government needs to create infrastructure for people who do not fit into what is considered "normal". A lot of groups are marginalized in society because they are different.

Our message is clear: Anyone can be born intersex. An intersex person is normal, being intersex is not a curse, neither is it a disease, rather it is a variation in sex characteristics of an individual that doesn't typically fit into male and female sex binary notion and this occurs naturally. Living as an intersex person does not come with a lifetime physical challenge. People need to know that when they see something they do not understand, it is okay to ask questions. Misconceptions should not be used to treat people in a discriminatory manner. Society should interact with persons who are considered different based on facts and not myths. People should make an effort to understand differences and they should be more accepting, especially if no harm is brought to them by being accepting of others.



Obioma Chukwuike



## Interview with Chinasa on living as an Intersex person in Lagos

### Can you please introduce yourself and how you identify?

My name is Chinasa. People identify me as a man and woman, but being an intersex person, I am aware of what I am, so I am a woman by nature.

### What was your childhood like?

Growing up was not easy. Some parents didn't let me come close to their children because they weren't sure about my gender. I had people talking a lot about me, but I didn't give up. I still have people talking about me being an intersex person. It is difficult to be intersex in Nigeria. But I keep moving because I didn't create myself, God did.

### When did you come to Lagos, and why?

I came to Lagos in 2014. I came here because I was looking for better treatment from people. Before now, I lived in Enugu and people did not treat me very well. People talked a lot and they made me feel uncomfortable. I can't kill myself because of how I was created.

### How do you find the city?

Lagos is a lot better.

### Does it offer you spaces for freedom, safety and expression? Or, is it continually challenging?

Lagos gives me a bit of safety, it is better than where I was before. I feel like I am more protected here in Lagos and people are kind to me here.

It does not also mean that I do not get some unfair stares and unkind treatment. There are a few challenges that I face sometimes. People point at me when I walk around, people are always staring and it makes me very uncomfortable.

I am also able to express myself a lot better. It is easy to talk to people that are educated. For instance, at my place of work, I have people who understand and people who don't. But it doesn't stop me from being myself at all.

### What are your experiences with misunderstanding around your identity?

I feel bad as people do not understand me and how they stare at me without getting to know me. They judge me without getting to know me and that makes me very unhappy.

### What do you wish people understood about you, or how do you wish people would treat you/each other?

I wish people knew that I am also a human being like them and I cannot harm anyone. I am a good person. I also want people to treat me like a normal person. I don't want them to treat me like I am from another planet.

### Can you imagine what a perfect city will be like for you?

I want the type of Lagos that will understand me and take me as how I am. I want a Lagos that will not stare at me like something was wrong with me.

### Would you like to say something?

Lastly, I want people to treat me well. I want to be treated like every other human being, not like an outcast.





# Conclusion

From the streets of Lagos, art to architecture, the past to the present, we have seen women and other vulnerable groups take a stand for what they believe, fight and beat various odds, break out of societal norms, and write new narratives with courage and gusto. And yet, with all the boundaries pushed, and battles won, with more women getting educated, elected and climbing higher up the proverbial 'ladder', the reality today is that a huge gender gap still exists in most of our homes, communities, workplaces, governments and seats of power.

There cannot be true urban development with 49.6% of the world population fighting for equity, feeling unsafe along city streets and public areas, and being less educated, underrepresented and marginalized. But things could be different.

In this publication female artists, architects, designers, practitioners and academics have shared the realities they face and have also imagined a Lagos where women and other vulnerable groups are equally represented in positions of power and decision-making, a Lagos where people are paid based on the job role and not on gender. A society designed and planned by women, for women - because designing for women means designing for all - with cities that are safer, more connected, accessible, resilient to disaster, healthy and secure for everyone.

Use this publication as a first step to imagine a world where gender roles are decided by individuals as opposed to being imposed by society's expectations and power dynamics.

In summary, the publication provides valuable tips on how to get to a more equitable city; it suggests how we can design spaces not just for 'him', nor even just 'her' but for all.

Here are a few takeaways to help practicalise this publication:

*Ask her.* The UN-Habitat's 'Her City', a guide for cities to sustainable and inclusive urban planning and design together with girls is a fine example of ways to encourage female participation in decision making on every level.

*Be intentional and innovative.* Do not stick to the status quo because it is the easy thing to do. Gendered systems are everywhere but they can be broken just by speaking up and informing people of a different way of doing things. Over and over again pilot projects have proven to be pivotal for change to happen, providing a desired outcome at a low cost in good time.

*Create systems.* Developing policies and laws that push spatial equity are great first steps. Implementation is a lot harder. Creating systems that can support implementation can make that process easier. In addition, accountability is even more important. Monitoring and evaluation processes that encourage continuous collaboration and innovation can improve how cities are planned and designed.

*Make it practical.* High-level concepts should be broken down into attainable steps that can be easily understood and followed. For example, LUDI created a design guideline to support urban planners/designers and architects to design gender-inclusive spaces in Lagos by listing out the current challenges and highlighting specific considerations for more inclusive design. This eye-opening process draws attention to ways we all perpetuate gender exclusivity in our day to day lives.

**Here is to the future we are fighting for.**





# Flâneuse

Envisioning a City for All

"There is more to this city. In the end it is the process of negotiation and the people themselves who apply meaning to the city."



HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG

ABUJA

Nigeria



LAGOS  
URBAN  
DEVELOPMENT  
INITIATIVE