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## Transforming social exclusion to benefit in the slum areas of the Global South through neighbourhood identity: lessons from Ajegunle slum in Lagos, Nigeria

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Transforming social exclusion to benefit in the slum areas  
of the Global South through neighbourhood identity:  
lessons from Ajegunle slum in Lagos, Nigeria

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**Abstract**

Contemporary urban areas are continually being fragmented based on socio-economic and cultural differences and large proportions of the populations in the cities of the Global South are, consequently, excluded from access to basic infrastructure and general socio-economic opportunities. David Harvey accentuates this contemporary trend in urbanisation, positing that it aggravates the proliferation of slums. Despite vast research on the social and environmental challenges of slum proliferation and their consequences, little is known about the potential positive value of the communal identity and solidarity in these slums. Ajegunle, Africa's largest slum neighbourhood and the sixth largest in the world, was adopted as a case study for this research. Karl Marx' theory of social conflict and a novel variant of Albert Hirschman's concept of 'exit, voice, and loyalty' constituted the theoretical framework for the research. The research methodology comprised both quantitative and qualitative methods. Primary data were gathered thorough questionnaires, interviews and personal observation, while secondary information was sought from relevant printed and online sources. The paper argues that social exclusion can stir up neighbourhood identity among the marginalised and 'voiceless' poor slum dwellers to create unusual benefit that mitigate socio-economic disadvantages. The results further support Karl Marx' postulation that individuals and groups in the society 'struggle' to

maximise their respective benefits, while also validating the novel concept of 'exit, voicelessness, and loyalty', which avers that 'obligatory loyalty' in slum communities engenders neighbourhood identity for self-preservation and communal development. The paper, therefore, recommended that governments should pursue policies of mutual respect with regard to slum communities, in order to harness the potentials of those communities, as a strategy for socio-economic development.

**Key words:** exclusion, Lagos, neighbourhood, poverty, inequality, marginalisation

## 1. Introduction

The term *neighbourhood* is often used in conjunction with the notion of *community*. This refers to the social group that resides in a specific locality/neighbourhood and that shares some common resources, and common values. According to Karl Marx' theory of social conflict, society comprises two groups; the ruling class, which exploits and oppresses the second group - the subject class (Karl Marx: 2006: n.p.) The consequence of this is that human societies have become arenas of inequality, consigning some sections/groups in the society to socio-economic exclusion and endless cycle of disadvantage and poverty. The urban area has therefore become an enormously significant formative arena, not only as the daily space of over half of the world's population, but also as the supremely visible manifestation of difference and heterogeneity placed together (Amin, Thrift, 2005). These widening differences and their implications exert tremendous influence on the nature and characteristics of cities and the interaction among individuals and groups or neighbourhoods within them.

Albert Hirschman's (1970) theory of exit, voice, and loyalty also avers that human beings can respond to unpleasant conditions by, either, raising a voice of discontent, in hope of stirring up an improvement, or quietly leaving the environment. This is also relevant in slum neighbourhoods where people are consigned to either exit, where possible, or become loyal to the community by compulsion and fate.

In many cases, however, the peculiar disadvantages of some neighbourhoods have inspired collective neighbourhood identity and motivated self-help initiatives for survival. In addition, such peculiar disadvantages have attracted the attention of researchers, who have amplified their plight and drawn attention to them, as well as

philanthropists, in various forms, who endeavour to ameliorate the conditions. This paper underscores this assertion by examining the variegated nature of neighbourhoods and the observed inequality, focusing on the survival strategies adopted in slum neighbourhoods. The paper further argues that such disadvantaged communities that suffer social exclusion can, sometimes, transform these peculiar drawbacks into peculiar advantage, through the strength of camaraderie and collective identity. Ajegunle, the largest slum in Africa and the 6<sup>th</sup> largest in the world, having a population of 1,500,000 (Davis 2007), is adopted as case study.

While various scholars have published several materials on Ajegunle, due to its colossal disadvantage, most of those materials were focused on specific areas of the socio-economic life of the residents. None has examined the unusual aspect of the peculiar advantage that the neighbourhood has acquired from its extraordinary detriment. Tunde Agbola (1994), for example, adopted Ajegunle as case study on his study on non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as agents of development, focusing on the role and mechanism of NGO operations, and not on social exclusion and its unintended benefits, as espoused in this paper. Etannibi Alemika and Innocent Chukwuma (2005) also studied the neighbourhood in their work on criminal victimisation and crime in Lagos, concluding that Ajegunle constitutes one of the three most dangerous and crime prone neighbourhoods in the Lagos megacity of over 15,000,000 residents. They, however, did not study the social exclusion dimension of the area. Oluwafemi Olajide (2010), in adopting the same Ajegunle neighbourhood as a case study, focused merely on the poverty profile and its implication on the environmental condition of the slum residents. Non of these and other numerous studies are known to specifically address the subject of social exclusion of the residents of the community, as done in this article. This confirms that, while there is no shortage of study on Ajegunle, this article presents a novel dimension to the literature. The theme of this article is also of global relevance because it addresses the sociology of slum life at this period when one-third of urban dwellers, about one billion people, live in de-humanising conditions in various slums across the globe, with the last decade witnessing unprecedented attention on the phenomenon of slums and how to address it (Ban 2009). This article therefore fills an important gap in the literature,

not only on Ajegunle, but also on social exclusion, as well as on the sociology of slum life in general.

## 2. Theoretical framework of study

### 2.1. Social conflict theory

Karl Marx' social conflict theory states that the society or organisation functions so that each individual participant and its groups struggle to maximise their benefits, which inevitably contribute to social change, often at the detriment of others (Marx: 2006: n.p.). The theory states that groups within a capitalist society tend to interact in a destructive way that allows no mutual benefit and little cooperation. As a result, there is a basic conflict of interest between the two classes, and the various institutions of society, e.g. the legal and political system, including law enforcement and financial institutions, are instruments of ruling class domination and serve to further its interests (Sociology Guide, 2010). David Harvey (2008) upheld the social conflict theory, stating that urbanisation has always been a class phenomenon, since surpluses are extracted from somewhere and from somebody, while the control over their disbursement typically lies in a few hands. He further observed that the city is being fragmented into several parts based on class differences, creating elite gated-communities, which stand in contrast to odious abode of the poor, known as slums. The social conflict theory therefore expounds on the origin/cause and consequences of slums.

### 2.2. 'Exit, voice, and loyalty' and 'exit, voicelessness, and loyalty'

Albert Hirschman (1970) introduced the concept of *exit, voice, and loyalty* in explaining the means by which citizens and consumers respond to deteriorating performance by the state, firms, and organisations, respectively. Although, it evolved as an economic theory, it has become highly relevant in urban studies and has been applied in the study of social interactions. The theory posits that members of organisations, businesses, firms, communities, nations or any other form of human grouping respond in two primary ways when they observe that the group is manifesting a decrease or deterioration in value to member(s) or quality of benefit to individuals.

These primary forms of response are *exit* that is, leaving/abandoning the group or *voice*, which refers to the individual's expression of disappointment and displeasure at the situation, but signifies loyalty to the group by choosing voice rather than exit. Similarities can be drawn between A. Hirschman's *voice* and K. Marx's *revolution*. The main contrast being that, while K. Marx's *revolution* is a violent expression of dissent, Hirschman's *voice* is intrinsically passive and persuasive.

*Exit, voicelessness, and loyalty* is a concept evolved, in Kunle Ifesanya (2012), as a variant of A. Hirschman's exit, voice, and loyalty, specifically addressing the sociology of slums. Unlike in the former, in which *exit* is often restrained by brand name loyalty or community identity, K. Ifesanya argued that no one wants to identify with the misery and squalor of slum life. Many therefore chose to exit. Physical exit from the slum, however, is usually unavailable to the poor residents due to lack of financial resources. Exit may, however, not necessarily be physical; it can be psychological or mental. The majority who could not exit the slum physically (due to economic handicap) resort to mental exit.

Mental exit in the slum is a consequence of disappointment in the government or local authorities and the eroding of trust in its willingness and/or ability to ameliorate the living conditions of slum dwellers. A major manifestation of 'mental exit' is the shirking of civil responsibility; characterised by refusal to obey rules and regulations, brazen criminality and violence. This partly explains the reason why slums, in general, are characterised by high crime rates and moral decadence. Exit, within the concept of 'exit, voicelessness, and loyalty' therefore often takes the form of rebellion, due to the socio-economic limitations and the consequent frustration of the slum dwellers.

"'Loyalty' in the slum is primarily a survival strategy for self-preservation' (Ifesanya 2012: 31). This is only manifested because an individual lacks the opportunity for viable prospect outside the slum, since no one sincerely wants to identify with the odium of slum-life. In this regard, the term *involuntary/obligatory loyalty* becomes more appropriate. This position is underscored in a statement by a respondent in a study of a slum area near Abuja, in Nigeria. The respondent stated that 'I will gladly leave this place if I had a choice. It is the accommodation problem

of the city that made us come here...we have been living [here] now for several years. Honestly, I do not like the place. If I had a choice in the matter I would not be found here for any reason' (Ajegunle: Abuja's ghetto community, 2011: 1).

In addition, despite the lack of desire to uphold identity with the slum, the option of voice in the slum is virtually unavailable because slum dwellers are the marginal people and are obscured from government and mainstream society (Davis 2007). One of the implications of this is that they have no input and no voice in making decisions on issues concerning their lives and well-being. Because they are 'voiceless' people, the option of 'voice', as postulated by A. Hirschman, is unavailable to them. Albert Hirschman's theory of exit, voice, and loyalty is, consequently, not fully applicable. This realisation forms the basis for the concept of 'exit, voicelessness, and loyalty', a modified variant of A. Hirschman's original theory.

In general, the voicelessness of poor slum dwellers exacerbates the phenomenon of *mental exit* from the society and this is manifested in rebellion, and high rate of criminality experienced in slum neighbourhoods. Their frustrating voicelessness also leads to *obligatory loyalty* for the purpose of self-preservation. The resultant positive effect of the latter is expounded in this article.

### 3. Methodology

The research methodology adopts both the qualitative and quantitative approaches. Two forms of data were collected for the study, i.e. primary and secondary data. The combination of information derived from both sources forms the basis for drawing up the inferences and conclusion. Primary data was gathered using structured and semi-structured questionnaires that were administered to different categories of respondents in the study area. Adopting the Simple Random Sampling technique that selects any case without pre-qualification, 215 houses, representing 5% of the total number of houses in the study area, according to O. Olajide (2010), was selected as cases and questionnaires were administered to the residents. The various categories of respondents are owners of houses (mostly known as 'landlords' in Lagos), renters of housing, formal and informal sector workers, employed and unemployed youths. Respondents were asked questions about the state/condition of the

houses they live in, detailed information about their living conditions, quality of physical environment, state of infrastructure in the neighbourhood and their socio-economic conditions, amongst other subjects. Personal observation of the physical state and social interaction within the neighbourhood also constitute a vital part of primary information gathered. Focus group discussions were held with long-time residents of Ajegunle on the history, social evolution of the community, public and private sector interventions in the area and the perceived impacts of such programmes.

Supplementary information was obtained from secondary sources, e.g. published academic journals and books, the World Wide Web (internet), biographies and autobiographies, amongst other sources. A comparison of housing and other social economic statistics of Lagos, in general and Ajegunle neighbourhood, in particular, was carried out and the results, along with other indices, were adopted in establishing the fact of social exclusion in the study area.

#### **4. The concept of 'the neighbourhood' in urban societies**

##### **4.1. The meaning of neighbourhood**

The term *neighbourhood* is often used to describe the subdivisions of urban or rural locations, i.e. cities, towns, and villages. In its purest definition, a neighbourhood (or residential neighbourhood) is the vicinity in which people live. People live next to or near one another in sections of an area and form communities. Those sections have some particular physical or social characteristics that distinguish them from the rest of the settlements. Essentially, neighbourhoods can be construed as the smallest comprehensive units of urban structure characterised by environmental conditions that are of human scale.

Neighbourhoods exert significant influence on the pursuit of individual life course. Hillary Burdette and Robert Whitaker (2004), for example, stated that there is a relationship between neighbourhood playgrounds, crime, overweight, and fast food culture. This position was underscored by D. Richter et al. (2009) who revealed that the density of a neighbourhood has more impact on the likeliness of suicide than poverty. An understanding of the sociology of neighbourhoods, therefore, becomes



vital in understanding individual's behaviour within the urban space.

#### **4.2. Residential segregation and social exclusion in neighbourhoods**

According to Ichiro Kawachi and Lisa Berkman (2003), residential segregation is a form of segregation that sorts population groups into various neighbourhood contexts and shapes the living environment and social space at the neighbourhood level. Residential neighbourhoods are often classified and segregated based on several variegated peculiarities. These include classification based on race/ethnicity, religion and economic/social status of individuals and groups within the population (Percy-Smith 2000; Uslaner 2001).

Ethnicity or race is a major classification characteristic. Examples of common racial/ethnic classification of neighbourhoods include Black, White, Chinese, Jewish, etc. neighbourhoods in different cities of the world. Often, such sectional and ethnically identified neighbourhoods are the minority groups within a larger society, as it is unlikely to refer to a black neighbourhood in a city or country of predominantly black people and it is also absurd to speak of a Chinese neighbourhood in China.

Neighbourhoods classified based on religious beliefs or affiliations of residents also segregate populations. Examples include: the Bradford region in the United Kingdom – a popular Islamic neighbourhood and Al-Dora – a historically Christian neighbourhood of Baghdad. Another important factor in neighbourhood classification is economic/social class status. Neighbourhoods delineated along social class are numerous all over the world, especially in intensely/unmitigated capitalist societies. Worldwide, most gated-communities are exclusive neighbourhoods for the upper class.

Neighbourhood classification is evident in most cities of Nigeria, including Lagos. Racial and ethnic classification is seen in appellations such as 'European quarters', or the 'European reservation area', established by the British colonial masters in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These neighbourhoods later became 'Government reservation areas' (GRAs), after the country's political independence. Residential segregation in Nigeria can be traced to the Township Ordinance No. 29 of 1917, which was supposedly promulgated for the control and improvement of the physical de-

velopment of the city. According to Leke Oduwaye (2009), however, the ordinance did not allow for appreciable developments in the indigenous quarters, underscoring the nonchalant attitude of colonial government to the planning and development of indigenous settlements. By 1928, the population size of the indigenous areas of Lagos, especially Isale Eko, constituted 71.5% of the total population of the entire city, occupying a total land area of 4.4 km<sup>2</sup> or only 7% of the total land area of the city, while the remaining portion was occupied by the European ruling minority (Olo-mola 1999; cf. Ifesanya 2012: 202). There are other further intra-ethnic classifications of neighbourhoods in Lagos. For example, Ketu & Mile 12 areas are known as Hausa-Fulani neighbourhoods within the Yoruba dominated city of south-west Nigeria. The Hausa-Fulani people are the dominant ethnic group in the northern part of the country. In Table 1 some ethnically classified neighbourhoods in various cities of Nigeria are shown, which are classified according to the dominant ethnic and religious composition of the residents.

Neighbourhood classification based on economic/social status of residents is also very common in Lagos. A 1997 research by Arbitrage Consulting Group confirmed the assertion of the World Bank (1996) that poor households in the Lagos Metropolitan area tend to live in communities in which most of the other households are poor, while the non-poor households tend to live in communities in which the population is largely non-poor. This represents a form of collective/neighbourhood identity. Some of the poor neighbourhoods identified in the research include: Ajegunle (study area for this research), Ijora Badia, Ijora Oloye, Olaleye-Iponri, Mushin etc. Neighbourhood classification based on race/ethnicity and economic status is therefore a common phenomenon in Lagos.

According to Gerry Rodgers et al. (1995, cited in Peace 2001), the phrase *social exclusion* emerged fully in academic and political discourses in the 1980s. While the exact meaning of the phrase is being contested, there is a general agreement that it refers to a wide range of phenomena and processes related to poverty, deprivation and hardship, and it is also used in relation to a wide range of categories of excluded people and places of exclusion (Peace 2001). Social divisions and exclusion in society are not new, however, the character of social divisions has changed, as human socie-

ties continue to evolve and resources are becoming scarcer due to several factors, which include population expansion across the globe. Social exclusion has become a preferred term in current debate, because it appears to be a broader and more dynamic concept than the notion of poverty. According to Julia Gerometta et al. (2005), while the notion of poverty focuses primarily on distributional issues, the lack of resources at the disposal of an individual or a household, social exclusion focuses primarily on relational issues; inadequate social participation, limited social integration and lack of power or voice (Häussermann et al., 2004, cited in Gerometta et al., 2005).

Table 1. Neighbourhood classification based on ethnicity and religious in select cities in Nigeria

City	Neighbourhood	Majority residents	Predominant religion
Lagos	Sabo	Hausa-Fulani	Islam
	Ketu	Hausa-Fulani	Islam
	Mile 12	Hausa-Fulani	Islam
	Ilaje	Ilaje	Christianity and animism
Ibadan	Ekotedo	Ijesha	Christianity
	Oke-ado	Ijebu	Christianity and Islam
	Sabo	Hausa-Fulani	Islam
	Shasha	Hausa-Fulani	Islam
Kano	Sabon-gari	Non Hausa-Fulani indigenes, mostly from southern Nigeria	Christianity
Zaria	Sabon-gari	Non Hausa-Fulani indigenes, mostly from southern Nigeria	Christianity

Source: Authors' compilation

Social exclusion represents what can happen when people or areas face a combination of linked problems, e.g. unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, and family breakdown (Social Exclusion Unit [SEU] 2004). The phenomenon has become a major social and development is-

sue, prompting many governments around the world to take more focused action to address it. One of such efforts is the establishment of the Social Exclusion Unit by the Labour government of Britain in 1997.

According to Christina Brown, one of the primary causes of social exclusion is the concentration of poor people in given neighbourhoods due to, amongst other factors, previous government policies. C. Brown further averred that 'such areas contain the housing the market does not want, the services that markets and the state cannot seem to provide, and are populated by the people the markets and the state cannot move themselves to serve' (Brown 2009: 1). These segregated neighbourhoods of racial/ethnic minorities and low-income people therefore often constitute bastions of excluded populations, often exacerbated by failure of governance.

## **5. Social exclusion in Ajegunle Neighbourhood of Lagos Megacity**

### **5.1. Lagos megacity and Ajegunle slum**

Mike Davis (2007:1) began his famous book 'The Planet of Slums', thus: 'Sometime in the next year or two, a woman will give birth in the Lagos slum of Ajegunle; a young man will flee his village.....it will constitute a watershed in human history'. The slum of Ajegunle, which he mentioned, is the case study for this research. This underscores the visibility and importance of the case study.

While the Lagos Metropolitan Development and Governance Project (LMDGP) (2011) affirm that Ajegunle is the most populated of the over 200 slum neighbourhoods of Lagos, M. Davis (2007) avers that it is the largest in Africa and the sixth largest in the world. This establishes the importance of this case study. Ajegunle, popularly known by its residents as 'AJ City' or 'Jungle City', is one of the worst neighbourhoods in Lagos; in terms of living conditions, extreme poverty, and crime, constituting one of the three most dangerous and crime prone neighbourhoods of Lagos (Alemika, Chukwuma, 2005; LMDGP 2011).

With a population of 15,500,000, Lagos is listed as the fourth most densely populated city in the world, with 18,150 persons per km<sup>2</sup>, after Mumbai, Kolkata, and Karachi (City Mayors 2007; Kreibich 2010). Ajegunle neighbourhood is located in close proximity to middle and high-income residential neighbourhoods of Surulere

and Tin-can Islands where many of the city's industrial and commercial bases are also located. This makes Ajegunle a very conspicuous low-income neighbourhood. This is a general phenomenon in Lagos, where the poor languish in shacks, sometimes constructed with old cartons and rusty tin sheets within the metropolis, while the rich live in luxurious and elaborately decorated buildings. Many of these high-class houses are enclosed within gated-neighbourhoods, thereby, reinforcing social/class segregation.

## **5.2. Disparity and social exclusion in the housing condition of Lagos residents**

Only an average of 9% of households in Ajegunle is above the poverty line (World Bank 1996). Tunde Agbola and Elijah Agunbiade (2007) stated that the average monthly household income at Ajegunle is roughly 14,815 NGN (naira), i.e. 72 EUR. This income comprises the cumulative earnings of two adults (the parents) and some minors (children of the family), who are usually engaged in economic activities to augment the meagre family income. Results from questionnaire administration show that up to 45% of the low-income informal sector workers spend more than 50% of their monthly income on the rent of a single room, with toilet, bathrooms, and kitchen being shared with several other families. In some cases, toilet facilities do not exist at all. In addition, comparative analysis of rent across the Lagos megacity revealed that most residents of Ajegunle and many of slums of Lagos would require between 4.5 and 26 years wages to be able to pay one-month rent for a standard three-bedroom apartment in a decent neighbourhood of Lagos, depending on the location. This situation, therefore, excludes the residents of Ajegunle and other slums of Lagos from access to adequate and decent housing.

Also, Table 2 shows that, while the average room size in the study area (Ajegunle) is 4.8 m<sup>2</sup>, the average size in the upscale neighbourhoods (many of which are within 'gated' estates) is five times greater at 20 m<sup>2</sup> (Ifesanya 2011). In addition, Ajegunle neighbourhood, with an average occupancy ratio of eight persons per room, has the highest room occupancy rate among all the slum areas of Lagos. The average occupancy rate in the upscale neighbourhoods of Victoria Island and Ikoyi is

one person per room.

Table 2. Comparative average room sizes and occupancy at Ajegunle and other neighbourhoods of Lagos

Slum areas			Upscale neighbourhoods		
Location	Room size (m <sup>2</sup> )	Persons per ro-	Persons per Room	Room size (m <sup>2</sup> )	Location
Ajegunle	4.8	8	1	20.0	VGC
Ebute	6.0	5	1	18.8	Victoria Island
Makoko	4.8	7	1	18.8	Ikoyi
Iwaya	4.8	6	2	18.0	Ikeja GRA
Bariga	4.2	5	1	24.0	Lekki Pennin-

Source: Ifesanya (2011: 39, Tab. I)

While the Lagos State Public Health Bye Law recommends a room occupancy rate of two persons per room (LASG 2004, cited in Oduwaye, Gamu-Kaka, 2007), the LMDGP (2011) confirms the extreme challenges at Ajegunle, stating that it has the highest slum population in Lagos with an average family size of eight. The LMDGP further confirm that each of these large families live together in single rooms. This alludes to the disadvantaged situation of Ajegunle residents and their exclusion from benefiting from some of the basic necessities of life.

Ironically, multi-million dollar upscale elite gated-communities with luxury houses have continued to emerge in Lagos at a fast pace and in large numbers; mostly clustered around the same part of the mega-city, that is, in areas of Victoria Island, Ikoyi, Lekki Peninsula, and Ajah. The other similar types of high-class residential areas are located mainly around Ikeja and Magodo areas of the Lagos mainland. In these upscale areas, social services are more accessible and the population density is light or medium, in comparison to the other parts of the city. The facilities available in these gated-communities include high-speed lifts, swimming pools, Jacuzzis/hot tubs, water fountains, waterfront views, lawn tennis courts, gymnasias, electronic card access system, twenty-four-hour security patrol, close-circuit television (CCTV) surveillance camera, etc. Some of these neighbourhoods also have private golf courses. Cost of housing in these upscale areas is far beyond

the affordability level of ordinary Lagosians (Lagos residents) who constitute up to 70% of the population. At the luxurious 1004-Flats complex, for example, the cheapest units in the complex, which are the two-bedroom apartments, cost 50,000,000 NGN (ca 244,000 EUR) while some units cost as much as 85,000,000 NGN (ca 414,000 EUR). This means that only the 'super-rich' can afford an ordinary standard two- to four-bedroom apartments in decent neighbourhoods, considering the fact that housing mortgage facility is virtually inexistent in the city (Agbola 2005; Kuye 2006) .

Considering the assertion of T. Agbola (2005) that housing is 'part cause, part consequence' of poverty, Ajegunle residents live in a vicious cycle of poverty. This assertion supports Habitat World (2002: 1), which stated that 'the blight of poverty housing reaches beyond rotting roofs and insufficient sanitation systems, casting low-income families into an unforgiving cycle of physical and emotional duress, compromising their health, academic achievement and sense of security'. Ajegunle residents are, consequently, excluded from several basic and vital elements of decent living and human dignity.

The neglect and exclusion of the low-income and slum neighbourhoods of Lagos, including Ajegunle, is obvious in the variations and differences in the standard, adequacy, and quality of infrastructure between the upscale islands of the city and the other parts. The lack of justification for this disparity is established in the fact that the responsibility for the provision of housing and basic infrastructure across the entire metropolitan area is that of the central government at the state level. These functions are being financed from the same budget and are coordinated by the same ministries, agencies, and departments of the state government. It is also germane to note that the oppression and exclusion of the low-income informal housing residents by successive governments of Lagos has a long history. According to David Aradeon (2009), as early as 1861, native residents of Lagos were driven out of Marina by the British government to make room for British trading houses and 'promenade', only to be removed again from midtown Lagos to create the race course for the elite. According to Amnesty International (2011a; 2011b), while Nigeria was named as one of the three worst housing rights violators among the countries of the world in 2006, the situation is worst in Lagos, where forced evictions of the poor and demolitions took

place on an almost weekly basis between May and July of 2008. Some communities in Lagos faced their third forced eviction, without any alternative provision. According to T. Agbola and A. Jinadu (1997), these forced evictions of the poor are perpetrated by government, even when the occupants possess valid titles on their land and occupied the land legally. The social exclusion of Lagos slum dwellers, and Ajegunle residents in particular, is intense and threatens their basic existence.

### **5.3. Individual survival strategies, community self-help and NGOs' impact**

#### **5.3.1. General remarks**

While many minority neighbourhoods usually have crippling challenges and disadvantages, they are also, not without their advantages. The agglomeration of people who share common identity, whether racial, ethnic, religious, etc. creates a psychological feeling of camaraderie, security, and confidence (Beall 2002). J. Beall further underscored the assertion by presenting the case of a socially excluded Pakistani Hindu caste called Churha, customarily associated with 'polluting work'. The Churha caste, which had converted en masse to Christianity under the British rule in the nineteenth century, in order to escape oppression, and often referred to as Punjabi Christian sweepers, are regarded as 'polluted' or unclean. On the basis of this 'reputation', all jobs associated with drains, sewers, and wastes have remained their exclusive preserve, thereby, preserving a means of livelihood for the group for several generations. Jo Beall (2002) concluded that this reveals how socially excluded groups can use their identity-based social exclusion to an advantage; in this case, access to prized public-sector jobs.

Manuel Castells (1997) earlier presented a similar argument, positing that 'resistance identity' is generated by groups who are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatised in their socio-economic and geo-political environment, and that collective resistance against 'otherwise unbearable oppression' has been a very effective means of surviving the difficult living conditions in many slums across the globe. This form of identity fosters the innovation, industry, and doggedness, which are the basic requirements for success in every sphere of humanity. This explains why the neighbourhood identity in Ajegunle has the potential of producing success



stories.

The peculiar predicament of Ajegunle residents has inspired self-help initiatives among the residents and evoked the empathy and attention of several NGOs. While massive, concerted and sustained government intervention is central to any effective amelioration of the challenges of Ajegunle residents, the jamboree of informal intervention at Ajegunle alludes to the fact that the peculiar nature of the neighbourhood and its debilitating challenges have been the 'pull factor' for such attention.

### 5.3.2. Individual survival strategies

The peculiar disadvantage of Ajegunle has also compelled the residents to be resilient, industrious, and dexterous, thereby, achieving the best out of their situation and turning disadvantage into advantage. Many of the youths of this neighbourhood have been spurred on and have struggled hard to escape the misery in which they found themselves. From field studies and literature search, Ajegunle is reputed to be the singular community to have produced the highest number of highly accomplished and successful celebrities of local and international repute in Nigeria, especially in the field of sports and entertainment. Some of these individuals include famous musicians, showbiz icons, and international footballers, e.g. Olympics gold medallist, World Cup player, former African 'Footballer of the Year', and African Nations' Cup gold winner - Emmanuel Amunike; Union of European Football Association (UEFA) Cup gold winner, World Cup player, Olympics Gold medallist and former national soccer team ace defender - Taribo West; and the coach of the country's Olympics silver winning team, third all-time leading scorer for the national soccer team, African Nations' Cup gold winner and World Cup player - Samson Siasia. Other international soccer stars, national soccer team captains and World Cup players from this neighbourhood include; Henry Nwosu, Andrew Uwe, Ifeanyi Udeze, Jonathan Akpoborie, and Bartholomew Ogbeche, amongst others. Many of the country's showbiz stars of national repute who emerged from Ajegunle include African China, Danfo Drivers, KcPresh, Daddy Showkey, Papa Fryo, Caliban-Trybe, Mighty Mouse, Marvellous Benji, Rasta Levy, and Uncle P., Basket mouth (voted as the coun-

try's best comedian) and A-go-die, amongst several others. This attests to the fact that extraordinary successes have been hammered out of the common incredible challenges of Ajegunle slum..

One thing these famous celebrities have in common, apart from growing up in the ghetto, is debilitating poverty. From interviews conducted by various individuals and organisations, these 'Ajegunle stars' acknowledge spending most part of each day on the streets because there was no space at home to perform any activity, apart from sleeping. This was because many of them had to share a one-room home with, between five and nine, other family members and share the toilets with up to five or more similar large families. This kept them playing on the football fields or performing and dancing at street corners and odious clubhouses. Some of them revealed that they also had to do this to augment the meagre family income, which could be as little as 10,000 NGN (ca 49 EUR) per month for a ten-persons household. This peculiar situation compelled them to spend more time outside their homes, utilising their skills, thereby, enhancing those skills and improving their chances of success in those vocations. It is a 'swim or sink' situation and these successful ones demonstrate the intrinsic possibility of turning slum misery into advantage.

### 5.3.3. Community self-help

While several cases of community self-help organisation for road construction, neighbourhood security watch, contribution of money for the supply of electricity transformers, etc. abound in Ajegunle, the 'Nations Cup', is of particular significance. This is a mock Africa Cup of Nations soccer competition. This event, which began in 1986 by the residents of the community, has become a resounding success, as almost all of the acclaimed international soccer stars listed above started their 'careers' from this slum initiative. The twenty-five-years old project has now been recognised by the world soccer ruling body - FIFA (International Federation of Association Football) - and the annual event is now being supported within the framework of FIFA's 'Football for Hope movement' in partnership with the 'Search and Groom' (an NGO) soccer programme, capitalising on this Ajegunle innovation to promote youth development across Lagos (Nigeria News 2011; FIFA 2012). The 2011 edition of the compe-

tion was witnessed by the Executive Governor of Lagos State. This is an affirmation of the benefit of Manuel Castells' 'resistance identity' of the weak social group and an authentication of K. Ifesanya's aversion, in his 'exit, voicelessness, and loyalty' concept, that 'obligatory loyalty' to the slum community fosters communal self-help actions which tend to ameliorate the quality of life in the neighbourhood.

#### 5.3.4. Non-Governmental Organisations

Amongst several other NGO interventions, the few examples enumerated here also underscore the special attention being focused on Ajegunle. Paradigm Initiative Nigeria, an NGO, introduced a project known as 'Ajegunle.org' to create better livelihoods through ICT opportunities, entrepreneurship training and short-term internships for young people in the neighbourhood. The United Kingdom (UK) Trade and Investment Section and the UK High Commission in Lagos is also collaborating with the NGO to achieve its goal, in recognition of the peculiar state of Ajegunle. The debilitating disadvantage of this community has also attracted the empathy and intervention of the representative of the Queen of England and 'Her Majesty's Permanent Representative to the Economic Community of West African States. Such high profile attention is not accorded other less obtrusive slums in Lagos.

The Saint Mary's Catholic Church, Cardoso Street, Ajegunle, also initiated and nurtured some socially beneficial schemes to mitigate the challenges confronting residents of the neighbourhood. Some of the projects include; a primary health care clinic, which attends to thousands of patients weekly; a vocational trade centre; a high school remedial training institute, children's educational/play centre, adult literacy school, two-hundred-users-capacity library etc. (Agbola 1994). These laudable and high profile interventions represent unusual advantages accruable from extreme disadvantage and social exclusion.

## 6. Conclusion

Neighbourhoods have emerged from humanity's need for safety, collective strength, and communal identity. The study of Ajegunle neighbourhood accentuates

the benefit of this neighbourhood identity, showing that heavily disadvantaged communities, suffering from intense social exclusion, can attract peculiar positive intervention due to their particular characteristics and condition. The results of the research, which combined both qualitative and quantitative research methods, uphold Karl Marx' theory of social conflict that states that each individual participant and group struggles to maximise their own benefits, leading to a polarisation of society, with the elite/ruling class dominating and oppressing the poor, from whom they extract surpluses. The study also underscores the novel concept of 'exit, voicelessness, and loyalty', which avers that the 'voicelessness' of poor slum dwellers leads to 'obligatory loyalty' for the purpose of self-preservation. This obligatory loyalty, which engenders strong neighbourhood identity for self-preservation, has been established in this research, in the case of Ajegunle – the study area.

As shown in this article, this type of strong neighbourhood identity by slum dwellers has the potential of stimulating and attracting empathy, useful resources and development interventions. In poor neighbourhoods like Ajegunle, these targeted interventions have the possibility of becoming oasis of opportunities within an expanse of misery and misfortune. This underscores the benefits that can accrue from neighbourhood identity in human society and the need for governments to view slum neighbourhoods as places of agglomeration of talents and potentials, which should be nurtured, rather than as odious and repulsive shanties where criminals reside. This positive view of slum neighbourhoods will inspire greater effort towards the amelioration of the conditions in such socially excluded neighbourhoods.

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